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Duncan McCargo

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# THAILAND

## State of Anxiety

Duncan McCargo

“Today, Thai people are without hope ... there is no certainty in their lives”.<sup>1</sup>

This statement came not from one of Thailand’s many academics or social critics, but from a popular young entertainer, Patcharasri “Kalamare” Benjamas. She was writing about the national anxiety epitomized by the extraordinary cult of Jatukham Ramathep amulets which seized Thailand in late 2006 and the first half of 2007.<sup>2</sup> Deeply uneasy about the economy, politics, and the royal succession, Thais bought tens of millions of these much-hyped amulets to protect them from adversity. For a variety of reasons, 2007 was a troubled time for Thailand and for Thais.

After a period of exceptional stability following the promulgation of the reformist 1997 Constitution, which gave rise to the dominance of Thaksin Shinawatra, from 2001 to 2006 and culminating in the military coup of September 2006, Thailand was again reverting to messy and fractious multi-party politics.<sup>3</sup> Yet this was not a simple reversion to pre-1997 realities, and the disunity was not now a matter of mere party differences. The messiness of pre-reform politics had been restored, alongside an explicit clash between two distinct yet inter-related power networks which went to the heart of the modern Thai state. As former Thaksin spokesman Jakrapob Penkair put it:

I didn’t see this as a struggle for democracy, I see this as a war against aristocracy. I want to rid aristocrats and dictators who join hands in robbing the liberty and the power of the people through the coup.<sup>4</sup>

The year 2007 saw the contested nature of Thai politics acutely revealed. The nation was bitterly divided between supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin

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DUNCAN MCCARGO is Professor of Southeast Asian Politics at the University of Leeds, U.K.

Shinawatra — who had been ousted in the military coup of 19 September 2006 — and his opponents. Thaksin's supporters came from a range of backgrounds; they included many rural voters in the north and northeast who supported Thai Rak Thai's (TRT) "populist" rhetoric and programmes, as well as elements of the middle classes and business community who applauded his criticisms of the bureaucracy and the country's traditional institutions — including the palace. Simplistic readings of Thailand's politics as "two countries", the city against the rural areas, were not validated by events.<sup>5</sup> Neither did Thaksin's opponents represent a cohesive force, but included supporters of the opposition Democrat Party, those affiliated with or sympathetic to the forces of "network monarchy",<sup>6</sup> and swathes of ordinary voters (including many urban or middle-class voters) who had been alienated by what they saw as Thaksin's arrogance, his authoritarian tendencies, and his questionable actions while in power. Thaksin had divided Thailand as never before; the coup leaders, who were assumed to have the backing of the palace,<sup>7</sup> spent 2007 waging an ultimately futile propaganda war against Thaksin. Even though the former prime minister remained physically absent from Thailand throughout 2007, as a result of a self-imposed exile reflecting concerns for his safety, Thaksin was the most influential, most discussed and most feared figure in the country — the invisible but omnipresent man of the year.

The year 2007 started, literally, with a bang: eight small explosions rocked Bangkok, killing three people. Were the bombs the work of dissidents in the military, Thaksin loyalists, or some other group? Despite claims and counter-claims, no satisfactory answers to these questions emerged. These mysterious and never-solved bombings proved a metaphor for the year's politics: each fresh development, each setback for the military regime fronted by former privy councillor General Surayud Chulanont, raised questions about the degree and nature of Thaksin's involvement, as well as the extent to which anti-Thaksin moves were linked to the palace. When Samak Sundaravej agreed to become leader of the People Power Party (PPP), he claimed he wanted to clear Thaksin's name of the charge of disloyalty to the crown, arguing that "But now when the military powers use the monarch to run a smear campaign against [Thaksin], this is bad enough."<sup>8</sup>

Several landmark political events took place in 2007: the legal decisions leading to the dissolution of TRT and the banning of 111 executive members of the party from holding political office for five years in May; the drafting of the new constitution; the constitutional referendum of 19 August; the emergence of the PPP as a replacement for TRT, along with a range of smaller "alternative" parties; and the general election of 23 December, which saw PPP gain almost half of the seats in Parliament.

## Dissolving Thai Rak Thai

Ousting Thaksin Shinawatra from office by military force by no means removed him from political influence. His TRT Party had won impressive victories in the 2001 and 2005 general elections, and Thaksin and other party members were still entitled to contest the post-coup elections, which the government had promised to hold by the end of 2007. Charges were brought against both TRT and the Democrats for alleged irregularities relating to an abortive general election held in April 2006, which had later been invalidated by the courts. A specially appointed Constitutional Tribunal (not to be confused with the Constitutional Court, which had operated under the 1997 Constitution) eventually decided to dissolve TRT and to ban all 111 members of the party executive from holding political office for the next five years.<sup>9</sup> Not only was Thaksin himself now ineligible to run for election, but so was virtually everyone who had served as a minister in his governments. To the casual observer, TRT had been decapitated. Shortly afterwards, the junta-appointed Assets Examination Committee seized around US\$1.7 billion worth of Thaksin's family wealth — though progress in bringing corruption charges against him was painfully slow.

The Constitutional Tribunal passed judgement a few days after an hour-long speech by the King, who declared that whatever decision the court reached would cause trouble. Concerning the forthcoming verdict, he stated, "I have the answer in my heart, but I have no right to say it." Referring to his 2006 intervention (widely credited with leading to the abrogation of the April 2006 election), he told an audience of judges:

You took responsibility following what I said in Hua Hin over a year ago and consequently many things happened. And those things have their causes. But the things got entangled. And soon they may be more so. You must be well prepared to dispense some criticism — not as judges, but as individuals or specialists — to prevent our country from sinking and people saying we have done nothing or trying to solve the problem ... Please keep on trying to improve our country's situation, which is not good at all this year.<sup>10</sup>

The King's somewhat cryptic speech was widely interpreted as suggesting a "middle path", punishing those directly responsible for wrongdoings rather than advocating the dissolution of any parties. But in the end, the Constitutional Tribunal took decisive action against TRT, letting the Democrats off scot-free.

The episode illustrated a growing trend towards "judicialization", a royally-promoted view that complex political problems could not be solved through electoral

politics or by elected officials, but were best left to knowledgeable and highly moral judges. Such ideas were popularized in a May 2006 paper by Thammasat University academic and polemicist Thirayudh Boonmi, who had suggested that the judiciary could resolve problems relating to political reform.<sup>11</sup> Yet in practice, the substance of the “judiciary” was wide-ranging: it included professional judges, judges appointed by the Senate to bodies such as the Constitutional Court, or judges appointed by the Council for National Security (NS) to the *ad hoc* Constitutional Tribunal.<sup>12</sup> While the CNS and the government had appropriated the discourse of “rule of law”, these improvised judicial interventions had a questionable legal basis. The trend reflected long-standing conservative mistrust of political parties and elections, mistrust that had only been exacerbated by the rise of Thaksin. In its latest incarnation, judicialization was an anti-Thaksin policy. If a military coup was the blunt instrument used to oust Thaksin from office, judicialization could be seen as the means by which the monarchical network sought to manage and reorganize political power in the post-coup period.

