



THAI POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE AGE OF REFORM

Siripan Nogsuan Sawasdee

Thai Political Parties in the Age of Reform

Siripan Nogsuan Sawasdee

**Institute of Public Policy Studies
Bangkok, Thailand
2006**

Nation Library of Thailand Cataloging In Publication Data

Siripan Nogsuan Sawasdee

Thai Political Parties in the Age of Reform. -- Bangkok:
Institute of Public Policy Studies, 2006

228 p.

1. Political Parties. I. Title.

324

ISBN: 978-974-9744-04-8

Title	Thai Political Parties in the Age of Reform
Authors	Siripan Nogsuan Sawasdee
First Printing	December 2006
Published	Institute of Public Policy Studies 99/146 Ngamwongwan Road, Ladyao, Chatuchak, Bangkok 10900 Tel. (662) 941-1832-3 Fax. (662) 941-1834
With support from	Konrad Adenauer Foundation
Cover designed by	Sittichai Sawasdee and Chaiwut Kaewruen
Printed by	P. Press Co., Ltd. Tel. (662) 742-4754-5
Distributed by	Chulalongkorn University Book Center Sala Prakewo Building Chulalongkorn University, Phaya Thai Road Bangkok 10330 Tel.: (662) 218 7000, 218 3980-2, 255 4433 Fax : (662) 255 4441 www.chula.cdu/cubook/index.htm
Price	350.- Baht

Copyright © 1998 Institute of Public Policy Studies

List of Acronyms

AMLO	Anti-Money Laundering Office
BAAC	Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives
CDA	Constitutional Drafting Assembly
CDD	Committee for Developing Democracy
DP	Democrat Party
ECT	Election Commission of Thailand
MPs	Members of Parliament
NAP	New Aspiration Party
NPLs	Non-performing Loans
OTOP	One Tambon One Product
PR	Proportional Representation Electoral System
SAP	Social Action Party
SME	Small and Medium sized business
SML	Small, Medium, Large Policy
TNP	Thai Nation Party (Chart Thai)
TRT	Thai Rak Thai

Forward

Political parties in Thailand have not a long and easy path. Since their emergence in the early 1950's only one party has survived and established itself as a strong political force. Because of their discontinuity, there has been no major research or study on this subject. Siripan's research is the first systematic effort to analyze Thai political parties of their developments and challengers, especially under the 1997 Constitution. The study is timely because of the recent coup (September 19, 2006) after which all parties were banned, and two major parties are under investigation by the constitutional court. Siripan raises a very important issue concerning the relationship between political parties and business conglomerates. In this third stage of development, Thai politics has brought in a new factor which makes the state and society relations more complicated, and may lead to a highly unstable situations.

Chai-Anan Samudavanija

President of the Institute
of Public Policy Studies
December 2006

Forward

Thai Political Parties in the Age of Reform provides a comprehensive evolution of Thai political parties in the contemporary time. Siripan Nogsuan Sawasdee convincingly argues that the 1997 constitution, party elites, election campaign, and dictatorial power of the single-party government had shaped the development of Thai political parties into a business conglomerate control.

The unexpected military coup on September 19, 2006 may seem to contradict Siripan's hypothesis that political parties are now insulated from the military power. However, when we dwell upon her explanation of the political party development process, she implicitly describes a sharp cleavage between the supremacy of the Thaksin government and the Thai military establishment. The widespread corruption of his majority government, the failure of the parliamentary check and balance system, the tight control of mass media, and the outcry discontent demonstration gave a solid legitimacy for many Thais to support the military coup. Therefore, Siripan's hypothesis implies that a military coup could potentially result from the collision between the Thaksin government and the longstanding bureaucratic system.

Siripan classifies the development of Thai political parties into three stages. She carefully links those stages of political parties into a perspective of the contemporary political party history. This perspective reflects an imbalance of the development, with a sophisticated management of political parties and election campaign on one hand and a poor mass of peasants and rural unemployed on the other. The massive victory of the 2005 election leading to a single-party government of Thai Rak Thai could not secure the Thaksin government from the military coup. The defeat of

the Thaksin government evidently indicates that the 2005 election victory was not an electoral representation of the Thai people as claimed, particularly in the upcountry areas. As Siripan confirms, Thai political parties do not truly represent the interest of Thai people; the parties have not built a representative foundation to support their development. Therefore, they now have to find their balance of development that could sustain growth.

Thai Political Party in the Age of Reform is a book that students and political actors of Thai contemporary politics must read.

Kanok Wongtrangan
2006

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has grown out of a research project of the same title, "Thai Political Parties in the Age of Reform," completed in December 2004. Since that time, I have conducted additional research in order to ensure the study's relevance to the current political situation in Thailand. My interest in the subject of political parties stems from the fact that although political parties have evolved enormously for the past three decades and have been significant players in Thai politics, we in Thai society hardly understand them. More importantly, the standard texts, both in Thai and English, on Thai political parties and the party system do not offer empirical and convincing explanations of what is happening and why. I am concerned to explain clearly what factors have contributed and continue to contribute to the changing elements of Thai political parties.

