The Limits of Borrowed Legitimacy: Military Trust Collapse in Thailand, 2001–2022

Jeffrey Stark

February 26, 2026 at 1:23 PM

Abstract

Thailand's institutional trust did not erode — it collapsed. Between 2001 and 2022, military trust held stable through two coups, a five-year military government, and a manipulated election before plummeting from 3.27 to 1.62 on a four-point scale; the share of Thai respondents reporting no military trust at all surged from 3–6 percent to 57 percent in a single inter-wave interval. This discontinuity defeats performance-based accounts, which predict that government trust — the institution most directly responsible for pandemic management and economic outcomes — should bear the heaviest losses. Instead, military trust collapsed approximately 1.5 times more than government trust, a pattern that identifies political crisis, not governance failure, as the proximate driver. Drawing on six waves of Asian Barometer Survey data (2001–2022) benchmarked against the Philippines and Taiwan, the only countries with complete longitudinal coverage, this study traces the collapse to the 2020–2021 pro-democracy protests — which crystallized from accumulated democratic grievances, the dissolution of the Future Forward Party, and the removal of the legitimating buffer that King Bhumibol's long reign had furnished to the military-monarchy nexus. Pre-trend analysis establishes that Thai military trust was rising through Wave 4 before reversing sharply, ruling out secular decline and corroborating a discrete political shock rather than gradual drift. The Philippines elucidates the scope condition: where Duterte's security apparatus acted in alignment with mass preferences for social order, coercive institutional trust held steady despite documented extrajudicial killings. Together, these patterns corroborate a democratic expectation updating mechanism in which exposure to responsive governance under Thaksin irreversibly raised citizens' evaluative thresholds, accumulating latent pressure that the 2020–2021 protests released. Preference alignment, not institutional type or performance quality, determines whether coercive institutions retain or forfeit public confidence.

1 Introduction

In Wave 1 of the Asian Barometer Survey (2001–2003), Thai respondents reported the highest institutional trust in the survey's coverage: 3.07 for the military and 2.85 for the national government on a four-point scale. That baseline captured an unusual moment — the optimism of the 1997 "People's Constitution," Thaksin Shinawatra's early delivery on populist pledges, and a military that had not yet tested its reservoir of public goodwill through direct intervention [Phongpaichit & Baker (2008); McCargo (2025);]. The trust was diffuse: default civic confidence rooted in post-crisis renewal rather than considered institutional judgment.

Two decades later, both had collapsed — government trust to 1.89, military trust to 1.62. No other country in the ABS's longitudinal coverage underwent a reversal of this magnitude. But the more consequential finding is not the endpoint. It is the shape of the journey. Trust did not erode steadily across two decades of political turbulence. It held — remarkably stable through two coups, a five-year military government, and a manipulated election — before collapsing catastrophically between Waves 5 and 6. The share of Thai respondents reporting no military trust at all stood between 2% and 10% across Waves 1 through 5. In Wave 6, it reached 57%.

The timing and institutional structure of the decline point to the 2020–2021 pro-democracy protests as the proximate shock. Those protests were qualitatively distinct from the Red Shirt mobilizations of the preceding decade. Where the earlier conflict was partisan — organized around support for Thaksin-aligned parties against a royalist-military establishment — the 2020–2021 movement explicitly targeted the military-monarchy nexus itself (McCargo, 2021; Sinpeng, 2021; Unno & Taylor, 2021).

Its three core demands — dissolving parliament, ending military interference, and reforming the monarchy's political role — named the institutional architecture that successive coups had built. This directness was in part enabled by a structural change in Thai politics that surveys cannot directly observe: the death of King Bhumibol in 2016 and the accession of King Vajiralongkorn removed the legitimating buffer through which the military had historically derived diffuse public deference (Chambers & Waitoolkiat, 2016; Ganjanakhundee, 2022). Where Bhumibol had ruled through networks and proxies, lending the military a form of monarchical legitimacy that insulated both institutions from scrutiny, Vajiralongkorn intervened directly — consolidating Crown Property Bureau assets, transferring army units to royal command, and amending the constitution to expand royal prerogatives — transforming the monarchy from a source of military legitimacy into a focal point of protest demands.

The ABS data cannot directly measure attitudes toward the monarchy. What they can measure is the mass-level consequence for the institutions most implicated in that political rupture. Military trust bore the heaviest losses, falling approximately 1.5 times more than government trust. This institutional differentiation is the analysis's central empirical test: a pandemic performance story predicts government trust should decline more sharply, since civilian administrations bear primary responsibility for policy outcomes; a political crisis story predicts military trust should decline more, since the protests explicitly targeted the armed forces' political role. The data corroborate the latter without ambiguity.

Three additional findings deepen the argument. Pre-trend models establish that Thai military trust was actually *rising* through Wave 4 (2014–2016) before reversing sharply, ruling out secular decline and isolating the protest period as a discrete causal shock rather than the

culmination of accumulated drift. Geographic analysis sharpens the picture further: the steepest collapses concentrated in Bangkok and the Northeast — the protest epicenter and the Thaksin heartland respectively — demonstrating that the 2020–2021 movement had transcended the Red Shirt–Yellow Shirt divide that structured Thai politics since 2006. Most consequentially for the theoretical argument, rejection of authoritarian rule *rose* over the same period that institutional trust *fell* — a pattern that distinguishes democratic maturation from generalized cynicism, and suggests that Thais were not withdrawing from politics but applying increasingly demanding standards to institutions they perceived as violating democratic norms.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on institutional trust in democratizing Asia and develops the competing explanatory frameworks. Section 3 presents data and methods. Section 4 reports results across five hypothesis tests. Section 5 discusses theoretical implications and Section 6 draws out the broader significance for how scholars interpret trust decline in hybrid regimes.

2   Literature Review

2.1   Institutional Trust in Democratizing Asia

Political trust is foundational to democratic stability, sustaining the institutional confidence through which citizens authorize governance and governments claim legitimacy (Easton, 1979; Norris, 1999). The dynamics through which it erodes or endures, however, differ substantially between established democracies and Asia's hybrid regimes. Where Western

scholarship has emphasized post-materialist value shifts (Inglehart, 1997) or the emergence of "critical citizens" who sustain democratic commitments while withdrawing institutional confidence (Norris, 2011), Asian contexts have produced distinct patterns shaped by more recent democratic transitions, unresolved regime contestation, and persistent elite-mass asymmetries in institutional access.

Early comparative work identified what Shin and colleagues termed a "satisfaction-support gap": citizens dissatisfied with institutional performance while maintaining principled support for democratic governance (Shin, 2007; Shin & Park, 2008). Subsequent scholarship corroborated substantial cross-national trust variation across Asian polities (Chang et al., 2007; Chu et al., 2008), documenting heterogeneity that aggregate indices conceal but that few studies have traced within specific countries across extended time horizons. What remains underdeveloped is systematic analysis of within-country trajectories over multiple decades — the longitudinal dimension that illuminates whether trust declines reflect discrete political shocks, secular drift, or the slow accumulation of performance failures. This paper addresses that gap through the ABS's six-wave coverage of Thailand, the Philippines, and Taiwan.

Coercive institutions complicate the picture in ways the existing literature has not fully resolved. Unlike consolidated democracies in which civilian control is settled and military involvement in politics constitutes an exceptional breach, many Asian armed forces retain ongoing political roles sanctioned by constitutions or custom (Croissant et al., 2013). Thailand represents an extreme case: thirteen coups since 1932, constitutional provisions insulating the military from civilian oversight, and a royal-military nexus that has historically furnished the armed forces with a legitimating buffer unavailable to purely partisan actors (Chambers,

2014; Ockey & Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2017). Existing scholarship illuminates the polarization dynamics and destabilizing role of the Thai military (Ferrara, 2015; McCargo, 2009) but has not traced their mass-level trust consequences across the full arc of democratic contention. That is the analytical terrain this study occupies.

2.2   Competing Explanations

Performance legitimacy accounts treat institutional trust as a function of output quality: citizens extend confidence when institutions deliver satisfactory governance and withdraw it when they do not (Hetherington, 1998; Van de Walle et al., 2008). A rally variant of this logic holds that crises initially generate trust gains as citizens unite behind national institutions under external threat (Mueller, 1970), though this effect dissipates — and can reverse — when crisis management is perceived to have failed (Esaiasson et al., 2021). Applied to Thailand, a performance account would attribute the Wave 5–6 collapse to pandemic-era governance failures, predicting that government trust — the institution primarily responsible for public health policy and economic management — should bear the heaviest losses.

Political crisis frameworks direct attention to regime-level conflicts rather than policy outputs. When institutions become implicated in contested seizures of power or democratic norm violations, citizens update beliefs about institutional neutrality in ways that are institutionally targeted rather than diffuse (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Torcal, 2014). Bermeo's (2016) typology of democratic backsliding and Helmke and Levitsky's (2017) work on informal institutions both suggest that trust updating tracks perceived norm violation: the institution

most directly responsible for democratic reversal suffers the greatest confidence losses, while institutions perceived as bystanders may be comparatively insulated. For Thailand, this framework generates a clear prediction — military trust should decline more steeply than government trust, as the armed forces were the primary agent of democratic disruption through the 2006 and 2014 coups, and as the 2020–2021 protests explicitly named military political interference as their animating target.

Pandemic governance research has documented divergent trust trajectories across contexts of varying epidemic management capacity: effective containment generated durable trust gains in some settings, while governance failures produced sharp declines in others (Baekgaard et al., 2020; Bol et al., 2021). This literature has concentrated predominantly on Western democracies and short-term dynamics, leaving the applicability of pandemic-driven trust mechanisms in hybrid regimes an open question. The institutional differentiation pattern provides the critical empirical leverage for adjudicating among these accounts: performance theories predict government trust as the primary casualty of COVID-era governance failures; political crisis theories predict military trust as the primary casualty of protest-targeted institutional contention.

2.3   Thailand's Political Trajectory

Four periods structure the analysis:

Period 1 (2001–2005): The 1997 financial crisis catalyzed constitutional reform, producing the "People's Constitution" that raised democratic expectations across Thai society (Harding & Leyland, 2011). Thaksin's decisive 2001 electoral victory was followed by credible delivery

on populist commitments — universal healthcare, village development funds, agricultural debt relief — generating unusually high institutional satisfaction (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2008). Both government and military trust were exceptionally elevated in this period, reflecting diffuse confidence in the constitutional renewal project rather than considered institutional judgment. The military's standing rested on its cultivated association with the monarchy and a self-presentation as a stabilizing force above partisan conflict (McCargo, 2005) — a posture that commanded deference precisely because it had not yet been tested by direct intervention.

