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The Authoritarian Electoral Blueprint of Thailand's Palang Pracharath Party May No Longer be Effective

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Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha walks through the Government House in Bangkok on 22 August 2022. Photo: Jack TAYLOR/AFP.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Although Thailand's authoritarian structures remain intact, regime-backed parties are unlikely to succeed in the next general election by following Palang Pracharath's authoritarian electoral blueprint from 2019.
- Palang Pracharath's success in the 2019 general election was built on its unique status as a party for and by the military regime, which enabled it to outcompete its rivals at co-opting political heavyweights, secure the advantage of an uneven playing field, and tilt the electoral outcome in its favour.
- Ongoing internal struggles among pro-regime forces and external challenges coming from Pheu Thai under a new electoral system have introduced new uncertainties that will make it difficult for regime-backed parties to replicate Palang Pracharath's success.
- Palang Pracharath's control over its MPs is contingent on its capacity to offer access to privileges, protection and spoils of government, which comes with its status as a ruling party and a party backed by the regime.
- Should Palang Pracharath fail to exhibit credible commitment to this offer, the party stands to lose the support of political elites, factions and influential families to other parties such as Bhumjaithai Party or Chart Thai Pattana Party.

INTRODUCTION

Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) was founded from the mission of extending the lifespan of the military regime that seized power following Thailand's May 2014 coup. In the 2019 general election, the PPRP secured 116 seats, becoming the leader of a governing coalition that not only excluded parties affiliated with Thaksin Shinawatra but also kept regime leader General Prayut Chan-o-cha in power. These accomplishments testify to the PPRP's success in turning authoritarian legacy into votes, and elections into instruments that prolonged authoritarian rule.

This article re-examines the making of this success and assesses whether it can be replicated in the next general election in light of recent developments in Thai politics. A confluence of factors played an important role in turning the tide in the PPRP's favour in the 2019 general election. These included, for example, a misstep by Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva, a strong turnout by pro-establishment conservatives in response to Thaksin's ploy to involve the monarchy in politics, and the appeal of General Prayut under the slogan "Choose Peace, Choose Prayut" ("เลือกความสงบ จบที่ลุงจู่") in the final stretch of the election campaign.¹

None could compare to the PPRP's designated status as a party for and by the regime. This status enabled the PPRP to take advantage of the uneven playing field created by the regime, form strategic alliances with powerful players with vested interests in the regime's survival, and leverage the regime's influence to co-opt political elites, factions and influential families to form the party's electoral base where none had existed before and where support for Thaksin still runs deep. Yet, due to ongoing internal struggles among pro-regime forces and changes in the electoral system, the same blueprint that contributed to the PPRP's success in 2019 is unlikely to produce similarly successful results in the next general election.

AUTHORITARIAN ROOTS

To understand how the PPRP became the regime's solution to electoral politics, one must first situate the party's emergence within the broader context of post-2014 Thailand. After taking power in May 2014, the regime established and exercised power through an array of appointed institutional bodies designed to elicit support from a narrow group of military and civilian elites. These institutions include, for example, the Cabinet, the National Legislative Assembly (NLA), the National Reform Council (NRC), and the Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC). The result was an "embedded military regime" that sank its teeth deep into polity and society, correcting the mistakes of the previous group of coup-makers who failed to curb Thaksin's influence after the September 2006 coup.² These institutions were however not enough to maintain a grip on power amidst pressure to democratise. Anticipating that a return to some form of democracy was inevitable, the regime chose to install safeguards – the 2017 Constitution and the Transitory Provisions³ – that would preserve its dominance despite elections being held.

A regime-backed constitution was not, however, the only innovation that manifested from the need to "make democracy work" for royalist-conservative elites.⁴ Shortly after the

constitutional drafting process, from within and outside the regime's inner circle, ideas to form a political party that would take advantage of the Constitution emerged.⁵ Initially, General Prayut was indecisive about forming and leading a party directly, or merely presiding over the Thai parliament in the same manner that General Prem Tinasulanonda had done during his premiership from 1980 to 1988.⁶ This window of opportunity saw multiple parties being set up in anticipation of, and to capitalise on, the regime's need for allies in the House of Representatives.⁷ Among other contenders, the PPRP was chosen to carry the torch for the regime.