Immediately following the dissolution of TRT, CNS leader General Sonthi Boonyaratglin floated the idea of an amnesty for the banned TRT executive members, fuelling speculation that the junta was unhappy with the verdict,<sup>13</sup> and may have been expecting both parties to be banned. Such an outcome would have appeared more “fair”,<sup>14</sup> but more importantly also offered greater scope to reshape Thailand’s political landscape. Sonthi’s comments also provoked speculation that the CNS had already achieved an understanding with Thaksin which could allow him or his allies to return to power. How real was the notional divide between Thaksin and the CNS? Had the tribunal judges really “done the bidding” of the CNS, or the palace? Had they misunderstood what was expected of them by the powers-that-be? Or had they simply made their decisions on the basis of the evidence before them? Like many other issues in recent Thai politics, these must remain for now open questions. Whatever the explanation, the shock of TRT’s dissolution was an important lesson for Thailand’s political class. Clearly, Thaksin could no longer afford to put all his eggs in one basket: he had to go into the next election with a number of political parties under his potential control.

## The 2007 Constitution

Following the dissolution of TRT, two core issues preoccupied the nation politically for several months: the rules of the game for the forthcoming election, and the line-up of parties planning to contest it. The rules of the game were thrashed out in an extended process of constitution-drafting, which culminated in an unprecedented

national referendum on 19 August. In procedural terms, the fact that the 2007 Constitution was validated by a popular referendum gave it an unsurpassed degree of legitimacy. In practice, however, many Thais continued to lament the demise of the 1997 “people’s constitution”, which had been drafted and approved under the auspices of an elected government, and which had involved extensive processes of consultation. The 2007 constitution drafting process mimicked the procedures of 1997 — including provincial consultation meetings — but was widely seen as a far more top-down process. Materials produced to educate people about the new constitution were replete with anti-TRT rhetoric.<sup>15</sup> There was relatively little effective grassroots campaigning around the content of the new constitution, with the exception of an unsuccessful move to enshrine Buddhism as Thailand’s national religion. Buddhist activists staged an extended demonstration outside Parliament in support of their cause, but some leaders of the movement were self-confessed opportunists, apparently seeking to embarrass CNS leader Sonthi Boonyaratglin (himself a Muslim) and build momentum for a no vote.<sup>16</sup>

One key element in the new constitution was a switch back to pre-1997 multi-member parliamentary constituencies, now choosing 400 MPs (Article 93).<sup>17</sup> In the past, multi-member constituencies (usually electing three MPs) had been credited with creating more opportunities for small parties, and so producing unstable coalition governments. Given the anti-Thaksin thrust of the new constitution, weak parties and fractious coalitions were now back in fashion: the 2007 constitution-drafters were clearly reacting against the shortcomings of the system that had brought Thaksin to power. The party list system was retained, but reduced from 100 to 80 MPs; voting was no longer national, but conducted according to ten regional blocs (Articles 95 to 98). These had been carefully crafted to reduce the likelihood of a TRT-style dominant party.

The wholly elected Senate created after 1997 was replaced by a 150-member Senate, comprising one elected Senator per province (currently seventy-six), with the remaining Senators appointed (Articles 111, 112). Appointed Senators were to be selected from a list of nominees, by a high-level committee of judges and heads of independent agencies (Article 113).<sup>18</sup> There was speculation that the CNS planned to use this appointment mechanism to retain control over the Senate, long after an elected government had taken office. In an important change, relatives of MPs or those holding political positions were not eligible to serve as senators (Article 115). While MPs were no longer required to hold at least bachelor’s degrees, Senators and ministers still had to be graduates. The new constitution made it much easier to call for a no-confidence motion: the support of one-sixth of MPs was required to bring such a motion against a minister (Article 159), and

one-fifth of MPs to bring a similar motion against the prime minister (Article 158): again, this was a backlash against earlier provisions that had allowed Thaksin to avoid serious parliamentary scrutiny. The new constitution also limited a prime minister to eight consecutive years in office (Article 171). More detailed rules of the political game were codified in a set of organic laws on matters such as elections and political parties.

## **An Ambiguous Referendum**

The decision of the CNS to hold a referendum on the new draft constitution was announced in the days immediately following the coup, and helped underpin the far-fetched view of the putsch as a “democratic” coup with “Thai-style” characteristics. During the extensive campaigning surrounding the constitutional referendum, the real issue at stake remained in some dispute. Certainly, very few of the 26 million people who cast their votes had read the draft constitution carefully, or could have explained the key differences between the 2007 and 1997 charters. The great majority of those who took part were not really voting for or against the draft document. In an attempt to maximize the “yes” vote, government publicity campaigns stressed that approving the draft constitution was an essential step towards holding an election, so many voters cast “yes” votes simply in order to bring on the restoration of parliamentary rule. This was an adroit move by the CNS-backed government, who were thereby able cunningly to present themselves as “pro-democracy”. Local government officials were exhorted to maximize the “yes” vote by all possible means: the Thai state threw its very considerable resources behind the referendum campaign. Political parties were not permitted to call upon voters to reject the constitution, and the junta used a range of tactics to suppress campaigning for a “no” vote, including invoking royalist sentiments.<sup>19</sup>

In the northeastern province of Buriram, stronghold of leading Thaksin sidekick Newin Chidchob, a campaign of official harassment culminated when soldiers invited village heads and sub-district heads (*kamnan*) to spend the night before the election enjoying military hospitality.<sup>20</sup> In Thailand, this is known as the “night of the howling dogs”, during which vote-buying and other illegal activities reach their peak. In the event, Buriram returned a 55:45 “yes” vote for the constitution, running completely counter to the general trend in the northeast. The “Buriram model” suggested a determination by the CNS to thwart pro-Thaksin activity and so shape electoral outcomes, one which boded ill for the forthcoming general election.<sup>21</sup> Yet in practice the model could not be generalized, since considerable resources were required to put such pressure on local leaders and voters.

By contrast, prominent Thaksin supporters campaigned for a “no” vote as a means of discrediting CNS and the Surayud government,<sup>22</sup> seeing the referendum as an opportunity to demonstrate their own continuing political support. In this sense, the referendum became a referendum on Thaksin. The de facto referendum on the coup itself, which the CNS had confidently expected to win, turned out to be a closer call than the military had anticipated. While the constitution was approved by 57 per cent of voters nationally, it was rejected by 62 per cent of voters in the populous northeast, a Thaksin stronghold, and was not endorsed in a number of northern provinces.<sup>23</sup>

In retrospect, CNS leaders must have rued the day that they ever promised the referendum, which illustrated that determining electoral outcomes remained a complex and messy process in Thailand’s rather fraught political conditions. Almost a year after the coup, CNS and the Surayud government had singularly failed to win over former Thaksin supporters. The constitution vote was a dry run for the real vote held on 23 December, and clearly signalled that forces loyal to Thaksin remained significant players politically. Many voters were unmoved by government pleas to endorse the constitution; turnout for the referendum was below 60 per cent. Those who had failed to turn out for the referendum were perhaps less likely to support anti-Thaksin, pro-coup candidates in the general election.

