

AN ANALYSIS OF ELECTION TRENDS IN THAILAND 2021

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ABSTRACT

Thailand, located in Southeast Asia, plays a vital role among other ASEAN nations. Its strategic location has helped it become a major hub for tourism, medicine, and manufacturing. Although Thailand has had political instability due to certain factors, it claims to have a democratic government that has recently announced that a general election will be held in 2023. This study examines recent elections in the country and provides a critical analysis of them by reviewing relevant documents that have been published. The research also intends to find out if there are any emerging trends in Thailand related to the elections that were held, especially in Bangkok and other central provinces. The research has found that a single party will not be able to dominate the elections, and there is a growing trend of coalition parties that will dominate the future elections. The study also found that major contributing factors to attracting more voters are new faces in leadership, introducing policies that are attractive to the younger generation, and avoiding populist policies that would tarnish the image of the party in the long run. Moreover, major political parties would have to ally with smaller parties by compromising leadership and policies to entice the younger generation. The study has also drawn conclusions based on the findings and has provided suggestions.

Keywords: Analysis, Election Trends, Thailand

INTRODUCTION

Elections have played a significant role in the political history of Thailand, with the first traditional election tracing back to the late 19th century. Since the 19th century, many elections have been held in Thailand with the best intention of choosing the best candidate to lead the country. Elections and their effects have shaped Thailand in many ways and have always played a major role in the day-to-day lives of Thai people. In 1932, a coup was staged, led by a group of military and civilian officials who overthrew the absolute monarchy and established a constitutional monarchy [18]. Then the new government implemented a democratic system of government and held its first general election in 1933. However, these early elections were not democratic, as the authorization was limited to only a small percentage of the population, with the military playing a significant role in selecting candidates. Therefore, there has always been a demand to change how the elections in Thailand are held and how the Thai people have reacted to different elections and political parties.

As the military plays a major role in Thailand, over the years it has experienced several military coups and periods of military rule, during which elections were suspended or held under

military supervision. In 1973, a military coup overthrew the government. A military dictatorship ruled the country until the late 1980s, when the military government held a constitutional referendum and passed a new constitution that allowed for the restoration of democratic elections. In the early 1990s, the country underwent a process of democratic reforms. It returned to a more democratic system of government, with one of the most significant events being the 1992 "Black May" uprising, which resulted in the arresting of military civilians demonstrating, seizing power, and the suspension of elections for several years [12]. After a period of military rule, elections were held again in 1996, and a new constitution was adopted that established a more democratic system. However, the so-called elected government did not stay in power as stated in the Thai constitution, and the country witnessed yet another coup.

In 2006, another military coup was staged, and the government was overthrown, paving the way for military rule until 2011, when an election was held, bringing back the civilian government again. Since then, Thailand has held its general elections regularly, with the most recent being the 2019 general elections, which have been generally considered free and fair and resulted in the victory of the Pheu Thai party and the appointment of their leader, Prayuth Chan-Ocha, as the Prime Minister [17]. There have been some criticisms of the electoral processes, including allegations of voter bribery and election irregularities, as well as calls for additional democratic reforms.

Generally, throughout its history, Thailand has experienced periods of military rule and democratic elections, with the country's political landscape often marked by periods of instability and conflict. Although Thailand plays an important role among ASEAN countries, political instability has become a major source of concern for investors in the country. Thailand has a leading role in tourism and manufacturing in the ASEAN region, and whenever there is a political problem, these two industries are severely affected, causing business owners to take extra caution when investing in Thailand.

OBJECTIVE

To find out if there are any emerging trends in Thailand related to the elections that were held, especially in Bangkok and other central provinces.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative documentary research involves scrutinizing existing documentary materials such as films, photographs, recordings, and written texts to obtain a deeper understanding of a particular subject or occurrence. To ensure the quality of content obtained from secondary sources like research papers and documents, the four-step approach for documentary qualitative research is followed approach.

The first step is to verify the authenticity of the documents. This involves examining the origin and history of the document to ensure that it is not a forgery or a misrepresentation of the information it contains. By doing this, researchers can have confidence in the reliability of the information obtained from the document. The second step is to verify the credibility of the documents. This involves assessing the accuracy and completeness of the information

contained in the document. Researchers may evaluate the sources of information used in the document, the qualifications of the author, and the presence of bias or conflicts of interest. By ensuring that the documents are credible, researchers can have confidence that the information obtained from them is accurate. The third step is to verify the representativeness of the documents. This involves assessing whether the document accurately reflects the population or phenomenon being studied.

Researchers may evaluate factors such as sample size, sampling method, and the relevance of the document to the research question. By ensuring that the documents are representative, researchers can avoid drawing incorrect conclusions from the data. The final step is to derive the mean from the documents. This involves calculating the average value of a particular variable across the documents. For example, if researchers are studying the prevalence of a particular disease, they may calculate the mean incidence rate across the documents. By deriving the mean, researchers can obtain a general idea of the data contained in the documents and draw conclusions based on this information.