ELECTORAL-AUTHORITARIAN BLUEPRINT

Although the PPRP was formed in an ad hoc manner just before the general election in 2019, this did not prevent the PPRP from positioning itself as an extension of the regime and channelling the regime's resources for its own ends. This positioning played a crucial role in turning the party into an instant political powerhouse, giving the party unfair institutional advantages, and tilting the outcome in its favour.

Carrots and Sticks

Leveraging the regime's backing, the PPRP engaged in an aggressive strategy of roping in provincial and local elites, factions and influential families with a proven track record and patronage-oriented linkages to the electorate.⁸ In constituencies where it could not count on the appeal of policies made or its prime ministerial candidate, General Prayut, the party relied instead on these individuals' networks to deliver the votes. Although this co-optation was by no means a strategy exclusive to the PPRP, the party was unusually well-equipped to undertake it on a large scale, thanks to its affiliation with the regime.⁹

In terms of recruiting politicians, the PPRP faced little resistance thanks not only to its deep pockets but also to Section 44 of the Interim Constitution.¹⁰ Although Section 44 had been invoked for a wide range of purposes, it was routinely used to order the appointment, transfer and suspension of government officials and local political office holders.¹¹ This did not occur at random, however – it was instead deployed as part of a broader strategy to root out opposition at various levels of government or, better, turn these individuals against their former patron, Thaksin. This was done by getting them, their family or faction to pledge allegiance to the PPRP in return for protection.¹² This legal instrument worked in tandem with activities by the military, operating under the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), to monitor and keep people affiliated with Pheu Thai (PT) Party in check.¹³

From the standpoint of politicians, joining the PPRP guaranteed that authoritarian powers, legal or coercive, would not be used against them. Instead, these powers would grant them unparalleled advantages in key dimensions that matter in Thai election campaigns. These include, for example, recruiting vote canvassers, preventing defection, deterring challengers, bending the rules, securing financial backing, and forging alliances with local government

officials and office holders.¹⁴ In turn, their support gave the PPRP what it needed to project an image of a robust party organisation despite being newly formed.

The Constitution Was Designed for Us

Establishing itself as a party that received the regime's blessing, the PPRP borrowed the term *pracharath* (the people's state) from policies already implemented by the military government several years before the party was founded—a time when no parties were allowed to operate, let alone campaign. It strengthened the credibility of this ready-made political brand by positioning itself as a party that was primed to win by design, thanks to its association with the regime that invented the rules.

This was seen and heard when Somsak Thepsuthin, one of the PPRP's leaders, famously declared that “this Constitution was designed for us,” delivering a powerful message that the party intended to reap the (unfair) advantages offered by the new constitutional framework.¹⁵ Implicit in this message was the notion that supporting the PPRP would guarantee favourable ties to the future governing coalition and, by extension, entitlement to the spoils of government.

Somsak's bold declaration did not come out of thin air. The 2017 Constitution and the Transitory Provisions established a bicameral parliament consisting of an elected 500-member House of Representatives and, for the first five years, an appointed 250-member Senate that would participate in the selection of the prime minister in a joint session involving both Houses.¹⁶ Since all but six senators were handpicked by a committee chaired by members of the military regime, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), this produced a body that was more representative of the NCPO's network than any other group in society.¹⁷

This concentration of parliamentary power in the hands of the NCPO via an appointed Senate was combined with an electoral system designed to blunt the dominance of Pheu Thai Party. Under the new system, called Mixed-Member Apportionment (MMA), voters cast only one ballot which functioned not only as a vote for a candidate competing in one of the 350 single-member districts, but also as a vote for that candidate's party in a 150-seat party-list proportional representation.¹⁸

This system removed any bonus party-list seats that would have been awarded to Pheu Thai Party under the previous Mixed-Member Majoritarian (MMM) system. It also made single-party absolute majority unlikely, and encouraged a multi-party coalition in which the PPRP, whose backer held sway over 250 appointed senators, had a major head start in terms of accumulating seats to approve a prime minister.¹⁹

Friends in High Places

Apart from the appointed Senate, the PPRP benefited from actions taken by institutions with vested interest in the regime's survival. Among these were the Constitutional Court and the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT), whose members were appointed or had their tenure extended by the NCPO.