## Thaksin at Large

Throughout 2007, Thaksin Shinawatra remained a newsmaker and power-broker. Stories and speculation about telephone calls and meetings — some supposedly accidental — between Thaksin and leading Thai figures surfaced regularly, despite the efforts of the junta to keep Thaksin off television screens and out of the press. For a time, Thaksin became a regular customer at London’s Harrod’s coffee shop, holding informal court there.<sup>24</sup> Thaksin’s purchase of a controlling interest in the British premier league football club Manchester City in June was a brilliant public relations exercise, allowing him to remain constantly in the popular eye through Thailand’s relentless television coverage of the English national game — in which he remained sublimely uninterested.<sup>25</sup> English supporters who struggled with Thaksin’s name dubbed him “Sinatra”. As the end of the year approached, however, Thaksin moved his base of operations from London to Hong Kong, where he received a stream of supplicants seeking his backing for ministerial and other positions.

In the months following Thaksin’s departure from Thailand, TRT had begun to fall apart. The party was nominally led by former education minister Chaturon Chaisaeng, but Chaturon was not a Thaksin insider, and lacked the patronage

resources to keep key players on board. Former TRT politicians fell into two categories: the 111 executive members of the party, who were officially banned from political office for five years (many of whom sought to perpetuate their influence through funding political factions or nominees); and non-executive members who were free to run again, sometimes on behalf of their patrons and political mentors. Both banned and non-banned TRT politicians faced the same dilemma: branch out on their own and form new political parties, or wait around for a reformed TRT to take shape? Initially, many leading TRT politicians assumed that Thaksin would not be able to re-establish his party, and might indeed be unable to retain his political influence. Some politicians, mostly those who felt somewhat disillusioned with Thaksin and were relieved to see him out of power, moved relatively quickly to set up their own new parties. Other politicians, confident that Thaksin would be able to stage a comeback, preferred to wait for TRT to re-emerge in a new guise.

In the event, the rebirth of TRT was very swift: within two months of the party's dissolution, a large contingent of TRT politicians regrouped as the People Power Party (Phak Phalang Prachachon; PPP in both Thai and English), which soon appointed former Bangkok governor Samak Sundaravej as leader. The logo of the PPP closely resembled that of TRT, and PPP members were quite open about the continuity between the two parties.<sup>26</sup> Samak even declared that he was simply a “nominee” of Thaksin.<sup>27</sup> It was an open secret that Thaksin controlled the PPP from his base in exile, aided by his wife Pojaman.

Samak was a controversial figure, who had first made his name as an unbeatable champion contestant on the television quiz show *Tick Tack Toe*. Possessing a photographic memory and a turbo-charged tongue, Samak went on to become a prominent rightist and scourge of the student movement in the 1970s. As interior minister following the Thammasat University massacre of 6 October 1976, he notoriously arrested hundreds of supposed leftists and banned numerous Marxist texts. In the years that followed, he announced that he would become prime minister in “three steps”. He took the first step in 1979, when his small Prachakorn Thai Party swept Bangkok in a landslide election victory. But his abrasive personality, “one man show” management style, and above all his narrow political base — he had virtually no electoral appeal outside the capital — barred him from ascending any further. After stints as communications minister and deputy prime minister in the 1980s and early 1990s, he eventually quit national politics, and was elected governor of Bangkok in 2000.

Why did Thaksin anoint Samak to head the PPP? From the outset, the PPP was a pugnacious party facing deep hostility from the military, the palace and the

political establishment. Thaksin judged that a gentlemanly, respectable figure would not fit the bill: he needed a forceful individual who would not be intimidated. The PPP also gave central roles to other figures with somewhat unsavoury images, including Buriram politician Newin Chidchob (who, though banned from holding formal office, was a key Thaksin strategist) and former policeman and Bangkok “godfather” Chalerm Yubamrung, who later became interior minister. The overall calibre of the PPP leadership was far inferior to that of the TRT. Samak claimed he had been appointed because of his reputation for loyalty to the monarchy, in view of the accusations of disloyalty made against Thaksin by the coup leaders. In reality, given Samak’s rocky relationship with privy council president Prem Tinsulanond (Samak had been ousted from presenting a television news programme after allegedly defaming Prem in February 2006), the idea of Samak as pro-monarchy was somewhat strained.<sup>28</sup> Rather, Samak’s appointment was a signal of Thaksin’s uncompromising determination to fight back against the CNS. Samak’s popularity in Bangkok would help make up for Thaksin’s declining support in the capital. By forming an alliance with Thaksin, Samak would finally realize his long-cherished dream of becoming prime minister — but would be obliged to do Thaksin’s bidding. This, at least, was the theory. In practice Samak was unlikely to prove a pliable puppet, and the idea that he would be quite content to step aside after a token stint in Government House was pure wishful thinking. Unfortunately, Samak’s usefulness to Thaksin was largely over once the task of fighting the election and assembling the new government was complete.

### **Alternative Parties**

The new parties contesting the election included: Pracharaj, founded by veteran politician Sanoh Thienthong in January 2006 following his intense personal feud with Thaksin; Matchima Thippathai, which was founded in 2006 by former TRT minister Somsak Thepsuthin, and later led by controversial financier and outspoken Thaksin critic Prachai Liewpairat (who had earlier been with Pracharaj); Ruam Jai Thai Chart Pattana, a hybrid, catch-all party which combined many former prominent TRT figures and other leading lights from the former Chart Pattana Party, along with former Democrat Party stalwart Pradit Phataraprasit as secretary-general; and, most prominently, the Puea Pandin Party. Led by veteran former minister Suwit Khunkitti, Puea Pandin presented itself as a compromise party able to work with either the PPP or the Democrats. Puea Pandin was rumoured to have received funding from the military,<sup>29</sup> who hoped to promote Suwit as an alternative candidate for prime minister. Through their names and political

rhetoric, the alternative parties promoted images of themselves as neutral and moderate.<sup>30</sup>

One Thai academic described these new smaller parties as “fronts for both sides”; the leading figures in all four parties included both former Thaksin opponents and Thaksin allies. All four parties appeared to be well positioned to blow with the political wind, backing either the PPP or the Democrats as the need arose. While many analysts initially saw the small parties primarily as the political vehicles of factions disillusioned with Thaksin, this reading was actually rather simplistic. In the event, any reluctance on the part of the smaller parties to work with PPP was quickly overcome, especially when all four achieved very disappointing results in the 23 December 2007 election, and found themselves with relatively few bargaining chips.

### **The Democrats and Chart Thai**

With so much attention on the PPP and the new parties, what of the long-standing opposition? Under the leadership of Oxford-educated Abhisit Vejjajiva, who was popular with Bangkok voters but viewed with some scepticism in the party's southern heartlands, the Democrat Party had a difficult part to play throughout 2007. Abhisit had an opportunity to project himself as the likely future prime minister after the dissolution of TRT in May 2007, but the Democrats struggled to present a dynamic and positive image of the party that would appeal to voters in the populous northeastern region. The image of the Democrats was as a party of southerners, Bangkokians and the middle class; and some of the party's more electable parliamentary candidates from other regions had long since switched to the Thaksin side.