Period 2 (2006–2013): The 2006 coup against Thaksin initiated a period of chronic instability from which Thai democracy has not recovered (Chambers, 2014). Despite deposing an elected government, the coup initially commanded significant elite support, particularly among Bangkok's urban middle class who had grown wary of Thaksin's populist challenge to established hierarchies. Pro-Thaksin parties won the 2007 and 2011 elections regardless, sustaining the electoral coalition the coup had sought to dissolve. Competing street mobilizations — the royalist Yellow Shirts and the pro-Thaksin Red Shirts — paralyzed Bangkok in successive waves, culminating in the military's violent dispersal of Red Shirt demonstrators in 2010 at a cost of over ninety lives (Montesano et al., 2012).

Period 3 (2014–2019): The 2014 coup installed General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, inaugurating five years of direct military governance that progressively embedded the armed forces' influence into Thailand's constitutional architecture (Ockey & Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2017). The 2017 constitution institutionalized this advantage through an appointed

Senate empowered to participate in selecting the prime minister, guaranteed military budget autonomy, and electoral rules calibrated to fragment the pro-Thaksin majority (Bunte & Dressel, 2016). The 2019 elections, conducted under these engineered conditions, were widely perceived as designed to preserve Prayuth's tenure rather than to produce a genuinely competitive democratic outcome (Chambers, 2021).

Period 4 (2020–2022): The youth-led protests that emerged in 2020 marked a qualitative rupture with the partisan polarization of the preceding decade (Sinpeng, 2021). Where earlier mobilizations had organized around Thaksin-aligned and royalist-military camps, the 2020–2021 movement united students and workers across regional and class lines around three demands — dissolving parliament, ending military political interference, and reforming the monarchy's constitutional role — that explicitly targeted the institutional architecture successive coups had constructed. The government responded with mass arrests and aggressive censorship, measures that temporarily suppressed street mobilization but intensified the underlying economic and political grievances that COVID-era lockdowns had amplified (McCargo, 2021).

This timeline generates predictions: if trust tracks political events, we should observe (1) declines following coups, (2) erosion during military government, and (3) sharp declines Wave 5–6 coinciding with protests. Crucially, military trust should decline more than government trust.

2.4 Hypotheses

H1 (Exceptional decline): Thailand exhibits steeper institutional trust decline than Philippines or Taiwan over 2001–2022.

H2 (Institutional differentiation): In Thailand, military trust declines more steeply than government trust, consistent with political crisis and inconsistent with pandemic performance.

H3 (Coercive legitimacy alignment): In Philippines, trust in coercive institutions is maintained during Duterte (Waves 4–5), reflecting alignment between state coercion and mass preferences.

The logic underlying H3 is the inverse of Thailand's. Where the Thai military acted against the democratic expectations of an increasingly mobilized citizenry, Duterte's security apparatus operated in alignment with mass demand for social order (Curato, 2016; Teehankee, 2016). H3 thus elaborates a critical scope condition: coercive institutional trust erodes when state violence violates citizen evaluative standards, but may be sustained — or even enhanced — when it is perceived as responsive to those standards. Philippine police trust should therefore remain stable or increase during the Duterte period despite documented extrajudicial killings, not because Filipinos are indifferent to state violence, but because the political meaning of that violence is filtered through the lens of preference alignment.

H4 (Democratic expectation updating): In Thailand, rejection of authoritarian rule increases over the study period, consistent with rising democratic expectations.

H5 (Political engagement and trust erosion): Higher political interest associates with lower institutional trust, strengthening over time in Thailand as engagement becomes vehicle for critical evaluation.

Hypotheses 4 and 5 interrogate the attitudinal mechanisms proposed by the democratic expectation updating account. If Thailand's collapse reflects a deepened evaluative shift rather than mere political cynicism, rising rejection of authoritarian governance alternatives should coincide with — rather than mirror — declining institutional trust. The pattern distinguishes democratic maturation, in which citizens apply increasingly demanding standards to institutions they hold capable of reform, from generalized political disillusionment, in which trust and democratic commitment collapse in tandem.

3 Data and Methods

3.1 Data Source and Sample

The analysis draws on all six waves of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS), covering 2001 through 2022. Thailand, the Philippines, and Taiwan are the only countries with uninterrupted coverage across the full six-wave sequence, making them the natural comparison set for a study of long-run trust trajectories. All other ABS countries lack sufficient temporal continuity to support the pre-trend and within-country trajectory analyses the hypotheses require. The combined sample totals 24,446 respondents.

Table 1: Sample size by country and wave

Country	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6
Thailand	1546	1546	1512	1200	1200	1200
Philippines	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200
Taiwan	1415	1587	1592	1657	1259	1532

Thailand's sample ranges from 1,200 to 1,500 respondents per wave. The ABS employs stratified multi-stage probability sampling, with response rates exceeding 60 percent across all waves and countries. The repeated cross-sectional design is well-suited to the study's analytical focus: because the core question concerns changes in aggregate institutional trust at the country level rather than within-individual opinion dynamics, cross-sectional samples fielded at comparable intervals furnish the appropriate unit of inference.

3.2   Dependent Variables

The outcome of primary interest is institutional trust, measured in the ABS using a standard four-point scale (1 = none at all, 4 = a great deal). The analysis centers on two institutions that the theoretical framework treats as analytically distinct: **national government**, representing elected and administrative institutional trust, and the **military**, representing coercive institutional trust. This pairing is theoretically productive because it generates discriminating predictions. The preference alignment hypothesis anticipates that military trust should decline more sharply than government trust in Thailand, as it is the coercive apparatus most directly implicated in anti-democratic interventions; the performance legitimacy account predicts the opposite, since pandemic management was largely a civilian-government function. Police and court trust enter the analysis as secondary outcomes to probe institutional breadth. Following established practice (Marien & Hooghe, 2011; Meer & Dekker, 2010), the four-point scale is treated as continuous for the main specifications; ordered logit robustness checks are reported in the Online Appendix.

3.3 Independent Variables and Controls

The primary explanatory variable is **survey wave** (coded 1–6), which captures linear time trends in trust across the twenty-year observation window. To isolate Thailand's trajectory from general regional patterns, **country** is entered as a categorical variable with Thailand as the reference category, so that country-by-wave interaction terms directly estimate the deviation of the Philippines and Taiwan from Thailand's slope. Demographic controls — age (mean-centered), gender, education (standardized), and urban residence — are included to account for compositional differences across samples and waves that could otherwise confound country-level trend estimates. These covariates do not enter as focal predictors but as adjustment variables, ensuring that aggregate trust trajectories reflect genuine opinion shifts rather than sampling artifacts.

3.4 Analytical Strategy

The core estimation strategy employs multilevel models with country-specific intercepts and slopes, which allow both the baseline level of trust and the rate of change over time to vary by country:

$$\text{Trust}_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10}\text{Wave}_{ij} + \mathbf{X}_{ij}\beta + u_{0j} + u_{1j}\text{Wave}_{ij} + \epsilon_{ij}$$

The country-specific slope deviation u_{1j} is the quantity of primary interest: if Thailand's trust decline is genuinely exceptional, $u_{1,\text{Thailand}}$ should be significantly negative and larger in magnitude than deviations observed for the comparison countries. This specification tests

H1 directly.

To adjudicate H2 — the claim that institutional differentiation is specifically Thai, not regional — we estimate pooled models incorporating three-way interactions among Wave, institutional type (military versus government), and Thailand indicator. The three-way coefficient isolates whether the military-government trust differential widened more in Thailand than in the Philippines or Taiwan, providing a within-country discrimination test that separates coercive from elected institutions.

To distinguish discrete political shocks from gradual secular erosion — the pre-trend falsification test that rules out alternative declining-trend accounts — we restrict estimation to Waves 1–4, which span the period before COVID-19 and before the 2020–2021 protests. Comparing trend slopes from this restricted sample against those from the full six-wave sample identifies whether the steepening of decline is concentrated in the protest and post-protest period rather than distributed evenly over two decades.

All models incorporate ABS-provided survey weights; Waves 3–6 supply explicit probability weights, while Waves 1–2 are treated as self-weighting. Models that stack government and military trust outcomes for the same respondents employ cluster-robust standard errors at the respondent level to account for the within-person correlation that stacked outcomes introduce. Primary sampling unit (PSU) identifiers are not available in the public-use ABS files, precluding full design-based standard error adjustments; this restriction is unlikely to alter the substantive conclusions, which rest on country-level contrasts rather than population-level prevalence estimates. Robustness checks — including non-linear wave specifications, ordered logit regressions, and subgroup analyses — are reported in the Online Appendix.

14

3.5 Limitations

Three limitations deserve acknowledgment. First, the repeated cross-sectional design prevents individual-level causal inference: because the same respondents are not tracked over time, the analysis cannot directly establish whether any particular individual's trust changed in response to political events. This constraint is a feature rather than a flaw for the present research question, which concerns aggregate opinion dynamics at the country level, but it means that the attitudinal mechanisms tested in Section 5 must be inferred from group-level heterogeneity rather than observed within-person change. Second, the three-country sample, dictated by ABS coverage constraints, limits direct generalizability; the analysis cannot rule out the possibility that unobserved country-specific factors unique to Thailand drive the observed patterns. The theoretical framing mitigates this concern by deriving predictions that specify which institutions should decline, in which periods, and for which subgroups — predictions that hold up to the discriminating tests applied here. Third, the absence of PSU-level sampling identifiers in the public-use files means standard errors are not fully design-corrected, though this affects precision rather than the direction or magnitude of the main estimates.