First, the Constitutional Court accepted the recommendation of the ECT and ordered the dissolution of the Thai Raksa Chart Party (TRC) for nominating Princess Ubolratana as candidate for prime minister.²⁰ This dissolution proved detrimental to the pro-Thaksin camp since the Pheu Thai Party had deliberately fielded candidates in only 250 of 350 districts to avoid contesting in the same districts as the TRC.

Second, the Constitutional Court ruled that the ECT's interpretation of the method for allocating party-list seats did not violate the Constitution. The method in question granted one parliamentary seat to parties which otherwise would not have won any seats had a different formula been used. Most of these micro-parties eventually joined the PPRP-led coalition.²¹

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NEXT ELECTION

There is little doubt that the PPRP's proximity to the regime gave the party unsurpassed advantages that proved instrumental to its success. This raises an important question concerning whether the PPRP, or other parties that claim the regime's backing, can produce similar results in the next general election by tapping into Thailand's authoritarian structures in the same way that the PPRP did in 2019.

On the one hand, although the NCPO was formally dissolved and, along with it, the powers of Section 44, the same structures that empowered the PPRP remain very much alive and well.²² While the appointed Senate is nearing the end of its five-year term, it retains the power to select every new prime minister until May 2024, and thus remains a key player in the formation of the next ruling coalition. On the other hand, important shifts in the Thai political landscape have introduced new uncertainties which did not exist in 2019 and which cast doubt on the PPRP's viability and the prospect of parties coming to power by following its model.

Since 2019, the PPRP's reputation and credibility have been tarnished by its failure to deliver on policy promises, inconsistent performance in by-elections and local elections, and intense factional strife. Above all, the party's unquestioning allegiance to General Prayut was shattered after party secretary-general Captain Thammanat Prompao conspired to unseat General Prayut in a no-confidence debate in September 2021. Although Captain Thammanat's failed attempt culminated in his dismissal from the Cabinet and from the PPRP, he remains a close ally of the PPRP leader and Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan who was allegedly aware of but turned a blind eye to Captain Thammanat's scheme. Captain Thammanat formed and led a new party called Thai Economic Party which is comprised of his faction of 16 MPs who defected from the PPRP.²³ General Prawit's brother, Police General Patcharawat Wongsuwan, a former national police chief, also serves as an advisor to the party, underscoring the informal alliance between Captain Thammanat and General Prawit that exists despite the clash between Captain Thammanat and General Prayut. Captain Thammanat recently resigned as party leader amid ongoing rumours that he and his followers will join another party, presumably Pheu Thai Party.

Captain Thammanat's manoeuvres created a widespread impression that General Prayut has outlived his usefulness for the PPRP under General Prawit's watch. This impression was

subsequently reinforced by uncertainties over General Prayut's eligibility as prime minister. Prayut was suspended from duty as prime minister on 24 August, pending the Constitutional Court's decision concerning his term limit. On 30 September, the Court ruled that he has yet to reach his eight-year term limit and that his tenure began when the current Constitution came into effect on 6 April 2017, meaning that General Prayut is eligible to serve as prime minister for only two additional years into the next term— until mid-2025.²⁴ It is unclear whether the PPRP will nominate or find someone to replace General Prayut as candidate for prime minister in the next general election, considering his soon-to-expire eligibility and waning popularity.

