

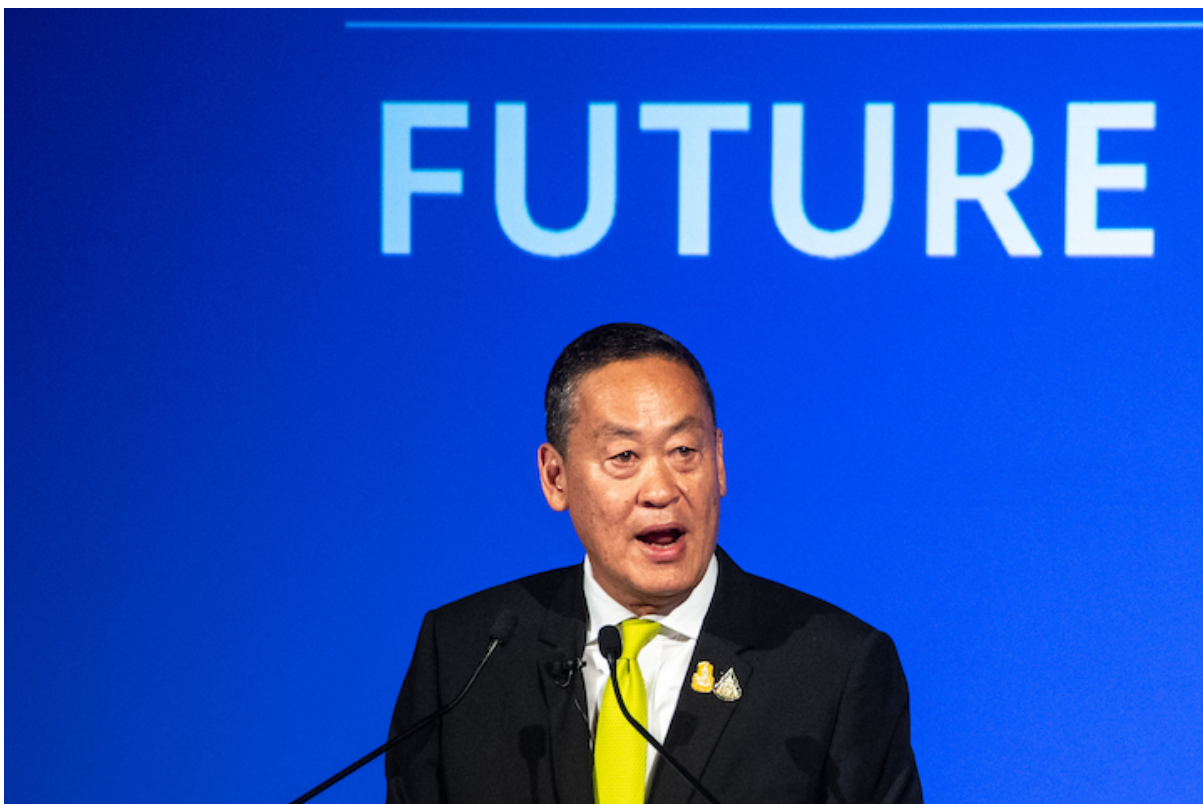
PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE ANALYSE CURRENT EVENTS

Singapore | 12 July 2024

Causes and Effects of Pheu Thai's Grand Compromise: The Lurking Instability of Thailand's Post-2023 Party System

*Mathis Lohatepanont and Napon Jatusripitak**



Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin speaking at the Nikkei Forum in Tokyo held on 24 May 2024. (Photo by Philip FONG/AFP).

** Mathis Lohatepanont is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Political Science, University of Michigan, and Napon Jatusripitak is Visiting Fellow in the Thailand Studies Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- After the 2023 general election, the Pheu Thai Party agreed to a grand compromise with the conservative parties, allowing Pheu Thai candidate Srettha Thavisin to take office as prime minister.
- A new strategic triangle of progressives, conservatives, and Thaksinites has locked Pheu Thai and the former members of the conservative Prayut Chan-o-cha coalition into a marriage of convenience.
- Mapping Thailand's political parties based on their stance on the status quo and the extent to which they successfully mobilised votes through nationally programmatic or localist strategies, makes it possible to illustrate the nature of Pheu Thai's shift in political position.
- Thailand's party system is likely to remain destabilised as the shift in Pheu Thai's political brand may produce major changes in voter linkages to the party.