4 Results

4.1 Trust Trajectories

20-Year Trust Trajectories: Thailand, Philippines, Taiwan (2001-2022)
Thailand's institutional trust collapsed; Philippines and Taiwan remained comparatively stable
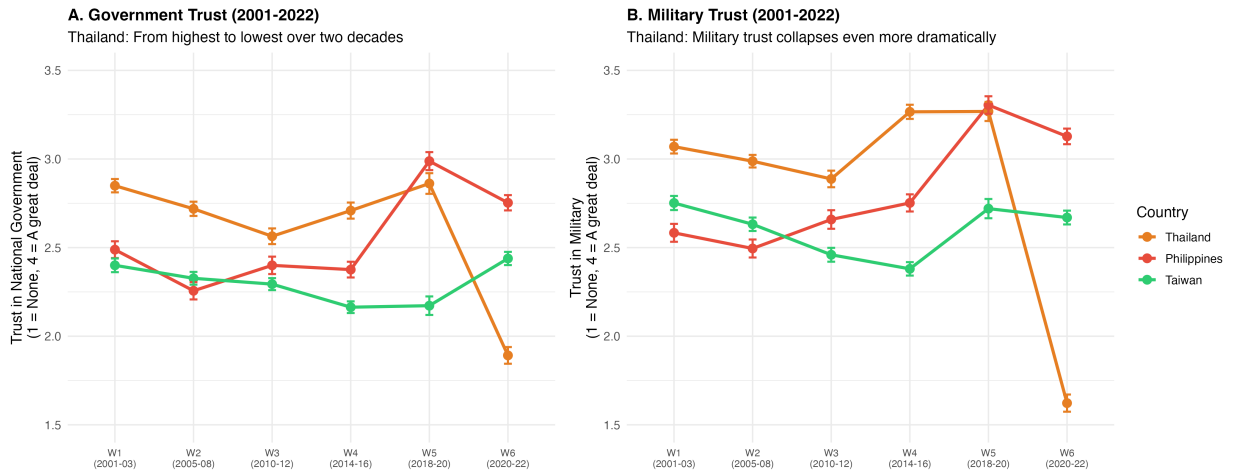

Figure 1: Twenty-year trust trajectories for government (A) and military (B) trust across three countries with complete ABS coverage (Waves 1-6).

Figure 1 traces the twenty-year trust trajectories for government and military trust. Thailand's trajectory is unambiguous: government trust declined from 2.85 in Wave 1 to 1.89 in Wave 6, a drop of 0.96 points on a four-point scale. Military trust fell even more sharply, from 3.07 to 1.62, a drop of 1.45 points. The Philippines and Taiwan, by contrast, maintain comparatively stable trajectories with modest inter-wave fluctuations.

Share of Respondents Reporting "No Trust at All" in Institutions
Thailand's bottom-box share surges in Wave 6 while comparator countries remain stable
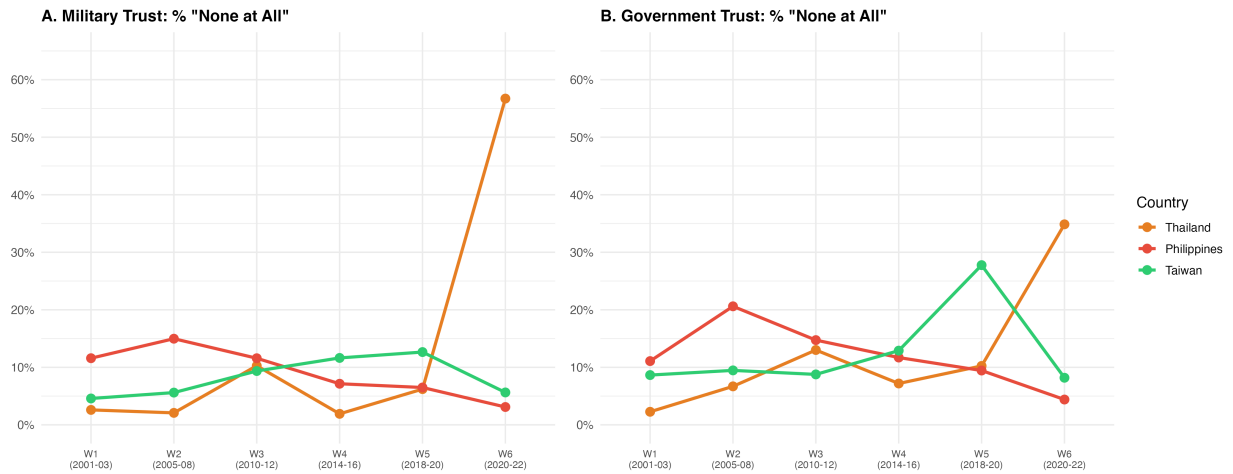

Figure 2: Share of respondents reporting "no trust at all" in military (A) and government (B) institutions across three countries, Waves 1–6.

The distributional evidence in Figure 2 underscores the severity of the collapse. The share of Thai respondents reporting "no trust at all" in the military hovered between 3% and 6% across Waves 1 through 5 before surging to 57% in Wave 6, a nearly tenfold increase. Government trust followed a similar, if less extreme, trajectory: the bottom-box share rose from 2% in Wave 1 to 35% in Wave 6. In the same period, the share expressing no military trust at all fell to just 3% in the Philippines and 6% in Taiwan, confirming that the Thai pattern is not an artifact of regional trends or measurement drift. The concentration of the shift in Wave 6 (fielded 2019–2022, during and after the 2020–2021 protest wave) points to a discrete political shock rather than gradual erosion.

4.2 Thailand Exceptionalism (H1)

Table 2: Country x Wave interaction models for government and military trust (H1). Thailand is the reference category; interaction terms capture deviations from Thailand's trajectory. Weighted OLS with survey weights; SEs are heteroskedasticity-consistent. N = 21,036 (government), 21,049 (military).

Outcome	Term	Estimate	SE	p
Government Trust	Wave	-0.115	0.006	0
Government Trust	Philippines	-0.727	0.033	0
Government Trust	Taiwan	-0.585	0.034	0
Government Trust	Wave × Philippines	0.211	0.008	0
Government Trust	Wave × Taiwan	0.121	0.008	0
Military Trust	Wave	-0.171	0.006	0
Military Trust	Philippines	-1.056	0.035	0
Military Trust	Taiwan	-0.674	0.036	0
Military Trust	Wave × Philippines	0.317	0.009	0
Military Trust	Wave × Taiwan	0.170	0.009	0

Table 2 reports fixed-effects models with country × wave interactions, testing whether Thailand's trust decline is exceptionally steep (H1). With Thailand as the reference category, the `wave_num` coefficient captures Thailand's per-wave trend: government trust declines by -0.115 points per wave ($p < .001$), and military trust by -0.171 points per wave ($p < .001$). The positive and highly significant interaction terms for both the Philippines ($b = 0.211$, $p < .001$ for government; $b = 0.317$, $p < .001$ for military) and Taiwan ($b = 0.121$, $p < $

.001 for government; $b = 0.17$, $p < .001$ for military) establish that both countries declined significantly less steeply than Thailand. Indeed, the interaction coefficients for the Philippines are large enough to imply a *positive* net slope, indicating rising trust over the period, a pattern we discuss further below.

Table 3: Country-specific random slope deviations from the average wave trend. Multilevel models with random intercepts and slopes by country; maximum likelihood estimation with survey weights. N = 21,036 (government), 21,049 (military).

Country	Government	Military	Difference
Thailand	-0.11	-0.162	-0.052
Philippines	0.10	0.154	0.054
Taiwan	0.01	0.008	-0.002

Multilevel models with random slopes corroborate these findings (Table 3). Thailand's slope deviations are the most negative for both institutions, and the gap between military and government slope deviations is largest for Thailand (-0.052), corroborating both H1 and H2. A likelihood ratio test confirms that the random-slopes specification significantly improves fit over random intercepts alone ($p < .001$), indicating meaningful cross-country heterogeneity in trust trajectories.

4.3 Institutional Differentiation (H2)

The descriptive evidence already suggests that Thailand's military trust declined more steeply than government trust. Table 2 showed a total twenty-year decline of 1.45 points for military trust versus 0.96 points for government trust, a ratio of roughly 1.5 to 1. To test this formally,

we estimate a pooled model stacking government and military trust observations with a three-way interaction (Wave × Military × Country).

Table 4: Three-way interaction model testing institutional differentiation (H2). The dependent variable is trust (government and military stacked); Thailand is the reference country. Weighted OLS with respondent-clustered SEs. N = 42,085 (two observations per respondent).

Term	Estimate	SE	p
Military	0.473	0.028	0
Wave × Military	-0.058	0.007	0
Wave × Philippines	0.209	0.009	0
Wave × Taiwan	0.119	0.008	0
Military × Philippines	-0.380	0.038	0
Military × Taiwan	-0.170	0.036	0
Wave × Military × Philippines	0.111	0.010	0
Wave × Military × Taiwan	0.054	0.009	0

Table 4 presents the key results. The `wave_num:is_military` interaction (b = -0.058, $p <$ .001) establishes that across the pooled sample, military trust declines more rapidly than government trust per wave. The critical three-way interactions test whether this military-specific decline is *disproportionately* concentrated in Thailand. The positive coefficients for both the Philippines (b = 0.111, $p <$ .001) and Taiwan (b = 0.054, $p <$ .001) confirm that Thailand's military-government differential is significantly larger than in either comparator country, corroborating H2.

The W5–W6 acceleration test further sharpens this result. A model interacting a Wave 5–6

indicator with the military and Thailand dummies yields a three-way coefficient of $b = -0.433$ ($p < .001$), indicating that the military-specific trust collapse in Thailand was concentrated in the period coinciding with the 2020–2021 pro-democracy protests. This temporal specificity strengthens the link between political crisis and institutional differentiation.

4.4 Performance Controls

Table 5: Models with performance controls: economic satisfaction and democracy satisfaction added to baseline specification. Weighted OLS with survey weights; SEs are heteroskedasticity-consistent. N = 23,365.

Outcome	Term	Estimate	SE	p
Government Trust	Wave	-0.021	0.006	0.000
Government Trust	Econ. satisfaction	0.206	0.006	0.000
Government Trust	Dem. satisfaction	0.262	0.007	0.000
Government Trust	Wave × Philippines	0.059	0.008	0.000
Government Trust	Wave × Taiwan	-0.026	0.008	0.001
Military Trust	Wave	-0.098	0.006	0.000
Military Trust	Econ. satisfaction	0.143	0.006	0.000
Military Trust	Dem. satisfaction	0.240	0.008	0.000
Military Trust	Wave × Philippines	0.198	0.009	0.000
Military Trust	Wave × Taiwan	0.058	0.009	0.000

If the trust collapse were driven by declining economic conditions or dissatisfaction with democratic governance, controlling for these performance proxies should substantially attenuate the

wave × country interactions. Table 5 adds economic satisfaction and democracy satisfaction to the baseline H1 specification. Both performance variables significantly predict trust in the anticipated direction: respondents who evaluate the economy more favorably report higher government trust ($b = 0.206$, $p < .001$), as do those more satisfied with democracy ($b = 0.262$, $p < .001$).