Even Abhisit's most ardent supporters had to acknowledge his youth and inexperience counted against him: at 43, he would have been Thailand's youngest post-war premier, yet he had never risen above the level of a junior minister. Educated abroad, he lacked natural empathy with the realities of Thai society, especially in the countryside. But Abhisit's most serious problem was his lack of a solid power base in his own party. Just as former Democrat prime minister Chuan Leekpai had been a front man for a group of party barons led by secretary-general Sanan Kachornprasat, so Abhisit was similarly deeply beholden to Suthep Thueksuban, a southern politician mired in controversy for his role in the land distribution scandal that brought down a Democrat government in 1995. Whereas by his second term Chuan had boasted an impressive cabinet line-up of technocrats and American Ph.D. holders — notably Supachai Panitchpakdi, Tarrin

Nimmanahaeminda and Surin Pitsuwan — Abhisit had a much less impressive talent pool at his disposal. In the Thai context, senior figures were reluctant to serve under such a youthful and untested leader. The Democrats sought to emulate the kind of popular policies adopted by TRT and the PPP, also embracing the importance of public relations, political marketing, and the use of catchy slogans.<sup>31</sup>

In theory, the Democrats were in alliance with Chart Thai, whose leader Banharn Silpa-archa nurtured hopes that he might become a compromise prime minister. Yet when the colourful former deputy Chart Thai leader Chuwit Kamolvisit called upon Banharn to pledge that he would not join a PPP-led coalition in November, Banharn declined. Chuwit responded by taking a restaurant table close to where Banharn was eating lunch with Abhisit, and conspicuously ordering a range of eel dishes. Chuwit's characterization of Banharn as a slippery eel proved prophetic when Chart Thai did indeed join the PPP-led coalition, abandoning the Democrats to a lonely opposition role.<sup>32</sup>

## Network Monarchy

For much of 2007, speculation about the election date was rife: given the continuing popularity of Thaksin and his allies, would the CNS delay the election? To his credit, Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont consistently opposed any postponement of the polls into 2008. While it may be tempting to impute Surayud with sound democratic impulses, one core reason he kept this promise was his own palpable lack of appetite for the job of prime minister. After leaving Government House, he admitted that he had been extremely loath to take on the position, that his happiest moments as prime minister were when he went to bed, and that if he could turn back the clock he would never have assumed the post in the first place.<sup>33</sup> General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, the army commander who staged the coup, was equally unequivocal: Surayud had been the wrong choice for the job, and should have refused the premiership from the outset. For Sonthi, Surayud lacked the necessary determination to address Thailand's pressing political problems, and had never worked hard enough to uproot Thaksin's power networks.<sup>34</sup> But Sonthi himself had never been a natural coup-maker, and had consistently sought to maintain good relations with Thaksin.

The 2006 coup turned out to have less in common with the 1991 coup than observers expected. In 1991–92 Suchinda Kraprayoon, for all his many failings, was an enthusiastic coup leader, eager to translate military power into political power for himself; to this end, he enlisted as a front man Anand Panyarachun, a first-rate technocrat ideally suited to the premiership, who used his year in

Government House to pass a range of reformist legislation. By contrast, during 2006–07 Thailand had a reluctant, second-rate coup leader and a hesitant third-rate prime minister, neither of whom had a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve, and who lacked either the capacity and the determination to pursue their limited objectives. Anand ended his term as prime minister with his reputation enhanced; Surayud ended his term with his reputation in tatters. In the event, Sonthi and Surayud were deeply unhappy with the outcome of the 2007 election, but seemed powerless to avert it.

On one level, 2007 was a triumphal year for the monarchy: the accolades of the sixtieth anniversary year in 2006 were crowned by a new wave of royalist sentiment on the occasion of the King's eightieth birthday on 5 December. On 7 November, the monarch emerged from hospital after nearly four weeks of illness, shortly after the millionth Thai had signed books wishing him a speedy recovery. Because the King was wearing a propitious pink shirt and jacket, loyal supporters rushed to exchange the special yellow royal shirts they had been wearing for over a year for pink ones.<sup>35</sup>

The fevered collective enthusiasm for monarchy seen during 2006 and 2007 had a darker downside, testifying to growing national anxiety about the royal succession. Heir apparent Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn remained a controversial figure, and the subject of constant gossip; in July it was widely rumoured that he had died in Sweden of a mystery illness. The inability of the palace to address public anxiety about the succession threatened to undermine the glory of the Ninth Reign. Although the King remained virtually beyond criticism, other members of the network were treated very differently. Privy council president Prem Tinsulanond was regularly villified by Thaksin advocates and on pro-Thaksin websites.<sup>36</sup> Former Thaksin government spokesman Jakrapob Penkair was one outspoken critic of Prem and associates, arguing that Thailand needed to move beyond rule by “aristocrats” who had no place in a modern society. He declared:

aristocrats are enemies to democrats ... people behind the CNS like Khun Prem Tinsulanond should be kicked out, because these are the people who really destroy democracy. These are people that the King should fire, out of his presidency of the Privy Council.<sup>37</sup>

Until recently, public statements of this kind were deeply taboo. However, Jakrapob was later rewarded with a ministerial post in the Samak government, while Noppadon Pattama, Thaksin's outspoken lawyer and constant defender, became foreign minister. The PPP was often accused of an anti-monarchist stance. For instance, leaflets accusing it of wanting to bring down the monarchy were distributed

at election rallies in the northeast.<sup>38</sup> Following the election, Thaksin himself indignantly denied harbouring any anti-monarchist sentiments.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, in the wake of the election Samak accused a “dirty little hand” of trying to meddle in the outcome — widely read as yet another reference to Prem.<sup>40</sup>

While the King was perhaps more popular and respected than ever, network monarchy was now profoundly weak as a political force. The King’s pleas for national unity in his December 2007 birthday speech failed to avert either a deeply divisive election, or the return of pro-Thaksin forces to power. A mass amnesty for 25,000 prisoners to mark the King’s birthday provoked mixed feelings among many observers and criminal justice officials, though no public criticism of this extraordinary royal munificence was possible. The monarchical network retained the capacity to shape military and judicial interventions in the political process, but was evidently powerless to change the course of electoral politics, which were now firmly entrenched as the main locus of power in Thailand.

## The Election

When PPP emerged as the strongest party on the night of 23 December, expectations that the December election would prove a “stealth coup” — in other words, that the military would manipulate or subvert the election results to ensure that the Democrats came out on top — proved unfounded. Such expectations had been fuelled by the publication of a confidential CNS memo, explaining how PPP candidates would be harassed, and state agencies mobilized to undermine and discredit the party’s electoral efforts.<sup>41</sup> Despite the sort of concerns raised by the memo, the Election Commission refused to allow the European Union to send official observers to monitor the election.<sup>42</sup> In the event, each of the major possible forms of electoral subversion either foundered or failed to materialize. The first of these was trying to shape the outcome of the election by curtailing the activities of vote-canvassers, *à la* Buriram: this simply could not be done on a large scale. A second form of subversion was supporting alternative “nominee” parties in order to undermine the PPP vote. This proved largely unsuccessful; indeed, in the case of Puea Pandin, it was a terrible disappointment to the military.