To substitute for the PPRP, whose commitment to General Prayut has become uncertain, a new party was formed to accommodate whatever remains of General Prayut's support base. The new party, called Ruam Thai Sang Chart, is led by former Democrat and PPRP member Pirapan Salirathavibhaga and former Democrat MP and PDRC protest²⁵ leader Akanat Promphan. However, given General Prayut's expiry halfway through the next four-year term and the absence of a viable successor in place, the new party has little control over its own fate.

Whether or not ongoing tension between General Prayut and General Prawit amounts to a fracture in the regime, one thing is abundantly clear – neither is in a position to take advantage of the authoritarian levers backing them. Even if these levers remain operational, when pulled in different directions, they are as good as unusable.

A case in point is the recent reversal to an electoral system that adopts “100” as the basis for allocating party-list seats—General Prayut at first reportedly preferred the “500” system but revisions towards that system were thwarted, presumably in accordance with General Prawit's wishes.²⁶ Unless the two sides can reconcile their differences in the presence of a common threat – a “landslide victory” of the PT and an imminent return to Thailand of exiled Thaksin – they will not succeed in using authoritarian powers to shape electoral politics. Uncertainties about which party, a sinking ship versus a life raft, will ultimately be empowered by the underlying authoritarian structures should be enough to deter political heavyweights from putting all their eggs into the regime's baskets.

The replacement of the single-ballot MMA system with a two-ballot parallel voting system has also increased the odds of a victory for PT; this has made party switching and realignment according to factional priorities at the expense of the PPRP more likely.²⁷ The new system will remove some of the advantages that the PPRP enjoyed in 2019. Since voters will cast two separate ballots, one for a constituency candidate and one for a political party, the PPRP will not be able to win additional party-list seats by accumulating constituency votes. Furthermore, due to an expected increase in the threshold of party-list votes per seat, the PPRP will face more constraints in terms of engaging in a divide-and-rule tactic to co-opt small parties and micro-parties in forming a coalition government.

By contrast, under these same rules, the PT now stands a good chance of winning enough seats, when combined with other opposition parties, to counterbalance the votes of the appointed Senate during the selection of the next prime minister. Capitalising on its previous track record, the PT has already predicted a landslide victory in the next general election.²⁸ The party has backed up this prediction by reconsolidating the party under the informal but visible leadership

of Thaksin's ex-wife Potjaman and quite possibly putting forward a candidate for prime minister bearing the Shinawatra family name, Ms Paethongtarn. Adding credibility to its bold claim, the PT has also successfully produced "mini" landslide victories for its candidates in the by-election of Chief Executive of Provincial Administration Organization (PAO) in Kalasin and Roi Et.²⁹

These developments suggest that the safest option for politicians with an independent electoral base who are currently aligned with regime-backed parties is to jump ship to parties that have the best chance of being part of the future governing coalition no matter who is in power, be it Bhumjaithai Party and Chart Thai Pattana Party, for example. Given the right price, some of these politicians may even join the PT, which many were originally a part of.

CONCLUSION

Since 24 September, the House has entered its final 180 days, and by-elections will no longer be held to fill vacant seats. This allows constituency MPs to resign and join other parties without facing penalty. Based on the rules that require MP candidates to be affiliated with a political party at least 90 days before the election day, party switching will take place before 8 February.³⁰

If General Prayut dissolves the House instead, which is widely anticipated to occur after he hosts the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in November, an election will be held at least 45 days but no later than 60 days after the House dissolution. Should that be the case, MP candidates are required to be part of a political party within 30 days in order to be eligible to run in the next general election.

Unless the PPRP successfully revamps its image or imposes party discipline using whatever means available, it looks as though a mass exodus from the PPRP to other parties will happen at some point before the end of this year or at the beginning of next year.³¹

Ultimately, the PPRP's control over its MPs has always been provisional. Their loyalty to the party has been contingent on the party's capacity to offer access to the benefits that come with its status as the chief ruling party and a party backed by the regime.³²

Unless the PPRP, or other regime-backed parties, can credibly commit to uphold this arrangement, the regime's experimental success with party and electoral politics may be at an end, even if that regime remains a key player in Thailand's political landscape.