INTRODUCTION

After the 2023 general election, the Pheu Thai Party formed a government coalition with several conservative parties that excluded the election-winning Move Forward Party from the government. This led to a major realignment in Thai politics, with Pheu Thai discarding its long-held anti-establishment position and becoming a party upholding the status quo.

This article analyses the causes and consequences of Pheu Thai's grand compromise with Thailand's conservative parties. We argue that the 2023 general election has produced a strategic triangle comprised of progressives, conservatives, and Thaksinites, whose varying strengths and weaknesses have facilitated a marriage of convenience between the latter two camps. However, as tensions escalate between Pheu Thai and conservative elites, jeopardizing the grand compromise, growing dissatisfaction with Pheu Thai among the electorate could further destabilise an already brittle party system.

BACKGROUND

The party system has been in a state of flux throughout much of Thailand's turbulent political history. Before 1973, competition between parties seeking a popular base was largely suppressed during intermittent periods of military rule. When elections were permitted, such competition was frequently overshadowed by narrow, patronage-driven rivalries among networks of bureaucratic elites and political dynasties.¹ These institutional legacies left most political parties in Thailand without deep societal roots, a clear ideology, or a commitment to representing specific groups of voters through coherent platforms.² Instead, they typically served as makeshift alliances prone to splintering, merging, disbanding, or reviving based on their leaders' whims and in response to shifting dynamics and changing institutional environments.

By the late 1990s, this party system, which had largely failed to reflect stable divisions in party positions and voter preferences, was disrupted by a new institutional paradigm brought about by the 1997 Constitution and the emergence of Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT). The TRT's innovative and popular policy platform spurred the development of a strong linkage with its supporters, particularly among the rural and grassroots population. This challenged the role of traditional electoral gatekeepers.³ By 2005, partisan ties had begun to crystallise along class and regional lines, with the TRT securing strong support among the working class in the North and Northeast, while its opposition, the Democrat Party, drew support from the more conservative South and more affluent voters. Despite numerous attempts to curtail Thaksin's influence and "turn back the clock" after the 2006 coup, whether through judicial interventions or constitutional engineering, these political divides persisted and hardened as Thaksin-affiliated parties continued to win the most seats in every election up to 2019.⁴

However, Thaksin's status as the primary fulcrum in Thai politics, around which political parties and movements aligned themselves, was not impervious to change. The 2014 military coup, followed by five years of military rule under the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), created a new political fault-line around the role of the military in politics. The institutional arrangements established by the junta-drafted 2017 Constitution, such as a junta-

appointed Senate that could participate in the selection of the prime minister, ignited both fervent support for and opposition to the prospect of allowing the NCPO and coup leader, General Prayut Chan-o-cha, to continue as prime minister.⁵ Emerging on one side of this divide in the 2019 election was the military-backed Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP). The PPRP sought to combine post-coup institutional advantages with support from conservatives who saw Prayut as an embodiment of peace, order, and continuity. The party became the new face of the conservative status quo, displacing the Democrat Party. On the other side of the divide, the Future Forward Party, led by Thanathorn Jungroongruangkit, championed a reformist agenda and captured the hearts and minds of a new generation of voters drawn by a bolder, more ideologically progressive alternative to Pheu Thai. Although Thaksin did not fade away from the political scene, for the first time in two decades, Thai politics was no longer revolving solely around him.

After the 2019 election, these generational and ideological divides became even more pronounced, as youth-led protests in the aftermath of the dissolution of Future Forward brought the role of the military and the royal institution into sharper focus. The conservative camp fractured further, into parties formed around Prayut and Prawit, such as the United Thai Nation Party (UTN), which had been founded to support Prayut for a third term as prime minister, and the PPRP, as well as more pragmatic conservatives like the Bhumjaithai Party and traditional conservatives such as the Democrat Party.⁶ All vowed to uphold the conservative status quo, but only the UTN succeeded in making this its ideological centrepiece in the May 2023 general election. On the other side, an ideological gap had formed between Pheu Thai and Move Forward, rooted in Move Forward's bold pledge to amend the *lèse-majesté* law⁷ and Pheu Thai's failure to unequivocally renounce the possibility of forming a coalition with parties associated with Prayut and Prawit.⁸ Move Forward prevailed in the election, seizing the historical moment created by a convergence of growing backlash against the "Uncles," readiness to move beyond Thaksin, and a vague yet profound desire for structural reform among the 14 million voters who overwhelmingly supported the party.⁹ However, Move Forward failed to form a government due to opposition from the junta-appointed senate and a newly forged alliance between Thaksin and conservative forces.