A third form of subversion involved trying to put intense pressure on the minor parties to ally with the Democrats instead of the PPP, so forging a grand coalition of non-PPP parties. Given the strength of the PPP vote, this proved an impossible task; indeed, small parties such as Ruam Jai Thai Chart Pattana indicated their willingness to join PPP immediately after the election, making the creation of a grand anti-PPP coalition doomed from the outset.

The fourth form of potential subversion involved using the Electoral Commission's powers to bar candidates accused of vote-buying and other violations of election rules from running — the so-called “red cards”. The first Election Commission — which had presided over the 2000 Senate and 2001 lower house elections — had issued large numbers of red cards, while the second Commission (arguably captured by TRT) had adopted a much less interventionist approach in 2005. In theory, if sufficient PPP candidates were red-carded, the party would be unable to form a government. In practice, however, this would only work if the Democrats won all of the seats where PPP was red-carded. If smaller parties aligned with the PPP took these seats, a batch of red cards would have no impact on the PPP's ability to form a ruling coalition.

Despite much media discussion on the use of red cards, in the end only seven were issued, including four to PPP candidates.<sup>43</sup> Twenty-two yellow cards were issued (invalidating an election but allowing the same candidates to run again), most of them to PPP candidates.<sup>44</sup> Yet instead of undermining the PPP and its allies, the carding exercise left PPP with exactly the same number of seats: the party managed to gain three seats in yellow card races to offset those it lost to red cards. The seats originally won by the PPP but lost to red cards were all taken by members of the Samak-led coalition, while in Petchabun a yellow-carded Democrat lost to the PPP. Contrary to some expectations that it would engage in tough refereeing, the Election Commission in 2007 proved to be little more interventionist than its rather passive predecessor of 2005. Since vote-buying and other abuses are ubiquitous in most Thai parliamentary elections, a single-minded group of Election Commissioners could in theory order endless re-runs; but the cumulative effect would be to undermine the convenient fictions around which such elections are organized, and so de-legitimate the entire political process.

The fifth form of possible subversion discussed was the use of the courts to dissolve political parties found guilty of electoral violations. At one point a rogue Democrat Party candidate, Chaiwat Sinsuwong, brought legal action against the PPP, arguing that it was a “nominee” of TRT and was essentially the same party as the one banned in May. Chaiwat's lawsuit reflected the judicialization of politics, and challenged the courts to act. His essential charge was really impossible to refute: PPP was a nominee of TRT. But millions of Thai voters had supported it on exactly that basis: did the courts have the right to dissolve a party that had won a general election? And if the courts did dissolve PPP, what would be the political consequences of their actions? Chaiwat's move was opposed by the Democrat Party leadership, and he eventually withdrew the case and quit the party. However, cases against the Chart Thai and Matchima Thippathai parties

remained under consideration by the Constitutional Tribunal. The legitimacy of the Constitutional Tribunal was itself questioned by some lawyers, who argued that the Tribunal was simply a political tool of the CNS, and should be dissolved. Not only were the rules of the game of electoral politics in dispute, but also the standing of the referees appointed to adjudicate over the game. In light of popular sentiment that the election results had to be accepted, the authorities were severely limited in their ability to manage and shape electoral outcomes.

Several features of the election were striking. First, despite the hostility of the military and the government, PPP easily won victory. The number of votes won by the PPP in the party list vote came close to the 15.7 million votes TRT gained in the controversial April 2006 election, which was boycotted by the opposition and later invalidated by the courts. However, the Democrats performed remarkably well in the party list vote, though gaining a much smaller number of constituency seats. In some places, people seem to have voted for PPP candidates, but used their separate party list ballot to pick the Democrats. Such split voting may reflect attempts to introduce an element of balance into the political system.

Vote-buying continued to be widespread in many parts of the country, especially in rural areas such as the northeast. Claims that the PPP were so popular they had no need to buy votes should be treated with scepticism. But given three candidates to choose from, many voters reverted to pre-1997 tactics, “selling” one or more votes, while awarding others to the candidates they personally favoured. James Ockey has suggested more than 60 per cent of ballots were divided between candidates from different parties.<sup>45</sup> This reflected a common practice whereby

**TABLE 1**  
**Election Results, 23 December 2007**  
(As amended following re-runs on 13, 17, 20 and 27 January 2008)

	<i>Constituency Seats</i>	<i>Party List Seats</i>	<i>Total</i>
People Power Party	199	34	233
Democrat Party	131	33	164
Chart Thai	30	4	34
Puea Pandin	17	7	24
Ruam Jai Thai Chart Pattana	8	1	9
Matchima Thippathai	11	0	11
Pracharaj	4	1	5
Total	400	80	480

*Sources: The Nation; Election Commission of Thailand.*

candidates campaigned individually, and not as a team. In some constituencies, the lead candidate for a three-person team campaigned without making any reference at all to the two notional running mates. As in previous elections, the role of vote canvassers (*hua khanaen*) remained the single most important factor in electoral outcomes; winners were normally those who secured the services of the most influential and effective team of local canvassers, who distributed money and incentives, and mobilized voters.<sup>46</sup> Yet the form of elections was also hybridized, combining elements of traditional and modern campaigning.

Across the country, government officials sought to maximize voter turnout by purging voter lists of so-called “ghost” voters, who were not expected to show up at the polls.<sup>47</sup> In some provinces, district officers were offered special budgetary awards for achieving the highest voter turnout.<sup>48</sup> In many areas of the country, some ghost voters turned out to be alive and well and yet were denied the right to vote. The long-standing Thai bureaucratic obsession with increasing voter turnout reached new peaks in this election. While the turnout figures should be treated with considerable scepticism, high turnout had no obvious negative impact on the PPP’s performance — and may indeed have contributed to the party’s strong showing.

## Surayud’s Legacy

On the night of the election, Samak Sundaravej declared, “The coup is dead”.<sup>49</sup> Some observers believed it had already been deceased for some time. Given Surayud Chulanont’s palpable reluctance to act the part of prime minister, and the image of his “old ginger” cabinet as a collection of grey, inactive bureaucrats plucked out of retirement, many commentators suggested that his government lacked focus and failed to accomplish much. Political scientist Thanet Charoenmuang identified Surayud’s disappointing, half-hearted premiership — in sharp contrast with Thaksin’s activist style — as a major reason for the PPP’s election victory.<sup>50</sup> Around a year into the job, Surayud himself seemed on the verge of resignation: he faced sustained criticism from the CNS and the media for his lacklustre performance, and was unable to offer any convincing explanation for his significant personal wealth — especially over a resort property in Khao Yai, built on land to which he seemed to lack proper title deeds. Sonthi was due to retire as Army commander at the end of September, and there were rumours that he might replace Surayud, or that his ambitious deputy Saprang Kalayanamitr might stage a second coup. In the event, Sonthi became a deputy prime minister, Saprang was successfully sidelined, and Surayud lingered on in office for nearly four more months.