The country × wave interaction pattern survives this adjustment largely intact. Thailand's per-wave decline remains steep for both government trust ($b = -0.021$) and military trust ($b = -0.098$), and the interaction terms for the Philippines and Taiwan remain positive and significant. Performance perceptions, in other words, do not account for Thailand's exceptional trajectory — the country-level patterns persist because the underlying driver is political rather than economic. This result corroborates the political crisis interpretation over performance-based accounts.

4.5 Pre-Trend Analysis

Table 6: Pre-trend check: differential trends in Waves 1–4 (pre-COVID). Weighted OLS with survey weights; SEs are heteroskedasticity-consistent. N = 16,855.

Outcome	Term	Estimate	SE	p
Government Trust	Wave	-0.060	0.010	0.000
Government Trust	Philippines	-0.376	0.040	0.000
Government Trust	Taiwan	-0.294	0.040	0.000
Government Trust	Wave × Philippines	0.045	0.014	0.001
Government Trust	Wave × Taiwan	-0.008	0.014	0.566
Military Trust	Wave	0.053	0.011	0.000
Military Trust	Philippines	-0.414	0.042	0.000
Military Trust	Taiwan	0.103	0.042	0.015
Military Trust	Wave × Philippines	0.025	0.015	0.085
Military Trust	Wave × Taiwan	-0.177	0.014	0.000

To assess whether the full-sample results are driven by post-2019 shocks or reflect longer-running dynamics, we restrict the sample to Waves 1–4 (pre-COVID). Table 6 reveals an instructive asymmetry. For government trust, Thailand was already declining before COVID (b = -0.06 per wave, $p < .001$), but the slope is roughly half the magnitude of the full-sample estimate (-0.115), indicating substantial acceleration in the later waves. For military trust, the pre-trend is even more revealing: the coefficient is *positive* ($b = 0.053$, $p < .001$), meaning Thai military trust was actually *rising* through Wave 4 before collapsing precipitously in

Waves 5–6. This reversal rules out a smooth secular decline and points instead to a discrete shock — precisely what the political crisis account, centered on the 2020–2021 protests, predicts.

4.6 Robustness

We conduct several additional robustness checks, reported in full in the Online Appendix.

Table 7: Thailand's per-wave trust slope across all six institutions, from the country x wave interaction model. Weighted OLS with survey weights; SEs are heteroskedasticity-consistent. N ranges from 20,630 (courts) to 21,465 (police).

Institution	Slope	SE	p
Military	-0.171	0.006	0
National Government	-0.115	0.006	0
Police	-0.074	0.006	0
Parliament	-0.056	0.006	0
Courts	-0.042	0.006	0
Political Parties	-0.042	0.006	0

Secondary institutions. Table 7 reports Thailand's per-wave slopes for all six trust measures. The military exhibits by far the steepest decline (-0.171), followed by national government (-0.115). Courts, police, parliament, and political parties all decline, but at roughly half the rate or less. This gradient, with the military as the clear outlier, corroborates a political crisis mechanism that specifically targeted the military's role rather than one of generalized institutional malaise.

Ordered logit models. Ordered logistic regression treating trust as ordinal categories produces substantively identical patterns (Table 8), confirming results are not artifacts of treating the scale as continuous.

Table 8: Ordered logistic regression (proportional odds) for government and military trust. Coefficients are log-odds; SEs are model-based. N = 20,446.

Outcome	Term	Estimate	SE	p
Government Trust	Wave	-0.270	0.014	0
Government Trust	Philippines	-1.754	0.078	0
Government Trust	Taiwan	-1.326	0.078	0
Government Trust	Wave × Philippines	0.504	0.020	0
Government Trust	Wave × Taiwan	0.273	0.019	0
Military Trust	Wave	-0.344	0.015	0
Military Trust	Philippines	-2.240	0.078	0
Military Trust	Taiwan	-1.396	0.078	0
Military Trust	Wave × Philippines	0.673	0.020	0
Military Trust	Wave × Taiwan	0.345	0.019	0

Subgroup analyses. The military-government differential holds across all demographic subgroups (young and old, urban and rural, low and high education), ruling out the possibility that aggregate patterns are driven by compositional change (Online Appendix, Table A3). As the protest-driven mechanism anticipates, declines are steepest among younger, urban, educated respondents — the demographics overrepresented in the 2020–2021 protests. Yet erosion is present across all groups, suggesting diffusion beyond the activist core into the

broader population.

Comparator country dynamics. Country-specific models for the Philippines and Taiwan provide useful contrasts. In the Philippines, military and police trust remain stable or rise slightly during the Duterte period (Waves 4–6), reflecting preference alignment under a leader who actively endorsed coercive institutions. In Taiwan, military trust exhibits no significant trend ($b = $ -0.005, $p = 0.329$), corroborating the successful depoliticization of the armed forces following democratization. These patterns are detailed in the Online Appendix (Tables A4–A5).

4.7 Difference-in-Differences: Isolating the Protest-Era Military Shock

The wave $\times$ country interaction models establish Thailand's exceptional trajectory, but embed the treatment effect across a linear time trend. To sharpen causal identification, we estimate a difference-in-differences specification in which the "treatment" is defined as the post-Wave 4 period (Waves 5–6), coinciding with the military government's consolidation and the 2020–2021 protests.

Table 9: Difference-in-differences model: Trust ~ Post-Wave4 × Military × Thailand. Observations are respondent–institution pairs (government and military trust stacked); Post-Wave4 = 1 for Waves 5–6. Model includes a linear wave trend and country fixed effects. Respondent-clustered SEs. N = 45,992.

Term	Estimate	SE	p
Post-W4	0.428	0.021	0
Military	0.249	0.009	0
Thailand	0.299	0.018	0
Post-W4 × Military	0.103	0.017	0
Post-W4 × Thailand	-0.562	0.030	0
Military × Thailand	0.133	0.018	0
Post-W4 × Military × Thailand	-0.433	0.030	0

The key estimate is the three-way interaction Post-Wave4 × Military × Thailand (b = -0.433, $p < .001$). This coefficient captures the *additional* trust decline for the Thai military in the protest era, over and above any general post-Wave 4 trend, any general military-specific trend, and any general Thai trend. Its magnitude and significance confirm that the military trust collapse is concentrated in Thailand and in the post-2018 period, and is not an artifact of the linear time-trend assumption used in the main H1 and H2 models.

The Wave 6 cross-sectional robustness check (Online Appendix, Table A9) produces a comparable estimate, confirming that the DiD result is not sensitive to how the post-period is defined.

4.8 Philippines: Coercive Legitimacy Alignment (H3)

The Philippine case provides a theoretically informative contrast to Thailand's trajectory. We first present a formal test before turning to the descriptive trajectory.

To test H3 directly, we estimate a stacked model in which coercive institutions (military and police) and non-coercive institutions (national government and NGOs) are compared within the Philippines across Waves 4–6. If preference alignment specifically elevates coercive trust, the interaction between wave and a coercive institution indicator should be positive and significant. The baseline wave trend is positive and highly significant ($b = 0.169$, $p < .001$), confirming that all Philippine institutions trended upward across Waves 4–6. However, the wave × coercive interaction is near-zero and non-significant ($b = 0.009$, $p = 0.573$), indicating that coercive institutions did not trend upward *differentially* relative to non-coercive institutions during the Duterte period. This null result is itself theoretically informative: trust rose uniformly across institutional types, reflecting a generalized legitimacy boost rather than preference alignment that specifically elevated the security apparatus. Full results are reported in Online Appendix, Table A8. Unlike Thailand's dramatic decline, trust in coercive institutions in the Philippines remained stable or increased during the Duterte period. Military trust rose from 2.75 in Wave 4 to 3.3 in Wave 5, before easing to 3.12 in Wave 6; police trust followed a parallel trajectory, moving from 2.62 to 3.06 and then 3.04. The pattern corroborates H3: where state coercive action aligned with mass preferences, institutional trust in the relevant institutions held.

The police trust trajectory is particularly revealing. Despite international condemnation of extrajudicial killings and documented human rights abuses associated with the drug war,

Filipino respondents did not withdraw trust from the institution most directly implicated. This finding accords with survey evidence that Duterte himself commanded sustained popular approval throughout his presidency, with his net satisfaction rating reaching "Excellent" levels as late as December 2019, and with the drug campaign receiving majority backing in contemporaneous polling despite international condemnation (Curato, 2016; Teehankee, 2016). Scholars situate this support within a tradition of punitive populism in Philippine politics, where perceptions of endemic drug-related crime activated strong demand for coercive enforcement among communities most directly affected.

Two interpretive caveats are warranted, however. First, the public opinion picture is less uniform than aggregate approval ratings suggest. Concurrent Social Weather Stations surveys found that large majorities simultaneously believed police were engaged in extrajudicial killings and evidence-planting, and that 92 percent of respondents said capturing suspects alive was important. Presidential approval and endorsement of lethal methods were, in other words, separable: Filipinos could support Duterte's goals while harboring deep skepticism about police conduct. The ABS trust items, which ask about institutions rather than specific practices, may capture the former more than the latter.

Second, the political climate during the drug war created conditions for substantial social desirability bias in survey responses. The administration publicly framed critics of the campaign as sympathizers with the narcotics trade, and journalists, activists, and political opponents faced documented harassment (Curato, 2016). Under such conditions, expressed approval in face-to-face interview settings may partly reflect preference falsification—respondents reporting politically safe rather than sincere views (Kuran, 1995). The ABS data are not

immune to this dynamic. Philippine coercive institutional trust figures for the Wave 4–5 period should therefore be interpreted as measuring expressed confidence under conditions of political pressure, not necessarily as authentic institutional legitimacy.

These caveats do not invalidate the preference-alignment argument. Even expressed acquiescence in the face of popular coercive policies is analytically distinct from the active alienation documented in Thailand, where no comparable mass preference existed for military governance. The Philippine pattern thus provides a critical scope condition for our theoretical framework—with the important qualification that the case is better treated as suggestive rather than confirmatory evidence for the coercive legitimacy mechanism.