The 1997 Constitution has persisted as the focal unit of many debates even after it was abolished. Its fundamental impacts on change and adaptation of Thai political parties and the party system can be seen in the results of the 2001 and 2005 general elections. For six years, the threats raised by the domination of big business in the political sphere have occupied what political debate there has been in Thai society. There were outcries from intellectuals fearing parliamentary dictatorship, along with protests from NGOs against the misuse of natural resources and the monopoly by business tycoons-cum-leaders.

Three months before the publications of this book, the Royal Thai Army staged a bloodless coup against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's government on the evening of September 19, 2006. This was the first successful coup in fifteen years. The coup group, later calling themselves "the

Council for Democratic Reform under Constitutional Monarchy" (CDRM), canceled the upcoming elections, suspended the Constitution and dissolved Parliament. The coup occurred after a nearly year-long political predicament involving Prime Minister Thaksin and the anti-government protest group, called the People's Alliance for Democracy, led by Sondhi Limthongkul, an outspoken journalist.

The 2006 coup d'etat has resulted in another significant incarnation of political parties as players in the Thai political arena. Although political parties were not abolished, their political activities have been strictly prohibited. This sadly shatters the hopes of many who want to uphold the spirit of Thai democracy. The 2006 coup conveys a message that in Thailand there will always be the threat of a military coup. Notwithstanding, this does not erase the general perception that competitive political parties are indispensable to the consolidation and growth of the democratic system in Thailand. Therefore, we cannot cease to examine and understand the roles of political parties even during the time of non-elected government.

I would like to thank the organizers and participants at the Asian Conference on Democracy and Electoral Reforms in the Philippines, who offered suggestions and criticisms of Chapter 3. Chapter 4 was published in KPI Yearbook No.3 (2004/5), and sections of Chapter 5 and 6 appeared in the Philippine Journal of Third World Studies as "The 2005 General Elections in Thailand: Toward a One Party Government," published in 2005. I am thankful to anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments for all these publications.

My deep appreciations are due to a number of people. Don Linder not only edited the book, but also gave me his valuable comments and suggestions, for which I am grateful. Siriya Rattanachuay and Yared Akarapattananukul helped check the text and arrange it into final form. I acknowledge this assistance with considerable gratitude. Kittipong

Vejmaleenon provided me with invaluable data and material for the writing of this book.

My family and their unconditional love has made me a person I am today. Sith, my husband who designed the book's cover, has endured the frustrations and demands. I adore his understanding and genuinely support.

Finally, I thank the Institute of Public Policy Studies and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for funding the research project and publishing this book.

Siripan Nogsuan Sawasdee

Chulalongkorn University

Bangkok, Thailand

December 2006

Contents

List of Tables Chart and Figures	vi
List of Acronyms	viii
Forward	ix
Forward	x
Preface and Acknowledgements	xii

Introduction:

Thai Political Parties in the Age of Reform	1
--	----------

Chapter I:

The Changing Model of Thai Political Parties	7
Literature Review: Thai Political Parties	7
Critique of Studies on Thai Political Parties	14
Models of Political Parties in Western Democracies	18
The Three Stages of Thai Political Party Development ...	20
Stage I: Military and Bureaucratic Control over Political Parties	24
Stage II: The Era of Rural Capitalists and Network Politicians	29
Stage III: Business Conglomerate Control over Political Parties	33

Chapter II:

Thai Political Parties in the Wake of

Electoral Reforms	45
Constitutional Engineering	46
Electoral Engineering	48
The Electoral System under the 1997 Constitution and Its Consequences	51
The Proportional Representation (PR) System	51

The Single-Member Constituencies, Plurality System	60
The Electoral Systems and Their Consequence	64
Candidates' Qualification Requirements	66
Barrier to Entry	69
Inventing Incentives for Party Building	70
Strengthening the Prime Minister's Power	74
in the Parliamentary System	
Anti-Vote Buying Provisions and	77
the Roles of Election Commission	
Conclusion: Party Adjustment in the Wake of Electoral Reforms	78

Chapter III:

Party Elites	82
Explaining the Rise of Rural Network Politicians	82
Explaining the Rise of National Capitalist and Business Conglomerate Control over Political Parties	89
The Overlapping of Politics and Business: Party Capital Mobilization	91
Where does the Money for Political Party Come From?	94
Party Elites Interplay	98
Party Switching in the Thai House of Representatives	99
Reasons to Party Switching	107
Faction Politics and Party Switching	108
Party Merger and Acquisition	112
Conclusion	118

Chapter IV:

Vote Structuring and Electoral Campaign	121
Political Parties and Campaign Strategies	122
Candidate-Centered Campaigns, Constituency Services and Political Patronage	124
New Contexts and Contents of Electoral Competition and Vote Structuring	129
1) Candidate Selection	130
2) Mass Media Communication and Professionalization	131
3) Setting of Strategies	136
4) Allocation of Campaign Resources	139
5) Policy Platform	143
Conclusion	145

Chapter V:

Coalition Formation and Parties in Government	149
The Thai Coalition Governments	149
Reward Allocations	155
Factions and Payoffs	158
Cohesion and Changes in Coalition Partners	159
The First Thaksin Government: A Coalition with "Dictatorial Powers"	160
Towards A Single-Party Government and a Business Conglomerate Model of Political Parties	166