Yet this image of Surayud's government as ineffectual was rather misleading: the military-appointed National Legislative Assembly (NLA) passed a mass of new legislation, especially in the final months of 2007, much of it highly conservative and intended to entrench the power of the security forces and the bureaucracy, and tighten control over information. A key Surayud move was the de facto nationalization of the former ITV channel, taking the station into state ownership while misleadingly appropriating the rhetoric of "public broadcasting".<sup>51</sup> New legislation included a draconian Cybercrime Bill, a controversial new Internal Security Act, a law curtailing the ability of the prime minister to intervene in the annual military reshuffle, new copyright laws, legislation to limit alcohol advertising, the Radio and Television Broadcasting Bill (which maintained the military and bureaucracy's anachronistic and extremely lucrative monopoly control over broadcast frequencies), new laws on university autonomy; and a Water Resources Act under which the state took control of all water sources in the country. The Kamnan and Village Heads Act abolished elections for village headman, allowing incumbents to serve until the age of 60 — a major restoration of bureaucratic power which subverted the political reforms of the 1990s.

Prominent Thai lawyer and former Senator Thongpai Thongbao described the NLA in its final weeks as a "law factory": twenty-four bills were passed on Thursday, 13 December, for example, although the fact that the Assembly's meeting did not appear to be quorate.<sup>52</sup> Debate on many of these important bills was minimal, and most were passed in a matter of minutes, with a tiny number of "no" votes or abstentions. Sixty-four bills were passed in the NLA's last three days, including twenty-seven on the final day, 21 December, despite repeated calls from civil society activists to suspend the Assembly until a more legitimate government had been formed. NGO leaders led demonstrations to halt proceedings of the "Shameless Assembly" on 12 December; ten prominent figures led by former Senator Jon Ungpakhorn were arrested. Despite the collapse in popular support for the coup and the plummeting credibility of the regime, the NLA continued to operate as an effective agent of certain conservative, business and regulatory interests who had captured the legislative process.

Notwithstanding its persistence in certain areas, the Surayud government was also guilty of hesitancy in others. The regime failed to grasp a number of legal nettles that a non-elected regime was particularly well placed to uproot. Thailand's *lèse-majesté* laws are antiquated, and were widely abused and politicized during the Thaksin period. Oliver Jufer, a Swiss man who defaced a portrait of the King, was convicted of *lèse-majesté* and given a jail sentence in March 2007, though he received a royal pardon shortly afterwards. Instead of reforming and clearly

delimiting these laws, the NLA actually proposed a greatly expanded *lèse-majesté* law; fortunately, this controversial proposal was later dropped, apparently when the King indicated his disagreement. The new trend was for offences relating to *lèse-majesté* to be dealt with under alternative legislation such as the Cybercrime Bill.<sup>53</sup> In April, when a tawdry 44-second satirical video clip of the King was posted on You Tube, the Surayud government asked for the clip to be removed — so creating global media interest; the unintended consequence of the government's action was that the offending video was seen by millions.<sup>54</sup> The website of the influential current affairs and political analysis journal *Fah Diew Kan* was barred at the beginning of January 2008, because it allegedly hosted comments critical of the monarchy. Meanwhile the CNS regime did nothing to counter the parallel abuse of defamation laws which had characterized the Thaksin period, and had allowed the rich and powerful to intimidate critics with impunity. Nor did the junta's interesting proposals for much-needed reform of the police make any progress; as the regime's legitimacy diminished, so did any initial willingness to tackle troublesome vested interests.

## The Economy

The Surayud government came to office proclaiming its intention to support the principles of “sufficiency economy” promoted by King Bhumibol, and to emphasize “gross national happiness” rather than GDP. While sufficiency economy was even written into the 2007 Constitution (Article 78), in practice the new administration gradually downplayed such rhetoric, which raised concerns for international investors and undermined the government's technocratic credibility. During the year, the Surayud government struggled to promote economic growth, relying mainly on exports for sustenance. In the face of a strong Thai baht — especially compared with the U.S. dollar — and intense competition from China, Vietnam and other rapidly-expanding regional rivals, Thailand struggled to deal effectively with an overall economic slowdown. GDP growth was expected to reach around 4.3 per cent, around 1 per cent down from the average for the Thaksin period; yet fuelled by China's outstanding performance, overall GDP growth in the Asia-Pacific region had reached double digit figures.<sup>55</sup> Among the so-called ASEAN Five (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam), the average was 5.8 per cent: in regional terms, Thailand's performance was distinctly weak.

Poorer people experienced lower wages in real terms, and a slowing of growth in farm incomes. Rising oil prices hit commuters and small businesses hard. While most salaried employees kept up appearances, behind the newish

cars and presentable wardrobes, Thailand was becoming a “Ma Ma” society: the outwardly affluent regularly dined discreetly at home on a popular brand of instant noodles. Farmers, workers, and members of the middle classes had all borrowed freely during the high-octane, high-spending Thaksin period, and were now struggling to service their loans and meet daily expenses. Average household debt reached 132,262 baht in August — or 31.23 per cent of incomes, a historic high.<sup>56</sup> Car sales dropped by 7.6 per cent in the first nine months of the year, a key indicator in this auto-obsessed nation.<sup>57</sup> Thailand’s 2008 budget was in deficit for the first time since 2003, to the tune of 165 billion baht, or 1.8 per cent of GDP.<sup>58</sup> This deficit was largely explained by the huge increases in the military budget — 34 per cent for 2007 and 28 per cent for 2008 — which was projected at 140 billion baht for 2008, up from 81.2 billion baht prior to the 2006 coup.<sup>59</sup> The military planned to buy Swedish fighters, a submarine, and some Ukrainian armoured vehicles. Political uncertainty did nothing to encourage either domestic demand or inward investment, and given continuing anxieties about both the longevity of the Samak government and the vexed question of royal succession, these uncertainties were by no means over as 2007 ended.

## Security Challenges

The 2006 military coup had complicated Thailand’s relations with the rest of the world, and throughout 2007 the country remained on international probation. The United States had been increasingly exasperated with the Thaksin government, and there was considerable quiet American sympathy for the coup. However, Washington was legally obliged to suspend military support programmes to Thailand worth around \$24 million dollars annually.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, counter-terrorism support was not halted, and the annual Cobra Gold joint military exercises were held as normal across Thailand in May 2007. European countries also tended to view Surayud’s Thailand with considerable wariness. By contrast, China was quick to embrace the junta, providing \$40 million of military training and aid.<sup>61</sup> Without an elected government, Thailand had to downplay its regional and international role, and was unable to show any leadership within ASEAN. This failure was especially acute during the Burmese crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in September 2007, when Thailand singularly failed to exercise any positive leverage on the neighbouring junta.<sup>62</sup>

Although the Surayud government invoked the ongoing conflict in Thailand’s southern border provinces as a justification for increased military expenditures, the security forces failed to make substantive headway against the virulent militant

movement in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Shootings continued on an almost daily basis, and civilians now constituted most of the victims of the violence.<sup>63</sup> A new policy of mass arrests helped reduce the number of incidents towards the end of 2007, but new recruits were readily forthcoming. The primary policy of the government was to subcontract frontline security tasks to rangers and local defence volunteers wherever possible, a dangerous trend that exacerbated tensions in many rural areas.<sup>64</sup> A national preoccupation with Bangkok politics and the stand-off between the government and Thaksin meant that the southern conflict — which had claimed almost 3000 lives since January 2004 — remained firmly on the backburner in policy terms.