THE GRAND COMPROMISE AND THAILAND'S TRIANGULAR DYNAMICS

While there is no concrete evidence to confirm the existence of the widely speculated deal that underpins the alliance between Pheu Thai and conservative forces or specify its exact terms beyond an official coalition agreement on cabinet quotas and policy priorities,¹⁰ its broad contours can be inferred. In July 2023, all the major parties in the former Prayut coalition visited the Pheu Thai headquarters to demand the exclusion of Move Forward from the coalition. This was officially due to their disagreement over amending Section 112 but also likely a result of incompatibility on a host of other structural reforms that Move Forward would have wanted to impose. In addition, the two sides likely negotiated for joint stewardship of constitutional reform to ensure that the constitution would not be amended in a way that was detrimental to conservative interests. Most importantly, the negotiations likely involved some form of agreement on leniency in applying the Ministry of Justice's regulations on former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra when he returned.¹¹

Regardless of the specific details, we know that three outcomes were realised: 1) Move Forward was kept out of power, 2) Thaksin was allowed to return to Thailand while facing minimal jail time, and 3) Pheu Thai candidate Srettha Thavisin became Prime Minister with the endorsement of military-backed parties and a sizeable number of junta-appointed senators.¹²

As a result of this grand compromise, Thai politics is now characterised by dynamics with three main camps: 1) progressives, represented primarily by Move Forward; 2) Thaksinites, represented primarily by Pheu Thai; and 3) establishment-aligned conservatives, led by parties affiliated with Prayut and Prawit, supported by their strategic alliances with other former members of the Prayut coalition. In the first year of the Srettha administration, each of the camps retained an advantage that has ensured a certain parity in power (See Table 1).

Table 1. The Three Camps of Thai Politics

Camp	Key Strength
<p><i>Progressives</i> (Opposition members which have remained in opposition)</p> <p>Key parties: Move Forward</p>	<p><i>Democratic legitimacy:</i> Move Forward won the largest number of seats at the 2023 election. Opinion polling since the election has consistently favoured the party, and its solid support amongst younger demographics provides a sense that its support will only grow.</p>
<p><i>Thaksinites</i> (Former members of the opposition which switched to the government)</p> <p>Key parties: Pheu Thai</p>	<p><i>Powerbroker status:</i> As the second-largest party in parliament, neither Move Forward nor the conservatives (which are ideologically too distant to collaborate) are able to form a majority government without Pheu Thai. Thaksin Shinawatra also retains a level of personal popularity that provides his affiliated party with a base of support.</p>
<p><i>Conservatives</i> (Former members of the Prayut government)</p> <p>Key parties: Palang Pracharath, United Thai Nation, Bhumjaithai¹³</p>	<p><i>Institutional privileges:</i> Although the weakest in parliamentary strength, the conservative parties benefit from the legacy of nearly nine years of appointments made under Prayut, including the Senate which threw its weight behind Srettha. This faction also enjoys the leadership of figures aligned with the military, such as Prawit Wongsuwan.</p>