4.9   Attitudinal Mechanisms (H4 and H5)

The attitudinal variables provide evidence for the democratic expectation updating mechanism. In Thailand, rejection of military rule followed a non-linear but ultimately ascending trajectory, rising from 3.25 in Wave 1 (on a reversed 1–4 scale where higher values indicate stronger rejection) to 3.52 in Wave 6. The composite measure of authoritarian rejection (averaging disapproval of military rule, strongman rule, and single-party rule) showed a comparable increase, from 3.06 to 3.29. The trajectory was not monotonic: rejection dipped sharply during the post-coup period ($b = -0.344$, $p < .001$ for the coup-era period effect), reflecting the initial rally-around-the-flag response to the 2014 intervention. However, rejection rebounded strongly in the protest era ($b = 0.152$, $p < .001$), surpassing pre-coup levels. The pattern corroborates H4: Thai citizens increasingly rejected authoritarian governance over the same period in which they withdrew trust from military and government institutions. Critically, this combination

of rising democratic expectations alongside falling institutional trust distinguishes the Thai case from generalized political apathy. Citizens are not disengaging from democratic ideals; rather, they are applying increasingly demanding standards to institutions they perceive as falling short.

The Philippines presents a revealing contrast. Rejection of military rule declined from 3.04 in Wave 4 to 2.64 in Wave 5, before partially recovering to 2.92 in Wave 6. Where Thai citizens were raising their democratic expectations over the same period, Filipino citizens under Duterte were, on aggregate, becoming more tolerant of military-adjacent governance — a divergence that corroborates the preference alignment mechanism. The drug war commanded majority support, and that support appears to have moderated the principled democratic opposition that elsewhere accompanies coercive state expansion. This dynamic echoes what Dalton (2004) describes as cognitive mobilization in reverse: when coercive policies align with perceived public interest, even attentive citizens may suspend democratic evaluative criteria in favor of outcome-based judgment.

Political interest operates as a significant moderator of the trust–time relationship in Thailand (H5), though not in the direction initially hypothesized. In the Thailand-only model, political interest is associated with substantially lower military trust at baseline ($b = -0.12$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that politically engaged Thais were already more skeptical of the military. The interaction between political interest and wave is positive ($b = 0.04$, $p < .001$), meaning that the trust gap between politically interested and uninterested citizens narrowed over time as less engaged respondents caught up to the already-low trust levels of their more attentive counterparts. The pattern reflects a diffusion dynamic: politically engaged Thais

31

recognized the costs of military intervention earlier, while less engaged citizens reached similar conclusions more gradually as the consequences of military governance became harder to ignore.

In the three-country model, the Thailand-specific pattern diverges significantly from both comparators. The three-way interaction (wave × political interest × country) is negative for the Philippines ($b = $ -0.038, $p = 0$) and Taiwan ($b = $ -0.031, $p = 0.003$), confirming that the moderating role of political interest is distinctive to the Thai context, where the military's political salience makes engagement a relevant lens for evaluating coercive institutions.

4.9.1 Satisfaction with Democracy

Satisfaction with democracy provides additional discriminating evidence. In Thailand, satisfaction declined from 3.24 in Wave 1 to 2.26 in Wave 6, a trajectory that parallels institutional trust erosion ($b = $ -0.159 per wave, $p < .001$). However, the relationship between satisfaction and trust is not symmetrical across institutions. In a stacked model predicting government and military trust jointly, democracy satisfaction is positively associated with both outcomes ($b = 0.373$, $p < .001$ for government trust), but the interaction between satisfaction and the military trust indicator is also significant and positive ($b = 0.105$, $p < .001$). This indicates that satisfaction with democracy is, if anything, *more* strongly associated with military trust than government trust in the Thai context, a pattern that attests to the politicization of the armed forces: when the military assumes a governing role, citizens evaluate it through the same democratic performance lens they apply to elected institutions.

4.9.2 Democratic Commitment and Trust Erosion

To address potential ecological inference concerns, we examine whether military trust erosion concentrates among respondents whose attitudes align with protest movement ideology. While the ABS lacks attitudinal measures of protest support, we can test whether trust decline is steepest among those holding democratic values aligned with the movement's demands.

In Thailand, democratic commitment is strongly associated with lower military trust across all waves (b = -0.581, $p < .001$), indicating that respondents who prioritize democracy and reject authoritarian alternatives consistently evaluate the military more critically. However, the interaction between wave and democratic commitment is positive rather than negative (b = 0.066, $p = 0.095$), meaning the trust gap between democratic believers and skeptics narrowed over time rather than widened.

This pattern initially appears to contradict the hypothesis that democratic true believers drove the trust collapse. Closer examination reveals a more nuanced dynamic that reflects the diffusion of democratic learning. Democratic believers began the period with already-low military trust (reflecting principled opposition to military political involvement), while less ideologically committed citizens extended relatively high diffuse trust. Over two decades, the latter group caught up to the former as repeated military interventions made the costs of military governance increasingly apparent even to initially deferential citizens. By Wave 6, democratic commitment remains the single strongest predictor of military trust (b = -0.589, $p < .001$), but the effect operates against a universally lower baseline.

Crucially, this pattern differs from government trust. While democratic commitment also

predicts lower government trust (b = -0.501, p = 0.001), and the convergence pattern is even stronger for government (interaction b = 0.123, $p < .001$), the three-way interaction testing whether democratic commitment operates differently for military versus government trust is not significant (b = -0.047, p = 0.248). This suggests that democratic believers apply consistently critical standards across institutions rather than specifically targeting the military, though both groups experienced steeper military than government trust declines (wave $\times$ military b = -0.053, $p < .001$).

Cross-national comparison reveals that this convergence pattern is specific to Thailand. In the Philippines, the interaction is negative (b = -0.169, $p < .001$), indicating that democratic believers' military trust gap widened over time relative to democratic skeptics, the opposite of Thailand's pattern. This divergence corroborates the preference alignment mechanism: under Duterte, Filipinos who valued democracy became increasingly alienated from coercive institutions even as those willing to trade democratic principles for order maintained or increased trust. Taiwan exhibits no significant difference from Thailand (b = 0.042, p = 0.346), corroborating stable military depoliticization that neither widens nor narrows ideological trust gaps.

These findings carry two implications for our theoretical framework. First, they confirm that democratic values shape institutional trust evaluations, but the relationship is conditioned by regime trajectory: in contexts of democratic backsliding (Thailand, the Philippines), democratic believers consistently distrust politicized militaries, while in stable democracies (Taiwan), ideology matters less for coercive institutional trust. Second, the convergence pattern in Thailand corroborates a diffusion interpretation of democratic expectation updating.

The 2020–2021 protests were led by democratic true believers who had long been skeptical of military governance, but the protests' broader impact was to extend this skepticism to previously deferential citizens. The aggregate trust collapse thus reflects not only the intensification of existing opposition but its successful transmission to wider publics.

4.9.3 Regional Variation and Political Geography

Region identifiers available in Waves 4 through 6 allow us to test whether trust erosion concentrated in areas most affected by protest activity and Thaksin-era mobilization. Table 10 displays mean military trust by region across the three waves. Bangkok and the Northeast, the protest movement's urban epicenter and the Red Shirt movement's rural heartland, respectively, experienced virtually identical declines of approximately 1.95 points from Wave 4 to Wave 6. The South, historically a Democrat Party stronghold with lower protest participation, showed the smallest decline at 0.98 points, less than half the magnitude of Bangkok and the Northeast.

Table 10: Military trust by region, Waves 4–6. Scale: 1 (none at all) to 4 (a great deal). Descriptive means (unweighted). N = 3,301 (Thailand, Waves 4–6 with non-missing region).

Region	W4	W5	W6	Change W4→W6	Change W5→W6
Bangkok	3.06	3.24	1.13	-1.93	-2.11
Northeast	3.51	3.82	1.55	-1.96	-2.27
Central	3.20	2.62	1.63	-1.56	-0.98
North	3.21	3.35	1.69	-1.52	-1.66
South	3.00	2.86	2.02	-0.98	-0.84

The temporal pattern is particularly revealing. In Wave 5 (2018–2020, immediately following

the 2014 coup and military government period), Bangkok, Northeast, and North regions all showed rising military trust relative to Wave 4, reflecting the short-term rally effects that followed the coup. The collapse occurred between Waves 5 and 6 (2020–2022), coinciding precisely with the 2020–2021 protest period. Bangkok dropped 2.11 points from Wave 5 to Wave 6, while the Northeast dropped 2.27 points, the steepest declines in the survey.

This geographic pattern carries theoretical significance. The convergence of Bangkok (urban, educated, protest movement base) and Northeast (rural, Thaksin loyalist, Red Shirt base) demonstrates that the trust collapse transcended the traditional Red Shirt–Yellow Shirt divide that structured Thai politics from 2006 to 2014. The 2020–2021 protests united constituencies that had previously opposed each other, creating a broader coalition against military governance that encompassed both the pro-democracy youth movement and the rural populist base alienated by repeated coups against elected Thaksin-aligned governments. The South's resilience, by contrast, suggests that regions with weaker histories of anti-military mobilization and stronger conservative-royalist orientation maintained relatively higher (though still declining) trust.

Regression analysis confirms these descriptive patterns. With the South as reference category, both Bangkok (b = -0.517, p < .001) and the Northeast (b = -0.446, p < .001) exhibit significantly steeper trust declines per wave, while the Central (b = -0.258, p < .001) and North (b = -0.209, p < .001) regions occupy intermediate positions. The geographic concentration of trust erosion in precisely the regions most affected by two decades of political struggle, Bangkok as the site of street confrontations and the Northeast as the electoral base repeatedly disenfranchised by military intervention, strengthens the political crisis

interpretation over pandemic performance accounts, which would predict more uniform geographic patterns.

4.9.4 Robustness: Institutional Breadth and Preference Falsification

A potential concern with the Philippine findings is that elevated trust during the Duterte period (Wave 5) reflects preference falsification rather than genuine attitudinal change. Under conditions of coercive governance, respondents may report higher trust in politically salient institutions—particularly the national government and military—while harboring private reservations they are unwilling to disclose. If this mechanism were operative, trust in less politically sensitive institutions such as NGOs and local government would be expected to remain stable even as trust in national-level institutions rose, producing a divergent pattern across institutional types.