ENDNOTES

¹ Abhisit Vejjajiva declared in early March that he would not support General Prayut as candidate for prime minister. His stance likely alienated many voters who felt the Democrat Party was an ineffective antidote to the Thaksin problem, leading them to support the overtly pro-military PPRP, the bitter medicine, instead. As for Thaksin, he made two political miscalculations that concerned the monarchy. First was nominating Princess Ubolratana as Thai Raksa Chart's candidate for prime minister, which led to Thai Raksa Chart being dissolved. Second was putting the spotlight on Princess Ubolratana during the wedding in Hong Kong of Thaksin's youngest daughter Paethongtarn just two days before the general election, sparking royalist and conservative outrage which likely translated into a strong turnout in favour of the PPRP. The choice to try to bring the monarchy into politics proved disastrous on both occasions. Finally, General Prayut's personal appeal under the slogan "Choose peace, choose Prayut" most likely worked in favour of the PPRP, especially in Bangkok and the South where the party won in constituencies that were previously dominated by the Democrat Party. The slogan sent a signal during the final stretch of the campaign that, as Abhisit stood idly by while Thaksin added fuel to fire, General Prayut was the only viable solution to Thailand's longstanding political turmoil.

² Prajak Kongkirati and Veerayooth Kanchoochat, "The Prayuth Regime: Embedded Military and Hierarchical Capitalism in Thailand," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 6, no. 2 (July 2018): 279–305, <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2018.4>.

³ One key innovation here is the role of the 250 senators – who were mostly hand-picked by the regime – in participating along with elected MPs in the selection of every prime minister over the next five years, until May 2024. In the race for the premiership after the 2019 general election, 249 senators voted for General Prayut, who won with 500 votes (251 from MPs in 19 parties in the PPRP-led coalition). Only the Senate President, Dr Pornpetch Wichitcholchai, abstained out of political correctness.

⁴ Putnam, Robert D. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

⁵ According to a technocrat who worked with the NCPO, interview with the author, Bangkok, 20 July 2021.

⁶ According to a technocrat who worked with the NCPO, interview with the author, Bangkok, 20 July 2021.

⁷ These include, for example, Paiboon Nititawan's People's Reform Party and People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) leader Suthep Thaugsuban's Action Coalition for Thailand Party.

⁸ These include, for example, Chonburi's Khunpluem faction, Sam Mittr ("Three Allies") faction, led by Somsak Thepsutin, Suriya Jungroongruangkit, Anucha Nakasai, and Pirom Pholwiset, Preecha Rengsomboonsuk's faction in Loei, Varatthep Rattanakorn's faction in Kamphaengphet, Virat Rattanaset's faction in Nakhon Ratchasima, Supol Fong-ngam's faction in Ubon Ratchathani, Santi Prompat's faction in Petchabun, Pinit Jarusombat's Wang Phayanak faction, Suchart Tancharoen's Ban Rim Nam faction, Aekkarat Changlao's faction in Khon Kaen, the Thianthong family in Sakaew, the Asavahame family in Samut Prakan, and the Teekananond family in Udon Thani. Where the PPRP failed to recruit dominant political families or factions, the party left matters in the hands of individuals it designated as regional leaders. For example, in several provinces in Northern Thailand, the PPRP enlisted Captain Thammanat Prompao. In the South, it sought the support of Colonel Suchart Chantarachotikul, General Prayut's old friend from military cadet school. The three southern-most border provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat were left under the care of Anumat Amat, a pro-regime former senator.

⁹ The PPRP was also a well-oiled party machine with significant financial backing. It was infamous for having raised funds at a banquet in December 2018 where each of the 200 tables at the event cost

3 million baht in donations. The party reportedly raised almost 650 million baht. In spite of the media uproar, this number only constituted a small fraction of the party’s actual funding receipt, according to an anonymous source. In a counterfactual scenario where the PPRP did not have the regime’s backing, it is unlikely that the party would have been as successful in terms of securing financial support.