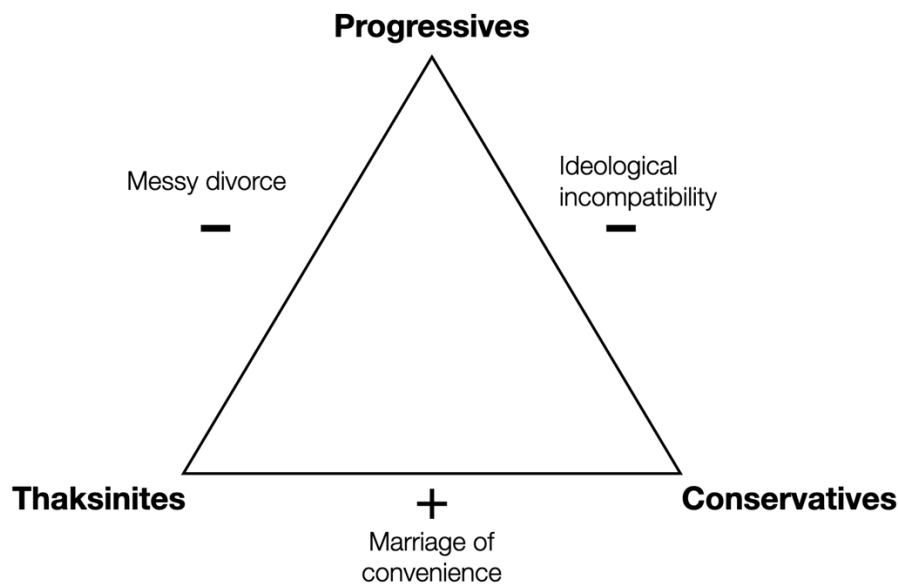
Source: Authors' creation

The grand compromise and the varying advantages of the three camps created a new “strategic triangle” in Thai politics, a concept which we borrow from the field of international relations. Lowell Dittmer (1981) defined a three-way relationship in which two players have mutually beneficial relations, and thus choose to ostracise a third player, as a “stable marriage.” As

illustrated in Figure 1, the Thaksinites and the conservatives are now partners, forcing Move Forward into the position of outcast. In this strategic triangle, Dittmer argues, the excluded player should try to establish a friendship with one of the partners in order to escape from exclusion, but “it may not be easy to establish such links, inasmuch as both of the other players may have acquired a vested interest in the existing pattern, which is premised upon mutual hostility to the ostracised third party”.¹⁴

Defying initial predictions of a fragile alliance between the Thaksinites and the conservatives, this coalition remained intact throughout the first year of the Srettha administration. Several factors contributed to this stability. Firstly, the conservatives needed Pheu Thai’s numbers to secure a government that could exclude Move Forward. Secondly, the conservatives’ institutional advantages, including sway over the Senate and potential influence over court proceedings involving Thaksin and other critical issues, prevented Pheu Thai from cooperation with Move Forward. Furthermore, Move Forward’s consistent lead in public polling minimised the desire for any destabilization to the coalition that could lead to an early election that neither Pheu Thai nor the conservatives are ready for. Finally, the highly public nature of Pheu Thai’s divorce from Move Forward provided little incentive for the party to accept a renewed partnership with Pheu Thai during this parliament even if it were offered, as that would damage the image of ideological purity that the party enjoys.

Figure 1. Strategic Triangle



Source: Authors’ creation

EFFECTS OF THE GRAND COMPROMISE: A DESTABILISED PARTY SYSTEM

While the power-sharing arrangement between the Thaksinites and the conservatives was stable through its first year, there is reason to speculate that it may become increasingly fragile due to evolving political circumstances. Previously, Pheu Thai needed to accommodate the powerholders within parties affiliated with Prayut and Prawit to ward off potential challenges from the junta-appointed Senate during the prime minister selection process. Now that the

Senate can no longer participate in selecting the prime minister alongside the House, Pheu Thai's reliance on these parties will primarily depend on their numerical contribution in terms of parliamentary seats—unless the threat posed by these parties' leaders or stakeholders to Thaksin proves credible.¹⁵ This heightens the likelihood of infighting within the coalition, especially considering that the door to cooperation between Pheu Thai and Move Forward is unlikely to have been closed for good.¹⁶

Yet, regardless of whether the grand compromise endures, it has already demonstrated its destabilizing effect on the party system. When a party as electorally significant and deeply ingrained in society as Pheu Thai undergoes drastic changes to its ideological stance, the repercussions extend beyond the party itself—it can create ripple effects that disrupt the entire party system. To illustrate Pheu Thai's realignment and the corresponding party system that has emerged, we use a classification system that maps Thai parties along two dimensions: 1) their stance on the political status quo, and 2) the extent to which their electoral appeal depends on a programmatic national offering versus a more locally-driven, constituency-focused strategy.

1) *Stance on the status quo*. Previously, Thailand's partisan divide was centred around support for or opposition to Thaksin Shinawatra. Since 2019, a new divide emerged in Thai politics across several key issues, including the Prayut government, the institutional legacies of the 2014 military coup, the pace and nature of constitutional reform, and, most importantly, the role and status of the monarchy. We argue that this divide now stands as the most pivotal fault line among major parties and between government and opposition due to Pheu Thai's brokering of a grand compromise with the former Prayut coalition parties. In essence, parties became defined less by their stance on Thaksin and more by their positions on whether to uphold the political status quo or advocate for reform.

We use three proxies to assess the party's stance on the status quo: their position on amendment of Section 112 of the criminal code, or the lèse-majesté law (indicating their stance on reform of the royal institution), membership of the Srettha coalition (indicating their current comfort with the political status quo), and their membership of the previous Prayut coalition (indicating their comfort with the legacy of the 2014 military coup in general).