To evaluate this possibility, we examine trust scores for NGOs and local government alongside national government and military trust across all six waves. Online Appendix Table A7 presents mean trust scores for all four institutional categories in both the Philippines and Thailand. If preference falsification inflates Philippine trust during the Duterte era, we would expect a widening gap between sensitive institutions (national government, military) and non-sensitive institutions (NGOs, local government) in Wave 5. Conversely, if the trust surge reflects a genuine attitudinal shift — as the coercive legitimacy mechanism proposed in H3 would predict — trust should rise uniformly across institutional types.

The Philippine data provide little support for the falsification interpretation. In Wave 5, trust increased substantially across all four institutions: NGOs rose from 2.57 to 3.16, local

government from 2.71 to 3.18, national government from 2.38 to 2.99, and the military from 2.75 to 3.3. This uniform surge better reflects a generalized legitimacy boost under Duterte's populist governance than selective inflation of politically sensitive measures. The military does register the highest absolute trust level in Wave 5 (3.3), and its relative elevation persists into Wave 6 (3.13 versus 2.89 for NGOs), suggesting that Duterte's securitized policy agenda conferred a modest additional premium on military legitimacy. However, the gap between institutional categories is substantively small and does not exhibit the sharp divergence that a preference falsification account would predict.

The Thai data offer a complementary insight. If Thailand's trust decline were driven primarily by disillusionment with specific institutions implicated in democratic backsliding—a "targeted backlash" rather than the systemic evaluative shift proposed by the democratic expectation updating framework—we would expect trust in peripheral institutions like NGOs and local government to remain relatively stable even as national government and military trust collapsed. The evidence contradicts this interpretation decisively. In Wave 6, trust eroded across all institutional categories: NGOs fell from 2.94 to 2.09, local government from 2.99 to 2.18, national government from 2.86 to 1.89, and the military from 3.27 to 1.62. The breadth of this decline suggests that the mechanism identified in H1 and H2 operates at the level of generalized institutional confidence rather than institution-specific grievance. Thai citizens did not merely withdraw trust from the military and the government it installed; they withdrew trust from the institutional landscape as a whole.

Two features of the Thai pattern merit emphasis. First, the military experienced the steepest absolute decline of any institution (a drop of 1.65 points from Wave 5 to Wave 6),

corroborating the intervention paradox established in the main analysis. Second, even NGOs — organizations with no direct role in Thailand's coups or political governance — saw trust fall by 0.85 points, from 2.94 to 2.09. This generalized erosion cannot be reconciled with explanations that attribute Thailand's trust collapse to COVID-19 governance failures or to dissatisfaction with specific political actors. The democratic expectation updating mechanism, however, accounts for it directly: once citizens' evaluative thresholds have been raised through exposure to responsive governance, the resulting skepticism extends beyond the institutions directly responsible for democratic reversals to encompass the broader institutional order.

Taken together, the institutional breadth analysis strengthens confidence in the study's core theoretical claims. In the Philippines, uniform trust elevation across sensitive and non-sensitive institutions corroborates the coercive legitimacy interpretation and mitigates preference falsification concerns. In Thailand, uniform trust erosion across all institutional categories establishes that democratic expectation updating operates as a systemic rather than targeted mechanism, reshaping citizens' relationship with institutional authority at a fundamental level.

5   Discussion

The two competing frameworks developed earlier — performance legitimacy and political crisis — made divergent predictions. Performance accounts held that government trust should bear the heaviest losses, since civilian administrations are the primary accountability targets of dissatisfied publics. Political crisis accounts predicted the opposite: military trust should decline more steeply, as the institution most directly implicated in Thailand's democratic

disruptions and most explicitly targeted by the 2020–2021 protests. The evidence decisively corroborates the second prediction. Military trust fell approximately 1.5 times more than government trust, the collapse concentrated in a single inter-wave period coinciding with the protest wave, and the pattern survives every performance control the data can support. What follows traces the theoretical implications of this result for civil-military relations, the comparative study of institutional legitimacy, and the interpretation of trust decline in Asia's hybrid regimes.

5.1 Political Crisis vs. Performance Explanations

The government-military trust differential provides a discriminating test between performance and political crisis accounts of institutional trust change. A performance explanation, whether rooted in economic governance, pandemic management, or service delivery, would predict that government trust should be the primary casualty, since elected officials and their appointed bureaucracies bear direct responsibility for policy outcomes. The military, by contrast, plays at most a supporting role in pandemic response and economic management, and should therefore be relatively insulated from performance-based updating.

The data reject this prediction decisively. Military trust declined more steeply than government trust in Thailand, and this differential widened sharply in the Wave 5–6 period. Adding controls for economic satisfaction and democracy satisfaction, the two most commonly used performance proxies in the trust literature, leaves the pattern essentially unchanged. If Thai respondents were punishing institutions for poor governance, the punishment fell disproportionately on an institution that does not govern in the conventional sense. No

standard performance model accommodates this distribution of losses.

The political crisis framework, by contrast, resolves it directly. The 2020–2021 protests represented the most direct challenge to military political influence since the 2010 Red Shirt mobilization, but with an important difference: the protest coalition was broader, younger, and more ideologically coherent in its demands (Sinpeng, 2021). The three core demands (dissolving parliament, ending military interference, and reforming the monarchy's political role) explicitly targeted the institutional architecture that the military had built through successive coups and constitutional engineering. The finding that military trust collapsed precisely in this period — and that the collapse was steepest among younger and more educated respondents — corroborates a mechanism in which political mobilization catalyzed a fundamental reassessment of the military's institutional legitimacy.

Multiple convergent patterns corroborate the protest-driven mechanism over alternative accounts: (1) temporal discontinuity, with pre-trend analysis showing military trust rising before reversing sharply; (2) institutional specificity, with military trust declining approximately 1.5 times more than government trust; (3) geographic concentration, with the steepest declines in Bangkok and the Northeast, the protest epicenter and the Thaksin heartland; (4) demographic gradients consistent with protest participation, with youth-led erosion that nonetheless diffused broadly across all subgroups; and (5) attitudinal alignment, with democratic commitment predicting steeper military trust decline over time. While no single pattern is definitive, their conjunction strengthens causal inference considerably beyond timing alone.

This is not to say that performance played no role. The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly contributed to economic hardship and political frustration, and the two mechanisms are

not mutually exclusive. However, the institutional differentiation pattern suggests that pandemic-related grievances were *channeled through* political crisis rather than operating as an independent driver. Respondents who were dissatisfied with pandemic governance appear to have attributed responsibility to the military-backed political system rather than to the civilian administrative apparatus alone. This channeling effect, in which performance failures amplify political grievances rather than generating independent trust dynamics, deserves further investigation in other hybrid regime contexts.

5.2   The Paradox of Military Intervention

Thailand's trajectory illustrates a paradox that has received insufficient attention in the civil-military relations literature: prolonged military involvement in governance can erode the very institutional trust that initially legitimized intervention. Indonesia's post-Suharto military reforms demonstrate that this outcome is not inevitable—where armed forces credibly withdraw from politics, institutional trust can be preserved (Mietzner, 2008)—yet Thailand's failure to achieve such withdrawal makes it a paradigmatic case of the legitimacy trap. In 2001, Thai military trust stood at 3.07 on a four-point scale, the highest among our three comparison countries. This figure should not be read as evidence of deep, considered confidence in the armed forces' governance capacity. Rather, the 2001 baseline captured a moment of diffuse institutional trust inflated by post-crisis optimism: the 1997 reform constitution had generated hope for democratic renewal, Thaksin's government was delivering visible policy benefits, and the military had not yet tested its reservoir of public goodwill through direct intervention. Military prestige rested on its long-cultivated association with

the monarchy and a self-presentation as a stabilizing force above partisan politics (Chambers, 2014; McCargo, 2005), a posture that commanded deference precisely because it had not been subjected to the scrutiny that active governance invites. This reservoir of diffuse trust provided the legitimating basis for the 2006 coup, which enjoyed significant public support, particularly among Bangkok's middle classes.

Yet each subsequent intervention drew down this reservoir without replenishing it. The 2006 coup was followed by political instability rather than the stability it promised. The 2014 coup extended into five years of direct military governance, during which the armed forces became inextricable from routine political administration: managing the economy, drafting a constitution designed to preserve their influence, and suppressing dissent. By the time of the 2019 elections, the military was no longer an institution that occasionally intervened in politics; it was a permanent political actor with identifiable policy preferences, factional alliances, and constitutional privileges.

This transformation from arbiter to actor carries a predictable cost. Institutions that claim legitimacy on the basis of neutrality and competence are vulnerable when they are perceived as partisan and self-interested. Our data suggest that this perception shift occurred gradually through the 2006–2019 period and then crystallized rapidly during the 2020–2021 protests, when the military's political role became the explicit target of mass mobilization. The pre-trend analysis corroborates this account precisely: military trust was still *rising* through Wave 4 (2014–2016), suggesting the 2014 coup was initially received as stabilizing, much as the 2006 coup had been. The subsequent collapse in Waves 5–6 indicates that the accumulated costs of intervention crystallized in a compressed period, rather than eroding gradually across

the full arc of military rule.

Comparative evidence from our other cases reinforces this interpretation. Taiwan's military trust exhibits no significant trend over the period, corroborating the successful depoliticization that followed democratization: the armed forces were removed from partisan politics through institutional reforms in the 1990s and have not intervened since (Croissant et al., 2013). The Philippines presents a more complex case, where military and police trust remained stable or rose slightly during the Duterte period — a pattern that reflects preference alignment under a leader who actively endorsed coercive institutions rather than any structural insulation from political accountability. Thailand's trajectory complicates any sanguine reading of this alignment: trust built on political association can collapse rapidly when the configuration of political power changes.

The broader implication is that military coups may generate short-term trust gains but long-term trust deficits. Each intervention politicizes the military further, making it harder to return to the apolitical posture on which diffuse trust depends. Thailand's two-decade trajectory may represent the natural endpoint of this dynamic: a military that has intervened so often and governed so long that it has exhausted the institutional legitimacy that made intervention viable in the first place.