One important step in conducting effective documentary research is to create a list of questions and keywords that capture the general idea of the study. This list can be used to guide the selection of appropriate documents for analysis. Additionally, the list of questions should be based on the research question or topic of interest, and should help to narrow down the scope of the search

RESULTS

2017 Constitutional Election. Advantages use the votes from the constituencies system to calculate the number of MPs in the party-list system. Consequently, people's votes were not wasted. Disadvantages: Use only one ballot. As a result, voters cannot separate the election of members of the House of Representatives in the constituency system from the selection of political parties. It should be an electoral system that had calculating system that was a correlation between the two systems. (Chaowprateep, C., Srisorn, W., & Chayanon, S., 2022)

The general election of 2019 in Thailand was held on March 24, 2019. Many citizens believed that the general election of 2019 would end the rule of a military prime minister and bring a democratic government; however, the result of the election showed otherwise. According to Merieau, E. (2019), this was after the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), a military junta, took power from Yingluck Shinawatra's elected government in the 2014 coup, citing the need to restore the country's democratic face against the populist government that had prompted street protests, lifted a ban on political activities, and called for new elections after five years of military rule. This election marked a watershed moment in Thai politics because it was held nearly 5 years after a heated debate over the current government's ability to lead the country. The government that came into power in 2014 claimed to be a democratic government, as it stated that there was a need to overthrow Yongluck's government due to its rampant corruption.

When the new general election was announced, many political parties expressed interest in running because it was the ideal opportunity for them to demonstrate to ordinary citizens what they are capable of. Nonetheless, following a huge debate and political drama, some electoral parties and activities were cancelled by the Election Commission of Thailand. Several political

parties, including the military-backed Palang Pracharath Party, the pro-democracy Pheu Thai Party, and the Democratic Party, highly contested the 2019 general election. However, the Court disqualified the rising opposition figure Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit [16], the leader of the Future Forward Party, from parliament, leading to thousands of protesters in Bangkok. Thanathorn, who was a rising figure in Thai politics, represented the younger generation in Thailand, and he is a strong critic of the Palang Pracharath party; nonetheless, due to his electoral activities, which some saw as not capable of leading the country, he was removed by the election commission. The Palang Pracharath Party, which was supportive of the military government [9] and was led by the incumbent Prime Minister Prayut Chan-Ocha, won the most seats in the election but fell short of a majority in parliament.

This election was marked by many controversies and allegations of electoral malpractices [14], with the opposition parties alleging that the military government had used its power to influence the election outcomes by rigging them in favor of the Palang Pracharath Party. Several opposition parties boycotted the election with these claims, citing that the election wasn't free and fair. Despite all these controversies, international observers deemed the election legitimate, and the country's election commission accepted the results. The Palang Pracharath Party formed a government with the support of other smaller parties, and Prayut Chan-Ocha was appointed the country's prime minister. His leadership role for the Palang Pracharath Party has given the party a new light among the great supporters of Prayuth, but mostly the younger generation did not accept him as a great leader due to his connection with the Thai military. The 2019 general election was seen as a significant event in Thailand's political history, and its aftermath has continued to shape the country's political landscape. The Thai general election of 2019 has made a huge impact on other political parties and their electoral activities as the controversy due to the vote counting left people confused; therefore, it is evident that for the upcoming election, political parties would carefully analyze the situation and the vote counting system so as to avoid any losses.

The emergence of new political parties during electoral activities has been a norm in many countries. Several new political parties emerged in the lead-up to the 2019 general election in Thailand [10]. Some of these parties were established by former members of other parties, while new political actors formed others. One of the most notable new parties was the Future Forward Party [8]. It was founded by businessman Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit and a group of young activists in 2018. The party ran on a platform of progressive policies, including reform of the military and monarchy, universal healthcare, and education, and gained a significant number of seats in the election and was seen as a potential challenger to the established parties [6].

The other new parties that participated in the election included the Thai Liberal Party, which was founded by former Pheu Thai Party member Chatchai Supachayanont, and the Action Coalition for Thailand Party (ACT), which former Interior Minister Anupong Paochinda founded, ran on a platform of national reconciliation and political reform. Former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva also formed the Thai Civilized Party to champion good governance and a strong economy. The Prachachat Party of former Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-Archa sought to address rural development and support for small businesses.

These parties, along with several others, were able to win seats in the election, contributing to the diverse range of viewpoints represented in the Thai parliament [10]. However, the Palang

Pracharath Party, which incumbent Prime Minister Prayut Chan-Ocha formed with the support of the military, ran on a platform focusing on economic development and national security and won the election of 2019, while the Future Forward Party came in third place, winning the largest share of the vote among the new parties. The emergence of these new diverse parties was seen as a sign of a more open and democratic political environment in Thailand, as it allowed for a greater range of voices and viewpoints to be represented in the political process.