Table 2. Parties’ Stance on the Political Status Quo¹⁷

	Currently opposes any amendment Section 112 of the Criminal Code (proxy for stance on reform of the monarchy)	Member of the Srettha coalition (proxy for stance on current status quo)	Member of the previous Prayut coalition or who has vocally <i>or</i> vocally supported Prayut for PM (proxy for stance on legacy of the 2014 military coup)
Move Forward			
Thai Sang Thai	✓		
Democrat	✓		✓
Pheu Thai	✓	✓	
Prachachart	✓	✓	
Bhumjaithai	✓	✓	✓
Palang Pracharath	✓	✓	✓
United Thai Nation	✓	✓	✓
Chart Thai Pattana	✓	✓	✓
Chart Pattana	✓	✓	✓

Source: Authors’ creation

Table 2 maps neatly with our previous discussion of the three camps in Thai politics: the conservative parties are most comfortable with the status quo,¹⁸ the Thaksinite parties were previously opposed but have adapted, while Move Forward is the most differentiated from the other parties.

2) *Level of national appeal*. While many parties adopted acute ideological stances in 2023, their connections to voters are not always anchored solely in these stances. This is because political parties often need to tailor their strategies to appeal to voter segments for whom ideological cues are secondary to, or complemented by, other factors such as candidates’ personal charisma or specific promises that address local concerns.¹⁹

We argue that this provides us with two ways to classify parties based on their level of national appeal. Parties that appeal nationally based on their ideological or programmatic commitments are usually described as competing by relying on *krasae*, which refers to “the ebbs and flows of voter sentiments”²⁰ towards a party, independent of how well a party has fared in

constructing a local support base. In contrast, parties that prioritise building and mobilizing local support typically rely on candidate-centred campaigns, patronage, vote-canvassing networks, and *krasoon*, which translates to “bullets,” a metaphor for cash handouts offered to voters to generate support.²¹

We measure the extent of support political parties receive from national versus constituency-focused appeals by calculating the difference between the share of party-list votes and constituency votes each party receives (Table 3).

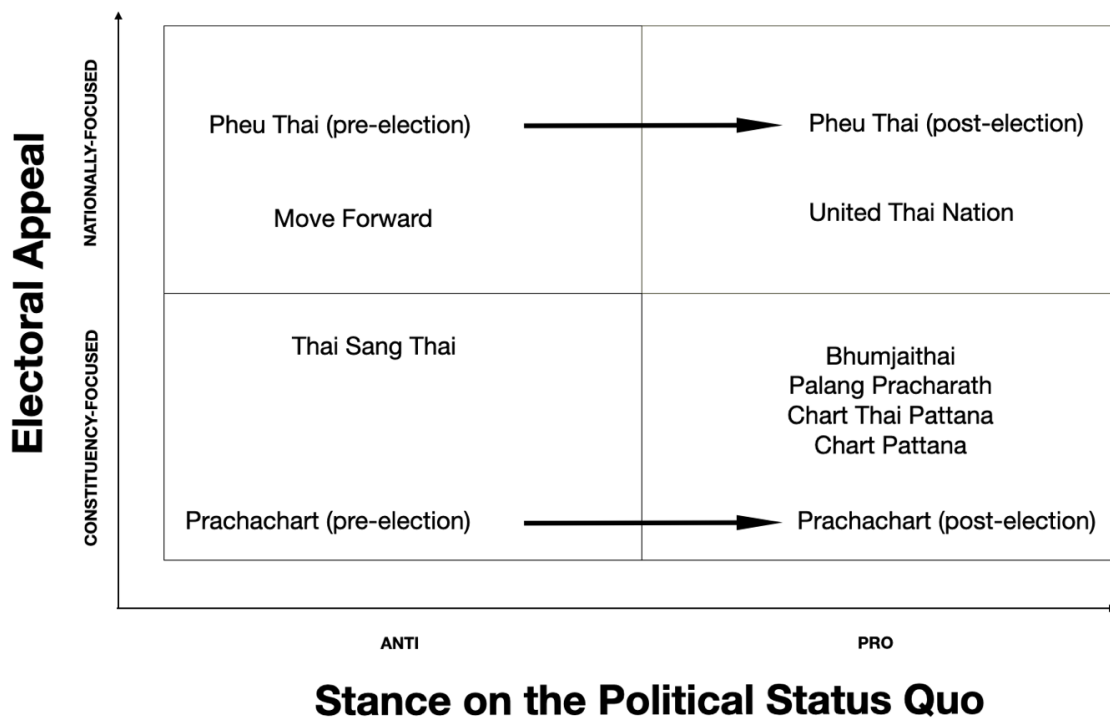
Table 3. Percent Difference Between Party List Vote and Constituency Vote Share