¹⁰ General Prayut as head of the NCPO had the “power to order, restrain, or perform any act, whether such act has legislative, executive, or judicial force; the orders and the acts, including the performance in compliance with such orders, shall be deemed lawful and constitutional under this Constitution, and shall be final.” See (*Unofficial Translation*) *Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (Interim)*, B.E. 2557 (2014) (Bangkok: Foreign Law Bureau, Office of the Council of State, 2014).

¹¹ iLaw, “Report on the Exercise of Power under Section 44 of the Interim Constitution of Thailand,” *iLaw*, November 18, 2015, <https://ilaw.or.th/node/3938>, accessed 30 September 2022.

¹² For example, among those suspended from local political office, pending investigation, were Boonlert Buranupakorn, Anusorn Nakasai, and Soontorn Ratanakorn, all of whom were allowed to resume their duties as chiefs of the Provincial Administrative Organization, presumably after agreeing to switch their allegiances, for the time being. Another obvious example was the case of Khunpluem family, a prominent political dynasty in Chon Buri. After Itthiphon Khunpluem had completed his term as Mayor of Pattaya, General Prayut appointed Police Major General Anan Charoenhawasri as the new mayor on 16 February 2017, using the power of Section 44. On 25 September 2018, he again used Section 44 to appoint Itthiphon’s brother, *de facto* leader of the family and Phalang Chon Party, Sontaya Khunpluem, as Mayor of Pattaya, replacing Anan. Sontaya eventually served as an advisor to the Prime Minister while Itthiphon was appointed Minister of Culture in addition to being a member of the PPRP’s executive committee. In the 2019 general election, Itthiphon and other former Phalang Chon Party MPs joined the PPRP, underscoring the possibility of a quid-pro-quo deal. It is rumoured that the deal was brokered by Sontaya’s long-time friend, then Army Commander General Apirat Kongsompong, the Secretary General of the NCPO.

¹³ Fieldnotes compiled during a visit to Kamphaeng Phet province, November 17, 2020.

¹⁴ A PPRP MP and member of the Sam Mitr faction, interview with the author, Bangkok, February 24, 2020.

¹⁵ “‘สุริยะ’ โว พปชร.ยิ่งใหญ่กว่าไทยรักไทย ‘สมศักดิ์’ ชี้ รธน.นี้ ดีขึ้นมาเพื่อพวกเรา,” [‘Suriya’ boasts that the PPRP is greater than Thai Rak Thai, saying the Constitution was designed for us] *Matichon Online*, November 18, 2018, https://www.matichon.co.th/politics/news_1232373, accessed 30 September 2022.

¹⁶ Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, BE 2560 (2017), Section 272.

¹⁷ To be precise, there were three groups of appointed senators. 194 members were chosen from a pool of 400 candidates nominated by a 9-person selection committee. 50 members were chosen by the NCPO from a shortlist of 200 candidates voted on by fellow nominees and applicants among occupational and social groups. The final six seats were filled *ex-officio* by commanders of the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, and the Armed Forces (the Supreme Commander), the national police commander, and the Defence Ministry Permanent Secretary. For additional details, see iLaw, “รวมข้อมูล 250 ส.ว. แต่งตั้ง: กลไกหลักสืบทอดอำนาจจากยุค คสช.,” [‘Data on the 250 appointed senators: the central mechanism for prolonging power of the NCPO’] *iLaw*, August 20, 2014, <https://ilaw.or.th/node/5366>, accessed 30 September 2022.

¹⁸ Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, BE 2560 (2017), Section 83.

¹⁹ In technical terms, a quota representing the share of seats that each party is eligible to receive—how many MPs a party “deserves” to have—is calculated by dividing each party’s votes by the total number of votes casted for all parties divided by the total number of seats (500). Party list seats are then allocated to parties on top of their constituency seats until their share of seats meets this quota. In 2019, the PT, having already exceeded this quota by winning constituency seats, did not get any party-list seat.