The turmoil in the south, which was slowly degenerating into a form of protracted civil war, had become an alarming symbol for Thailand more broadly. The national capacity for creative compromise seen in the landmark 1997 Constitution had been hopelessly mislaid, and the country was more clearly divided than at any time since the 1970s. Talk of national reconciliation was little more than a pious royalist hope; by the end of 2007, Thaksin's supporters had won an election, and were heading back to power. Sadly, there was still no good reason to believe that 2008 would offer much less cause for collective anxiety on the part of the Thai population.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Patcharasri 'Kalamare' Benjamas, "Prakotkan haeng thiphung" [Phenomenon of hope], *Nation Weekend*, 28 April 2007, p. 39.
- <sup>2</sup> For detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see other articles in the special issue of *Nation Weekend*, 27 April 2007. Sanitsuda Ekachai argued that animism, rather than Buddhism, was now Thailand's de facto national religion.
- <sup>3</sup> For a set of important articles on the politics of the coup, see the special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (February 2008), edited by Michael K. Connors and Kevin Hewison.
- <sup>4</sup> See interview at <[http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2007/06/16/headlines/headlines\\_30037021.php](http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2007/06/16/headlines/headlines_30037021.php)>.
- <sup>5</sup> These arguments had been developed by political scientist-turned-politician Anek Laothamatas.
- <sup>6</sup> This term refers to the idea of the Thai monarchy as a complex political actor; "network monarchy" is not confined to the King and members of the royal family, but

- includes members of the Privy Council and other loyalists, some of whom may have no direct formal connection to the palace. See Duncan McCargo, “Network monarchy and legitimacy crises in Thailand“, *Pacific Review* 18, no. 4 (2005). 499–519. For a recent paper in Thai by Nidhi Aeosriwongse discussing the concept, see <<http://www.fringier.org/?p=310>>. For an insightful article that illuminates the ideological foundations of network monarchy, see Michael K. Connors, “Article of faith: the failure of royal liberalism in Thailand“, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (February 2008).
- <sup>7</sup> In an interview with Shawn Crispin, Sondhi argued that he became the spokesman of the traditional elites, including the Thai Farmers Bank Lamsam dynasty, and that Surayud egged him on to provoke the demonstrators to spill blood. “Recollections, revelations of a protest leader“, *Asia Times*, 27 April 2007, <[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/ID27Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/ID27Ae01.html)>.
- In a public speech in Los Angeles later in the year, Sondhi explicitly claimed direct royal funding for his anti-Thaksin protests, and allegedly had difficulty returning to Thailand after giving the speech. For detailed discussions, see <<http://bangkokpundit.blogspot.com/2007/11/bleg.html>>, <<http://www.sameskybooks.org/board/index.php?showtopic=4224&st=0&gopid=18437&#>>.
- <sup>8</sup> Shawn W. Crispin, “The Thai military’s democratic nightmare“, *Asia Times*, 16 November 2007.
- <sup>9</sup> For the full Thai text of the judgement see <[http://files.thaiday.com/download/trt\\_party.pdf](http://files.thaiday.com/download/trt_party.pdf)>.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Nation*, 25 May 2007.
- <sup>11</sup> See “Thirayudh Boonmi chu tulakanphiwat kae wikhrit-pathirup kanmuang“, [Thirayudh Boonmi pushes judicialization to solve crisis and reform politics], *Matichon*, 1 June 2006.
- <sup>12</sup> The picture here is confusing: the military appointed Constitutional Tribunal comprised six Supreme Court justices and three Supreme Administrative Court judges, including the presidents of both courts. CNS could claim that all the members of the Tribunal were “judges” in their own right, but the creation of the Tribunal itself was somewhat arbitrary. See “Thailand: The judiciary is the real loser“, statement by Asian Human Rights Commission, 31 May 2007, at <<http://www.ahrck.net>>.
- <sup>13</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 1 June 2007.
- <sup>14</sup> It must be noted that the charges against the Democrats were rather thin, and less serious than those filed against TRT.
- <sup>15</sup> An example was the widely distributed, government-funded booklet *Prachathipatai chai dai ching ching: khu mue khon Thai* [Real usable democracy: handbook for Thai people] (Bangkok: Project to support political knowledge and participation, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, 2007). The booklet criticized many aspects of politics under Thaksin as undemocratic; for example, p. 42 discussed the negative effects of merging political parties, including a cartoon of Thaksin with three

- politicians whose parties had merged with TRT.
- <sup>16</sup> Fieldnotes from interviews with protest leaders outside parliament, 17 May 2007. One leader was a former member of the shadowy pro-Chavalit Yongchaiyudh “Revolutionary Council”, while disgruntled former Thaksin ally Sanoh Tienthong was featured in some of the literature given to the author.
- <sup>17</sup> For an unofficial English translation of the final 2007 Constitution, see <[http://www.parliament.go.th/parcy/sapa\\_db/committee0-upload/0-20080208162151\\_0-20071122144805\\_cdca.pdf](http://www.parliament.go.th/parcy/sapa_db/committee0-upload/0-20080208162151_0-20071122144805_cdca.pdf)>.
- <sup>18</sup> The Senate Selection Committee comprised the President of the Constitutional Court, the Chairperson of the Election Commission, the President of the Ombudsmen, the Chairperson of the National Counter Corruption Commission, the Chairperson of the State Audit Commission, a judge of the Supreme Court of Justice, and a judge of the Supreme Administrative Court.
- <sup>19</sup> Posters stating “Love the King. Care about the King. Vote in the referendum. Accept the 2007 draft charter” were widely used in the northeast. *Bangkok Post*, 12 July 2007.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview, Northeast Thailand, 17 December 2007.
- <sup>21</sup> Chang Noi, “Following the political money”, *The Nation*, 3 September 2007.
- <sup>22</sup> Images of the anti-referendum campaign featuring banned former TRT executives can be seen at <<http://www.thairakthai.or.th/index.asp>> — such pictures rarely found their way into mainstream media outlets.
- <sup>23</sup> There were 14,727,306 “yes” votes (56.69 per cent of votes cast) and 10,747,441 (41.37 per cent) “no” votes. *Source*: Election Commission of Thailand. For a very useful colour map prepared by Chris Baker showing the degree of support for the constitution across the country, see <<http://rspas.anu.edu.au/rmap/newmandala/2007/08/20/the-pink-zones/#more-1416>>.
- <sup>24</sup> Details of Thaksin’s London life may be found in Sunisa Lertpakawat, *Thaksin: Where are you?* (Bangkok: Unusual Publishing House, 2007), an uncritical account based on interviews conducted by an apparently unauthorized female army lieutenant.
- <sup>25</sup> See Andrew Marshall, “Thaksin Shinawatra: shooting to win”, *Sunday Times*, 5 December 2007; regular coverage on the website <<http://citeh-citeh.blogspot.com/>>; and Thapon Wanchuplao, *Maew mai mo* [Thaksin doesn’t brag] (Bangkok: Lok wan ni, 2007).
- <sup>26</sup> For the PPP and TRT logos, see the party websites <<http://www.ppp.or.th/index.asp>>, and the still-functioning <<http://www.thairakthai.or.th/index.asp>>.
- <sup>27</sup> See, for example, *The Nation*, 27 August 2007. After his appointment as prime minister, Samak gave several interviews in which he rejected the “nominee” self-label.
- <sup>28</sup> Samak himself offered a different gloss on this episode, arguing that he and his fellow presenter had voluntarily ended their television programme after the Prem controversy. See *Pak Samak* [Samak’s mouth] (Bangkok: Lok Wan Ni 2007), p. 116. Samak had been seen as very pro-monarchy in the 1970s.