Conclusion:

Thai Political Parties and Civil Society	174
Bibliography	180
Index	203

Tables

1.1 List of Thailand's Prime Ministers in Each Stage of Party Development	26
1.2 System, Leadership and Policy Factors in the Big Business Model of Party Development	37
1.3 Characteristics of Thai Political Parties in Each Stage of Transformation	39
2.1 Number of Seats and Percentage of Votes, 2001 Election	54
2.2 Party List Votes and Percentage of Votes, 2001 Election	55
2.3 Percentage of Votes as Compared to Percentage of Seats in the PR System, 2001 Election	56
2.4 Party Memberships, Number of Candidates Competing in Single-Member Constituencies and Party Lists, Number of Elected MPs, Party List Votes: 2001 Election	57
2.5 Number of Seats and Percentage of Votes, 2005 Election	59
2.6 Three Political Parties that Won the Most Seats in Each General Election from 1975-2005	63
2.7 Changing Party Affiliations, Before 2001 General Election	69
2.8 Percentage of Non-Bachelor Degree Elected MPs from Previous Elections	70
2.9 Public Subsidies for Party Institution Building, 2001	73
3.1 Percentage of Major Political Party Executive Board Committee Members with Business Backgrounds (2001)	91
3.2 Donation to Political Parties, 1998-December 2001	96

3.3 Number of MPs Switching Major Political Parties in Three Consecutive General Elections, 1995-2001	100
3.4 Political Parties in Coalition Governments During 1992-2001	101
3.5 Number of 1996 MPs Swapping Party Affiliation in the General Election 2001	103
3.6 Number of Switching MPs and Their Success in Seeking Office	105
3.7 Number and Percentage of Former MPs Failing to be Re-Elected	106
3.8 Major Composition of Thai Rak Thai Party	111
3.9 Characteristics and Viability of Major Political Parties in Operation During 1988-2004	117
4.1 Numbers of Membership and Branches by Political Party, 2001 and 2004	139
5.1 Percentage (%) of MPs in Major Political Parties from 1986-2005 General Elections	152
5.2 Political Parties in Coalition Governments, 1988-2005	153

Chart

4.1 Numbers of Listed Political Parties' Membership Between 2000-2004	138
---	-----

Figures

Figure 1: Mass Parties Linking State and Civil Society	177
Figure 2: The Relationships between Thai Political Parties, State and Civil Society	177

INTRODUCTION

THAI POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE AGE OF REFORM

It is very difficult to conceive of democracy without political parties, although it is not very difficult, however, to conceive of it without interest associations or social movements. However fragmented, weak, or undisciplined, however poorly rooted in society, however unstable and vociferous, parties are a very real and necessary part of the politics of new democracies. Democracy cannot be sustained without competing political parties.

(Peter Mair, A Conference on Political Parties and Democracy, The International Forum for Democratic Studies, November 1996, Washington D.C.)

The struggle for power within the Thai political domain has nearly always been settled by coups¹. As a result, political parties have had an uncertain status. At times their existence depended on the whims of military generals, who could abolish or revive them at will. The political parties also contributed to their problems and poor image, partly a result of the cliental and factional politics brought on by the politicians themselves through their unethical pursuit of self-interest.

Despite the above mentioned hindrances the Thai political party system has continued to evolve, albeit intermittently. It is presently at a delicate stage of transition from its past status as an adjunct to the bureaucratic establishment to more substantial roles as a channel for popular representation and as a provider of top political executives². A notable and significant change from the past status is the

entry of business people into electoral politics. Leaders of central-elitist, business-oriented political parties have begun to replace previous local networks. Additionally, the electoral process, especially the proportional representation system (PR or Party List system), with a 5% threshold, tends to favor big and well-funded parties. Therefore, even though since the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution we have witnessed a wave of party proliferation (as many as 60 of them registering and competing in the general election in 2001), only the most wealthy ones could manage to get their candidates on board. In addition, the hitherto unimaginable circumstance of one party receiving the majority of seats in parliament and setting up a one-party government has proven to be possible.

In Thai politics, party leaders and Members of Parliament alike are motivated not only by the desire to be re-elected (Downs 1957³; Katz 1980), but above all to join the majority government. And it is apparent that electoral viability is becoming even more dependent on the skills and resources possessed mostly by certain social groups and political parties. Therefore, many members of parliament have been willing to shift their political affiliations to join the healthier and wealthier parties if doing so will secure them seats. Evidence shows that even the leaders of a long-established party like Chart Pattana were willing to resign from a party that they once helped to establish and join a more viable party (Thai Rak Thai) to secure their chances of winning and getting cabinet posts. In other words, contrary to past circumstances, candidates are now in need of a party banner more than the parties need them. This condition poses a serious threat to the survival of small- and medium-sized parties (SMPs) which used to pride themselves on being crucial elements in the formation of coalition governments.

Two other critical changes in the Thai political environment are noteworthy. First is the institutional arrangement. The promulgation of the 1997 Constitution introduced new