5.3   The Philippines: Coercive Legitimacy and Preference Alignment

The Philippine findings merit sustained comparative attention. The stability of coercive institutional trust during the Duterte period challenges simplified accounts that equate

authoritarian governance with trust erosion. Rather, the Philippine case demonstrates that the relationship between coercive state action and institutional trust is mediated by preference alignment. That trust rose uniformly across sensitive and non-sensitive institutions suggests that Duterte's legitimacy was not confined to the security apparatus but permeated the broader institutional landscape. The Philippine pattern exemplifies what Levitsky and Loxton (2013) term the electoral foundations of authoritarian populism, in which leaders who deliver visible, if coercive, policy outcomes generate broad-based institutional legitimacy. When Duterte launched the drug war in 2016, he did so with broad popular mandate and sustained majority approval ratings (Curato, 2016; Teehankee, 2016). The police, despite being implicated in thousands of extrajudicial killings, were perceived as acting on behalf of citizen preferences rather than against them.

This contrast with Thailand is instructive for comparative theory. In Thailand, the military's political interventions increasingly contradicted growing democratic expectations; in the Philippines, the police's coercive action aligned with popular demands for order. The trust consequences diverged accordingly. This finding suggests that the critical variable is not the severity of coercive action per se, but the degree to which such action is perceived as responsive to citizen preferences, a formulation that bridges the institutional trust literature with research on populist authoritarian legitimacy (Pernia, 2023).

Two caveats temper this interpretation. First, the ABS data cannot distinguish between genuine popular endorsement of the drug war and preference falsification under conditions of intimidation. If Filipinos who opposed the drug war were reluctant to express distrust in the police during face-to-face interviews, the apparent stability of police trust may overstate

actual support. Second, the Duterte period represents a relatively short window (Waves 4–5); whether coercive legitimacy alignment can sustain trust over longer periods remains an open question that subsequent ABS waves may help resolve.

5.4 Generational Dynamics and the Future of Thai Institutional Trust

The subgroup analyses reveal an important generational dimension that merits separate discussion. Younger respondents, those most likely to have participated in or sympathized with the 2020–2021 protests, show the steepest military trust declines, but the erosion is present across all age cohorts. This suggests a combination of cohort and period effects: the protests were led by younger Thais, but the underlying disillusionment with military governance was broadly shared (Sinpeng, 2021).

This pattern has implications for the durability of the trust collapse. If the decline were confined to a single generational cohort, one might expect recovery as that cohort ages and new cohorts with different formative experiences enter the electorate. However, the cross-cohort character of the decline suggests a more fundamental shift in how Thai citizens evaluate the military's institutional role. The 2023 general election, in which the progressive Move Forward Party won the most seats on a platform of military reform and structural change, provides suggestive out-of-sample evidence that the attitudinal shifts documented here have behavioral consequences, though confirming this link requires individual-level data that the ABS cannot provide.

5.5 Democratic Expectation Updating and Political Learning

The attitudinal mechanism findings are where the theoretical argument is most forcefully substantiated. The concurrent rise in rejection of authoritarian rule and decline in institutional trust in Thailand corroborates the democratic expectation updating account over its rivals. If trust decline reflected mere political cynicism or democratic fatigue, rejection of authoritarian alternatives should decline in parallel, with citizens losing faith in institutions and governance models simultaneously. The opposite obtains: Thais increasingly rejected authoritarian governance in principle while withdrawing trust from specific institutions they perceived as practicing it — a dissociation that distinguishes democratic maturation from generalized disillusionment.

The political interest findings add a micro-level mechanism to this macro-level pattern. Politically engaged citizens, those most exposed to information about the military's political role and most likely to apply democratic evaluative standards, drove the trust decline disproportionately. This finding connects to (**Shin2005-wd?**)'s research on democratic learning in Asia, which argues that democratic experience fundamentally reshapes citizens' cognitive frameworks for evaluating governance. The present analysis demonstrates that this learning process generates institutionally differentiated trust outcomes: democratic learning does not erode trust uniformly but targets the specific institutions perceived as violating democratic norms.

5.6 Implications for the Comparative Study of Trust

Thailand's case interrogates a foundational assumption in the comparative trust literature: that institutional confidence in Asian societies is primarily performance-driven. The influential "Asian values" framework and its successors have emphasized economic delivery as the dominant legitimating currency across diverse institutional forms (Shin, 2007; Shin & Park, 2008). Yet political legitimacy concerns — perceptions of institutional neutrality and democratic accountability — demonstrably override performance evaluations as drivers of trust, even in a middle-income context where material stakes are high. Performance matters, but its effects are mediated by the political conditions through which performance is evaluated and attributed.

A secondary but vital concern is methodological. The comparative literature too often treats institutional trust as a composite index or focuses on a single institution, typically the national government or parliament. The government-military differential carries substantial theoretical information that disappears in aggregation: had this study examined only government trust, Thailand's decline would have appeared significant but not exceptional. The military-specific collapse is what marks Thailand as an outlier, identifies the political crisis mechanism, and discriminates between competing explanations with a precision that any single-institution analysis would forfeit.

The deepest implication, however, concerns interpretation rather than method. Declining trust is conventionally read as evidence of democratic malaise. Thailand's trajectory complicates this reading substantially. If military trust erodes because citizens increasingly insist on civilian supremacy and democratic accountability, the decline registers *democratic deepening*

rather than institutional decay — a distinction that matters profoundly for how scholars and policymakers interpret survey data. Not all trust declines are symptoms of democratic erosion, and not all institutional trust is democratically desirable.

5.7 Limitations

Several limitations qualify our findings and point toward productive extensions. First, the repeated cross-sectional design prevents us from tracking individual-level trust dynamics. We observe that aggregate military trust collapsed in Waves 5–6, but we cannot determine whether this reflects widespread individual-level updating, compositional change in survey participation, or some combination. Panel data, or at minimum repeated surveys of the same sampling units, would strengthen causal inference considerably.

Second, our three-country comparison, while analytically powerful for the specific contrasts we draw, limits the generalizability of our findings. Thailand, the Philippines, and Taiwan were selected because they are the only countries with complete ABS coverage, not because they represent the full range of Asian political systems. Countries with comparable experiences of military governance (Myanmar, Indonesia, Pakistan) might exhibit similar trust dynamics, but confirming this requires data that are not currently available in a consistent cross-national framework.

Third, we rely on ecological inference to link aggregate trust patterns to individual-level mechanisms. We argue that the military-government differential reflects political crisis rather than performance, but we do not directly observe individual attitudes toward the military's political role or the 2020–2021 protests. The subgroup analyses provide some leverage (the

finding that younger, more educated respondents show steeper declines is consistent with the political crisis mechanism), but they do not eliminate the possibility that unmeasured confounders drive the observed patterns.

Fourth, the ABS trust measure is a four-point scale with limited granularity. Floor and ceiling effects may attenuate estimated declines for countries that start near the extremes, and respondents may interpret the scale differently across countries and time periods. The ordered logit robustness check addresses the linearity assumption but cannot resolve cross-cultural measurement equivalence concerns.

Fifth, response bias concerns apply to both countries. In Thailand, government repression of protests may have inhibited critical responses in Wave 6 face-to-face interviews, though this would understate rather than overstate our findings. In the Philippines, intimidation under Duterte may have inflated reported police trust. The institutional differentiation pattern — military-specific decline in Thailand, police stability in the Philippines — argues against generalized interviewer effects, which would affect all trust measures similarly rather than concentrating losses in politically targeted institutions.

Finally, our analysis ends in 2022, and subsequent political developments provide natural extensions of the theoretical framework developed here. The 2023 general election, in which the progressive Move Forward Party won the most seats on a platform of military reform before being judicially dissolved, offers suggestive evidence that the trust dynamics traced here have behavioral consequences. More consequentially for the democratic expectation updating framework, the February 2026 general election—held following a brief border conflict with Cambodia that created conditions for nationalist mobilization—provides a

particularly informative out-of-sample test. If democratic expectation updating has durably raised evaluative thresholds, the framework generates three specific predictions: (1) no major constituency should rally to explicitly defend military political prerogatives, even under nationalist mobilization conditions; (2) younger cohorts should remain resistant to authoritarian appeals; and (3) any trust restoration should be conditional on perceived institutional reform rather than performative nationalism.

Preliminary evidence from the 2026 election is broadly consistent with these predictions, though it also reveals important scope conditions.[1] The nationalist-conservative Bhumjaithai Party won a decisive plurality (193 seats), drawing disproportionately from older, rural voters—the demographic profile our framework identifies as most susceptible to rally effects and least exposed to the cognitive mobilization dynamics described above. Critically, however, Bhumjaithai's appeal rested on populist economic promises and cultural conservatism rather than explicit endorsement of military political prerogatives, consistent with prediction (1). The revived Democrat Party (22 seats) attracted a segment of younger, urban voters who had previously supported progressive alternatives, but post-election analysis characterized this constituency as seeking "clean governance" in explicit opposition to the leading conservative coalition rather than endorsing the institutional status quo. The People's Party retained its base among younger voters committed to structural reform. No major electoral constituency mobilized in defense of the military-backed institutional order per se.

This fragmentation pattern is itself theoretically informative. Rather than reversing demo-

---

[1]Seat counts draw on preliminary results from the Election Commission of Thailand (February 2026). Turnout figures and election conduct assessments draw on ANFREL (2026), which reported a provisional turnout of 65–70 percent across the concurrent parliamentary elections and constitutional referendum. Party-level demographic characterizations are drawn from Thai news reporting and should be treated as provisional pending academic analysis of final results.

cratic learning, the 2026 election reveals its differentiation across competing reform pathways: radical constitutional change (People's Party), incremental reform within existing constraints (Democrats), and populist economic redistribution without structural institutional challenge (Bhumjaithai). The democratic expectation updating framework does not predict unanimous opposition to military influence, but rather that the evaluative threshold shift should be durable and that trust restoration should require substantive rather than symbolic institutional change. Future ABS waves will be essential for determining whether these electoral patterns correspond to the institutional trust dynamics traced across the preceding analysis, and whether the shift from diffuse to conditional trust identified here proves as durable as the theory predicts. The National Anti-Corruption Commission's February 9 verdict finding 44 former Move Forward MPs guilty of ethical violations for legislative speech acts—potentially disqualifying 15 People's Party incumbents and banning them from politics—illustrates precisely the institutional resistance that the democratic expectation updating framework predicts: an institutional order under legitimacy pressure deploying formal legal mechanisms to constrain the reform coalitions that trust erosion has empowered (ANFREL, 2026).