- <sup>29</sup> Daniel Ten Kate, “Thailand at the brink”, *Asia Sentinel*, 20 December 2007.
- <sup>30</sup> For example, Ruam Jai Thai means “unity amongst Thais”; whilst Matchima means “middle way”.
- <sup>31</sup> See Wongthonong Chainarongsing, *Question Mark* (book length interview with Abhisit Vejjajiva) (Bangkok: A Book, 2007), pp. 66–68.
- <sup>32</sup> For details, see *Matichon*, 6 November 2007; *Naeo Na*, 20 January 2008.
- <sup>33</sup> “Surayud rues the day he became premier”, *Bangkok Post*, 31 January 2008.
- <sup>34</sup> Wassana Nanuam, “Sonthi admits Surayud failed in interim govt”, *Bangkok Post*, 28 January 2008.
- <sup>35</sup> According to *Matichon*, Princess Sirindhorn had started wearing pink after astrologers suggested the planet Mars (associated with Tuesday and the colour pink) would help restore the King to full health. During 2006 and much of 2007, government officials and many other Thais wore yellow shirts, because yellow was associated with Monday, the day of the King’s birth. Following the death of the King’s sister Princess Galyani Vadhana on 2 January, the country entered a period of national mourning, and black replaced both yellow and pink as the royalist colour of choice.
- <sup>36</sup> One of the best known was <hi-thaksin> (originally hi-thaksin.org, later moved to <hi-thaksin.net> after the site was blocked by Thai authorities), which opened with images of Thaksin in royalist mode, but was actually full of anti-Prem content. For an example see <<http://www.hi-thaksin.net/contentdetail.php?ParamID=11906>>.
- <sup>37</sup> For a webcast of this English interview with Jakrapop, see <[http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2007/06/16/headlines/headlines\\_30037021.php](http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2007/06/16/headlines/headlines_30037021.php)>. He went even further in another recording <<http://www.upload.com/download.aspx?pku=3825AC32954EFJJHQ7WV5328CSWHO>>.
- <sup>38</sup> Original leaflet in author’s possession, acquired at a PPP rally in Roi-et, 18 December 2007.
- <sup>39</sup> “Thaksin blows top in anti-monarchy perception”, Thai News Agency, 28 December 2007.
- <sup>40</sup> *Thai Post*, 6 January 2008.
- <sup>41</sup> The full nine-page memo of 14 September 2007, marked “Secret”, is reproduced at <<http://www.hi-thaksin.net/contentdetail.php?ParamID=74539>>.
- <sup>42</sup> While visiting an Election Commission office in the northeast, I was quizzed by officials who obviously suspected me of being on a clandestine EU mission. Fieldnotes, 19 December 2007.
- <sup>43</sup> In addition, House speaker, PPP party list MP and party executive member Yongyuth Tiypairat was belatedly and provisionally red carded on 26 February 2008.
- <sup>44</sup> I am very grateful to the Election Commission for supplying detailed information on all the re-runs, in a personal communication of 11 February 2008.
- <sup>45</sup> James Ockey, “The partisanship dilemma and democratization in Thailand”, paper presented at the Tenth International Conference on Thai Studies, Thammasat University, 9–11 January 2008, author’s notes from oral presentation.

- <sup>46</sup> On vote-canvassers, see Anyarat Chattharakul, “Networks of Vote-Canvassers in Thai Elections: Informal Power and Money Politics”, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 2007.
- <sup>47</sup> Since voter turnout is based on the proportion of eligible voters who turn up at the polls, by removing from the voter lists those who are not expected to attend anyway, local officials are able to boost artificially the official turnout rate in their areas. Problems occur, however, when some of those so removed actually appear to vote.
- <sup>48</sup> Fieldnotes, Chaiyaphum province, 23 December 2007.
- <sup>49</sup> Samak television interview, 23 December 2007, fieldnotes.
- <sup>50</sup> Thanet Charoenmuang, “Kanleuktang jak mum thongthin” [The election from a local perspective], Special interview, Prachatai, 25 December 2007.
- <sup>51</sup> Ubonrat Siriyuvasak interview, 16 May 2007.
- <sup>52</sup> “A law factory in Thailand”, *Bangkok Post*, 16 December 2007.
- <sup>53</sup> A number of participants referred to this trend at a session on *lèse-majesté*, during the Tenth International Conference on Thai Studies held at Thammasat University on 10 January 2008.
- <sup>54</sup> For a discussion by the Southeast Asia Press Alliance, see <<http://www.seapabkk.org/newdesign/newsdetail.php?No=640>>.
- <sup>55</sup> World Bank, Forecast Summary, Global Economic Prospects 2008, at <[web.worldbank.org](http://web.worldbank.org)>.
- <sup>56</sup> *The Nation*, 26 August 2007.
- <sup>57</sup> *The Nation*, 19 November 2007.
- <sup>58</sup> Richard Kilner, “Thai economy to be bolstered by democracy”, *Banking Times*, 27 November 2007, <<http://www.bankingtimes.co.uk/27112007-thai-economy-to-be-bolstered-by-democracy/>>.
- <sup>59</sup> *The Military Balance*, 2007 and 2008, International Institute of Strategic Studies, London. Also, “Thai military seeks US\$8.8b for weapons: army”, AFP, 26 November 2007.
- <sup>60</sup> P. Parameswaran, “US to resume military aid to Thailand”, AFD, 6 February 2008. <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/TopTenStories2007\\_print.html](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/TopTenStories2007_print.html)>
- <sup>61</sup> For background, see Kavi Chongkittavorn, “Asean needs to rein in its rogue member”, *The Nation*, 28 September 2007.
- <sup>62</sup> See Human Rights Watch, “No One Is Safe, Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand’s Southern Border Provinces”, 28 August 2007, at <[www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)>.
- <sup>63</sup> See International Crisis Group, “Southern Thailand: The Problem with Paramilitaries”, Asia Report No. 140, 23 October 2007, at <[www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org)>.