

# AIS General Research Fund (GRF) and Early Career Scheme (ECS) Success Round 2021-22

**Project Title:** How does Backsliding affect Pushback? Comparing Opposition to Autocratization in the Philippines and Thailand

**Brief Abstract:**

The autocratization literature has emphasized types and mechanisms of democratic “backsliding,” with some recent research focusing on resistance to this threat. Despite increasing interest in opposition, there has been little analysis of how different kinds of backsliding affect the extent of pushback, a research lacuna this project addresses. Specifically, the project asks why there been more pushback in elections and through protests against Thailand’s military-monarchical regime than by those opposing an aggrandizing president in the Philippines.

An institutional explanation which accounts for pushback based on the degree of residual electoral, state institutional, and civil societal forms of democratic accountability despite autocratization does not explain the variation between these two countries because there has been more opposition in Thailand despite greater generalized repression and institutional manipulation there than in the Philippines. An alternative explanation is thus sought which explores how pushback is shaped by “framing battles” over regimes’ democratic legitimacy claims despite autocratizing. Thailand’s military-monarchical rulers’ have had limited success in portraying recent elections as restoring democracy, with legitimacy linked to the monarchy also eroding. This has catalyzed the formation of a broad civilian alliance which it is hypothesized has bridged a major class/regional cleavage by framing opposition as a struggle to restore democracy. By contrast, oppositionists in the Philippines, confronting an illiberal but popular president claiming democratic legitimacy, have largely been confined to a human rights frame with limited mobilization against the regime.

The project thus aims to make an important contribution to an emergent “pushback” literature by offering the first paired comparison of opposition in these two Southeast Asian backsliding cases - “executive aggrandizement” in the Philippines (since 2016) and a “promissory” military coup in Thailand (in 2014). These country cases are appropriate because, despite important differences, they followed parallel political paths until autocratizing in distinct ways. Paired comparison allows for more detailed and contextualized analysis than large-N quantitative studies can capture while also producing potentially generalizable findings that go beyond what a single country case can yield.

**Investigator:** Professor Mark R THOMPSON

**Biography:**

Mark R. Thompson is Head and Professor of Politics, Department of Asian and International Studies and Director, Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC) at the City University of Hong Kong. He is president of the Hong Kong Political Science Association and past president of the Asian Political and International Studies Association. He previously taught in the UK (Glasgow University) and Germany (University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Dresden University of Technology, the Munich Federal Army University, and the University of Muenster). He has held several visiting positions, including at Keio University, the University for Peace, De la Salle University, and Thammasat University. He was Lee Kong Chian Distinguished Fellow for Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore and Stanford University. He completed his PhD in political science at Yale University where he was a student of Juan Linz and James Scott. He has received several major external grants, most recently one funded by the Hong Kong General Research Fund on illiberal populism in the Philippines. The author or editor of 10 books and over 100 articles and chapters, his research focuses on democratisation, autocratisation, and leadership.