There have been many major political parties in Thailand, and they are usually separated by a color code. The two major parties would be one backed by the military and one backed by the non-military; the yellow color belongs to the former and the red color belongs to the latter. In the general election of 2019, the Palang Pracharath Party emerged as the largest party, winning 116 seats out of the 500 members of the House of Representatives [6]. However, the party did not win a simple majority and was therefore forced to form a coalition government with the support of other smaller parties that were emerging and willing [3]. The parties that joined the coalition government included the Bhumjaithai Party (BJT), which had won 51 seats in the election led by Anutin Charnvirakul, the Liberal Democrat Party, which is the oldest party and had won 50 seats led by Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Action Coalition for Thailand Party (ACT), with seven seats led by Suthep Thaugsuban; and the Charthai Pattana Party, which won six seats under the leadership of Suchart Tancharoen. The coalition also included several independent MPs who supported the government.

After forming the Palang Pracharath Party-led coalition, they were able to win a narrow simple majority in parliament, with a total of 250 seats. This enabled the Palang Pracharath Party (PPP) and its allied parties in the coalition to form a government, resulting in the appointment of Prayut Chan-Ocha, the leader of the Palang Pracharath Party, as the new Prime Minister of Thailand.

However, it is worth noting that the formation of this coalition government was controversial, as it has been. The political landscape in Thailand has remained complex and fluid (Hirsch, P. 2010). Some of the parties in the coalition had previously been opposed to the military government and had supported the opposition in the election. This formation led to accusations that the coalition was not representative of the people's will and that the election had been rigged in favor of the military-backed parties [15]. This coalition government later faced a lot of challenges and internal divisions that broke the coalition. It seemed rather difficult for the government to keep the small parties together, and it often led to many debates with one side stating that the government favored a party with the potential to win the next election.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

Thailand, with its past political turmoil, aims to have political stability to uplift its economy. As the current government steers its wheels toward a post-pandemic time with General Prayut Chan-Ocha as the captain, it has a lot of hurdles to overcome as the global economy has slowed down. Thailand has also felt the pressure of slow economic growth from the effects of the pandemic, but can the current government revive the economy with its policies? With its controversies, the 2019 general election shaped the political landscape in the country and introduced some major trends.

During the 2019 general election, many trends in elections were identified, and with a political lens, ordinary citizens could easily understand the reasons for these emerging trends. Among the younger generation, the emergence of new small but popular political parties was one of the major trends during the general election. These small parties wanted to bring changes to the current political system in order to make a positive change, including policies that would be introduced; however, parties that could make a real change lost the election race, and some other small parties won the race with the help of a coalition. The election also showed the rise and fall of many political parties and leaders, and one of the prominent figures among them was Thanathorn of the Future Forward party. He was seen as a promising candidate for the election but was removed from the race due to his business interests. The general election also introduced new faces to the country's political scene. Many popular business figures and influential figures were brought in by different political parties, as it was believed that candidates with business backgrounds would be able to uplift the economy in the country. Despite their credentials and qualifications, many candidates lost in the general election. Another major trend was the coalition government and how

the current government successfully remained in power with the help of small parties. The government had successfully negotiated with the small parties that would help the government fill in the required quota for the candidacy, and General Prayuth was nominated to continue to be the prime minister without much difficulty and with the support of the other political parties. In addition to the coalition government, the government successfully introduced economic populist policies that favored the tourism and manufacturing industries. The government also implemented tax cuts, allocated funds for infrastructure development, and increased its emphasis on tourism and agriculture. These populist policies helped the current government remain in power; however, it is also important to note that most of the policies introduced by the government were not much favored by the younger generation. In sum, the general election of 2019 in Thailand was a political turning point for the major political parties, the government, and the whole political landscape within the country. The general election also brought some changes and trends that would bring some political stability to the country.

Populist policies are very popular in many countries during an election, and during electoral activities, many leaders introduce populist policies to attract people to vote for them. Populist policies have been a major attraction for many candidates. Populist policies are initiatives designed to address the needs and concerns of ordinary people [1], often through measures intended to appeal to and broaden the political support base. These policies can take many forms and can be implemented by political parties or individual politicians who seek to gain support by appealing to the public's emotions and prejudices instead of relying on logical ideologies or evidence-based policies [13]. In most cases, it involves using government resources to provide direct benefits to the general population, such as through social welfare programs, infrastructure projects, and subsidies for certain goods and services.

Common populist policies are in the form of economic policies seeking to redistribute wealth, policies to protect and promote the interests of particular groups, and policies to reduce the influence of elites [13]. Like in 2019, there were several populist policies implemented in Thailand. An example is the government of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha, who introduced a series of economic measures, the "Thai Niyom Yangyuen" (sustainable Thai-style administration) program, aimed at boosting growth and reducing inequality in certain groups

such as farmers, the elderly, and businessmen. These included tax cuts and credit extensions for small businesses; increased support for farmers and rural communities through agricultural farm input subsidies; increased funds for senior citizens; and tourism promotion efforts [20]. Another populist policy that the government implemented was the "Baandamtii" (village fund) program, which provided funding to village-level organizations to support a variety of community projects, such as improving local infrastructure and supporting economic development initiatives.

Populist parties and politicians often rely on populist policies to gain support and can be found across the political spectrum [2], from left to right. These populist parties and movements have gained significant support in many countries in recent years and have often been associated with the rise of nationalism, protectionism, and anti-establishment sentiment.

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