6 Conclusion

Thailand underwent the most dramatic institutional trust collapse in the Asian Barometer Survey's two-decade history. Between 2001 and 2022, it went from the most trusting to among the least trusting societies in the survey's coverage, a reversal with no parallel in the ABS data. This paper has documented that collapse, identified its institutional structure, and evaluated competing explanations for its occurrence.

Three findings establish the argument's empirical foundation. The first is that Thailand's trust decline is not an artifact of regional trends, compositional change, or measurement instability. Multilevel models with random slopes confirm that Thailand's trajectory is significantly steeper than those of the Philippines and Taiwan, the two countries with comparable data coverage, and this result holds across a range of model specifications and robustness checks.

The second finding is the more theoretically consequential one: the decline is institutionally differentiated in ways that isolate a political crisis explanation and rule out a performance account. Military trust fell approximately 1.5 times more than government trust, with the sharpest acceleration concentrated in the Wave 5–6 period coinciding with the 2020–2021 pro-democracy protests. This pattern is the inverse of what a COVID-19 performance story would predict — if pandemic mismanagement drove the collapse, government trust should have been the primary casualty. Instead, the institution most directly implicated in Thailand's democratic deficits bore the heaviest losses. Pre-trend analysis deepens this interpretation by revealing that military trust was actually *rising* through Wave 4 before reversing sharply, ruling out a smooth secular decline and pointing unambiguously to a discrete political shock.

Third, Thailand's case exposes a structural paradox in military-politics relations. The institutional trust that legitimized military intervention in the first place was progressively depleted by the intervention itself. Each coup, each year of direct governance, and each constitutional manipulation transformed the military from an institution trusted for its perceived neutrality into one distrusted for its perceived partisanship. This dynamic has implications beyond Thailand. Across Southeast Asia and other regions where militaries claim stabilizing roles (Myanmar, Egypt, Pakistan), the Thai trajectory offers a cautionary

illustration of how the short-term legitimacy gains from intervention can produce long-term institutional damage that is difficult to reverse.

The findings also carry methodological lessons for the comparative study of trust. Disaggregating institutional trust reveals patterns that composite measures conceal: the government-military differential was the key empirical discriminant in our analysis, and it would have been invisible in an aggregate trust index. Similarly, the pre-trend analysis demonstrates the value of long time series for causal inference; without the Wave 1–4 baseline, the Wave 5–6 collapse could not have been distinguished from a long-running secular trend.

A final observation concerns interpretation. Declining institutional trust is often treated as inherently problematic, a sign of democratic erosion or governance failure. Thailand's case suggests a more nuanced reading. If military trust is eroding because citizens increasingly reject military involvement in democratic politics, this may reflect growing democratic expectations rather than institutional decay. The challenge for Thailand, and for scholars studying it, is distinguishing between the erosion of trust that undermines democratic governance and the erosion of trust that accompanies democratic maturation. The twenty-year trajectory documented here is consistent with both readings, and resolving this ambiguity will require attention to how the trust collapse translates—or fails to translate—into institutional reform in the years ahead.

References

ANFREL. (2026, February 12). *ANFREL Interim Statement on the Conduct of the 2026 Thai Parliamentary Elections and Constitutional Referendum*. Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL).

Baekgaard, M., Christensen, J., Madsen, J. K., & Mikkelsen, K. S. (2020). Rallying around the flag in times of COVID-19: Societal lockdown and trust in democratic institutions. *Journal of Behavioral Public Administration*, *3*. https://doi.org/10.30636/jbpa.32.172

Bermeo, N. (2016). On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, *27*, 5–19.

Bol, D., Giani, M., Blais, A., & Loewen, P. J. (2021). The effect of COVID-19 lockdowns on political support: Some good news for democracy? *European Journal of Political Research*, *60*, 497–505. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12401

Bunte, M., & Dressel, B. (Eds.). (2016). *Politics and constitutions in southeast Asia*. Routledge.

Chambers, P. (2014). *Knights of the realm: Thailand's military and police then and now*. White Lotus.

Chambers, P. (2021). Thailand's military in 2021: Mid-year reshuffle, continuing factionalism and rejected reform. *ISEAS Perspective*.

Chambers, P., & Waitoolkiat, N. (2016). The resilience of monarchised military in Thailand. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *46*, 425–444. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2016.1161060

Chang, Y.-T., Zhu, Y., & Pak, C.-M. (2007). Authoritarian Nostalgia in Asia. *Journal of Democracy*, *18*, 66–80. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2007.0043

Chu, Y.-H., Diamond, L., Nathan, A. J., & Shin, D. C. (2008). *How East Asians View Democracy.* Columbia University Press.

Croissant, A., Kuehn, D., Lorenz, P., & Chambers, P. W. (2013). *Democratization and civilian control in Asia* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137319272

Curato, N. (2016). Politics of anxiety, politics of hope: Penal populism and Duterte's rise to power. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, *35*, 91–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341603500305

Dalton, R. J. (2004). *Democratic challenges, democratic choices: The erosion of political support in advanced industrial democracies.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199268436.001.0001

Easton, D. (1979). *A systems analysis of political life.* University of Chicago Press.

Esaiasson, P., Sohlberg, J., Ghersetti, M., & Johansson, B. (2021). How the coronavirus crisis affects citizen trust in institutions and in unknown others: Evidence from "the Swedish experiment". *European Journal of Political Research*, *60*, 748–760. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12419

Ferrara, F. (2015). *The political development of modern Thailand.* Cambridge University Press.

Ganjanakhundee, S. (2022). *A soldier king: Monarchy and military in the Thailand of Rama X.* ISEAS.

Harding, A., & Leyland, P. (2011). *The constitutional system of Thailand: A contextual analysis.* Hart Publishing.

Helmke, G. (2017). *Cambridge studies in comparative politics: Institutions on the edge: The origins and consequences of inter-branch crises in Latin America: The origins*

and consequences of inter-branch crises in Latin America. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139031738

Hetherington, M. J. (1998). The political relevance of political trust. *The American Political Science Review, 92*, 791–808. https://doi.org/10.2307/2586304

Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and postmodernization: Cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies.* Princeton University Press.

Kuran, T. (1995). *Private truths, public lies: The social consequences of preference falsification* (2nd ed.). Harvard University Press.

Levi, M., & Stoker, L. (2000). Political trust and trustworthiness. *Annual Review of Political Science (Palo Alto, Calif.), 3*, 475–507. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.475

Levitsky, S., & Loxton, J. (2013). Populism and competitive authoritarianism in the Andes. *Democratization, 20*, 107–136. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.738864

Marien, S., & Hooghe, M. (2011). Does political trust matter? An empirical investigation into the relation between political trust and support for law compliance: does political trust matter? *European Journal of Political Research, 50*, 267–291. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2010.01930.x

McCargo, D. (2005). Network monarchy and legitimacy crises in Thailand. *The Pacific Review, 18*, 499–519. https://doi.org/10.1080/09512740500338937

McCargo, D. (2009). Thai politics as reality TV. *The Journal of Asian Studies, 68*, 7–19. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021911809000072

McCargo, D. (2021). Disruptors' dilemma? Thailand's 2020 Gen Z protests. *Critical Asian Studies, 53*, 175–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2021.1876522

McCargo, D. (2025). "not the same as before"? Contested discourses of political change

in Thailand's 2023 elections. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, 44,* 183–203. https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034251325272

Meer, T., & Dekker, P. (2010). *Trustworthy states, trusting citizens? A multi-level study into objective and subjective determinants of political trust.* 95–116.

Mietzner, M. (2008). *Military politics, Islam and the state in Indonesia: From turbulent transition to democratic consolidation.* Iseas Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812308450

Montesano, M. J., Chachavalpongpun, P., & Chongvilaivan, A. (Eds.). (2012). *Bangkok, may 2010: Perspectives on a divided Thailand.* Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Mueller, J. E. (1970). Presidential popularity from Truman to Johnson. *The American Political Science Review, 64,* 18–34. https://doi.org/10.2307/1955610

Norris, P. (1999). *Critical citizens: Global support for democratic government.* Cambridge University Press.

Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic deficit: Critical citizens revisited.* Cambridge University Press.

Ockey, J., & Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. (2017). Team work: Shifting patterns and relationships in local and national politics in Thailand. *Sojourn (Singapore), 32,* 562–600. https://doi.org/10.1355/sj32-3b

Pernia, R. A. (2023). Populists in power: trust in public institutions and support for strong leadership in the post-authoritarian democracies of Indonesia and the Philippines. *Asian Journal of Political Science, 31,* 63–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2023.2185789

Phongpaichit, P., & Baker, C. (Eds.). (2008). *Thai capital after the 1997 crisis.* Silkworm Books.

Shin, D. C. (2007). *Democratization: Perspectives from Global Citizenries* (R. J. Dalton & H.-D. Klingemann, Eds.; pp. 259–282). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10. 1093/oxfordhb/9780199270125.003.0014

Shin, D. C., & Park, C.-M. (2008). 2. The mass public and democratic politics in South Korea: Exploring the subjective world of democratization in flux. In Y.-H. Chu, L. Diamond, A. J. Nathan, & D. C. Shin (Eds.), *How East Asians View Democracy* (pp. 39–60). Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/chu-14534-004

Sinpeng, A. (2021). Hashtag activism: social media and the #FreeYouth protests in Thailand. *Critical Asian Studies*, *53*, 192–205. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2021.1882866

Teehankee, J. C. (2016). Duterte's resurgent nationalism in the Philippines: A discursive institutionalist analysis. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, *35*, 69–89. https: //doi.org/10.1177/186810341603500304

Torcal, M. (2014). The decline of political trust in Spain and Portugal: Economic performance or political responsiveness? *The American Behavioral Scientist*, *58*, 1542–1567. https: //doi.org/10.1177/0002764214534662

Unno, A., & Taylor, J. (2021). *"Reform, not abolition": The "Thai youth movement" and its demands for reform of the monarchy. 3.*

Van de Walle, S., Van Roosbroek, S., & Bouckaert, G. (2008). Trust in the public sector: is there any evidence for a long-term decline? *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *74*, 47–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852307085733