²⁰ “Thai Court Accepts Party Dissolution Case over Nomination of Princess Ubolratana as PM Candidate,” *Straits Times*, February 14, 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/thai-court-accepts-party-dissolution-case-over-princess-pm-gaffe>, accessed 30 September 2022.

²¹ One exception was People Power Party who joined the opposition from the beginning.

²² Other authoritarian appendages that still remain might include, for example, the 2017 Constitution, Constitutional Court, the ECT, and other organisations with linkages to the now-dissolved NCPO.

²³ In technical terms, they did not resign but were ousted from the PPRP; the “expulsion” enabled them to hold on to their positions as MPs and join another party without losing their parliamentary membership.

²⁴ Patpicha Tanakasempipat, “Thai PM Stays in Power as Court Finds No Breach in Term Rule,” *Bloomberg*, September 30, 2022, Asia Edition edition, sec. Politics, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-30/thai-court-ruling-to-decide-prayuth-s-fate-as-election-nears>, accessed 30 September 2022.

²⁵ PDRC is the People’s Democratic Reform Committee, which led the bloody street protests in Bangkok against the Yingluck Administration that ruled from November 2013 to May 2014, which eventually led to the coup by General Prayut on 22 May 2014.

²⁶ It is also rumoured that General Prawit has been in talks and cutting deals with the PT and Thaksin, using Captain Thammanat as a proxy. Captain Thammanat used to belong to Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai Party.

²⁷ At the time of writing, the Constitutional Court is reviewing two cases, one from a group of senators, and another from a group of MPs from small parties and micro-parties, concerning two proposed revised organic bills on the election of MPs and on political parties, and whether these contradict the Constitution.

²⁸ “Pheu Thai’s Big Names Kick Off Landslide,” *The Bangkok Post*, September 11, 2022, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2388921/pheu-thais-big-names-kick-off-landslide-bid>, accessed 30 September 2022.

²⁹ “Pheu Thai Win at Roi Et Polls Fuels Party’s Landslide Hopes,” *The Bangkok Post*, September 26, 2022, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2400638/pheu-thai-win-at-roi-et-polls-fuels-partys-landslide-hopes>, accessed 30 September 2022.

³⁰ This is based on the assumption that the next general election will take place on 7 May 2023, as officially scheduled by the ECT.

³¹ This is already happening to an extent. Sixteen MPs joined Captain Thammanat’s Thai Economic Party, three MPs moved to Sang Anakot Thai (Futurise Thailand Party), a new party led by former PPRP party leader Uttama Savanayana and former PPRP secretary-general Sontirat Sontijirawong, and one joined the Democrat Party.

³² The PPRP’s track record in terms of “protecting” their MPs from lawsuits has been inconsistent. In February 2021, Buddhipong Punnakanta and Nataphol Teepsuwan, leaders of the Bangkok faction in the PPRP and former leaders of the PDRC, were found guilty of insurrection for staging an anti-government protest that led to the cancellation of the general election of 2 February 2014, and which offered a pretext for the May 2014 coup. Buddhipong and Nataphol had to resign from their posts as Digital Economy and Society Minister and Education Minister respectively. Sira Janejaka, Bangkok MP, was disqualified by the Constitutional Court from holding public office after it was discovered that he had previously been convicted of fraud. Sira will also have to compensate for the salaries and benefits he received as MP, totaling around 8 million baht. Pareena Kraikupt, Ratchaburi MP, was disqualified for her illegal use of public land in Ratchaburi. Virat Rattanaset, PPRP senior deputy leader and chief whip of the ruling coalition, was suspended in November 2021, pending an investigation by the Supreme Court’s Criminal Division for Holders of Political Positions, for his role in a corruption scandal involving the taking of bribes in the construction of futsal fields in the north-eastern provinces. His wife Tassaneeya and her younger sister Tassanaporn also shared the same fate. All three are PPRP MPs.

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