Party	% Difference
Move Forward	12.49
Pheu Thai	4.11
Bhumjaithai	-10.77
Palang Pracharath	-9.83
United Thai Nation	3
Democrat	-3.66
Chart Thai Pattana	-1.06
Prachachart	0.71
Thai Sang Thai	-1.44
Pheu Thai Ruam Palang	-0.07
Chart Pattana Kla	-0.23
Teachers for People	0.46
Thai Counties	0.54
New Democracy	0.69
Fair Party	0.46
Social Power	0.42
Thai Liberal	0.2
New Party	0.67

Source: Authors’ calculation based on data obtained from the Election Commission of Thailand

We map out these two dimensions in Figure 2. As a result of the grand compromise, Pheu Thai is the only major nationally-oriented party to have made the transition from opposing to supporting the established status quo.²²

Figure 2. Typology of Political Parties



Source: Authors' creation

Pheu Thai's switch of affiliation is poised to have a major impact on the party's trajectory, aligning with Noam Lupu (2016)'s argument that it is the formation of unexpected alliances that often lead to crises in party brands and a collapse in supporter attachment to the party.²³ The crucial question now is how voters will respond to Pheu Thai's break from its pledge to uphold a pro-democracy alliance with Move Forward, opting instead for an alliance with conservative and military-backed parties. Specifically, will Pheu Thai's supporters punish the party for this decision, and if so, how? Conversely, will conservative voters, who were previously opposed to Pheu Thai, reward the party for this decision and begin to see it as a viable party to represent their interests?

We predict that Pheu Thai's ambiguous stance on the status quo will alienate more progressive voters, among both new generations of voters and former Pheu Thai supporters who seek accountability from the party, leading them to support Move Forward. Meanwhile, conservatives who opposed Pheu Thai previously will continue to do so due to their stance on Thaksin, leaving the party in a political no man's land in terms of its ideological appeal to Thai voters. As a result, Pheu Thai will lose support from ideologically committed voters and struggle to gain the support of conservatives, even as it shifts to a pro-establishment position. This will lead to a significant decline both in its vote share and ability to compete by making ideological pledges to its supporters. To compensate, Pheu Thai will be forced to adopt a more locally-oriented election strategy, especially if its economic platform fails to resonate, like in 2023, with the broader electorate. The crisis in Pheu Thai's brand is thus likely to affect all three characteristics of party system stability identified by Mainwaring, Bizarro, and Petrova

(2017): 1) stable main parties, 2) stable vote shares, and 3) stable party linkages (in terms of whether parties mobilise voters through programmatic or clientelist ties).²⁴

CONCLUSION

Our predictions regarding Pheu Thai and the future of the Thai party system will hinge on two crucial factors: whether the divide between supporters and opponents of the conservative status quo remains the dominant voting cleavage, and the extent of political learning that takes place.

First, the 2023 general election could be seen as representing a unique critical juncture, influenced by circumstances and events that are unlikely to converge in the same manner in the near future. The 2023 general election followed unprecedented pro-democracy movements that brought issues concerning the role and status of the monarchy to the fore, including the possibility of amending the lèse-majesté law. The election was also shaped up to be a contest that would potentially determine whether the military leaders associated with the 2014 coup would continue their rule. In the next election, although the voting cleavages formed around these issues are likely to persist, the intensity and focus of these issues might shift due to ongoing political events. Firstly, the possible resurgence of the anti-Thaksin movement could re-center tensions around Thaksin's personality in a manner more reminiscent of the pre-coup landscape. Thaksin's image as a source for sound economic stewardship could also come under attack given Pheu Thai's ongoing difficulties with implementing its policy priorities in the face of continued economic stagnation. Additionally, parties may avoid taking explicit stances on the establishment due to new legal constraints²⁵ or a tacit understanding that such actions could jeopardise their chance of forming a government as it could alienate potential coalition partners.

Second, substantial political learning will likely occur for both political parties and voters. It was previously anticipated that the return to a two-ballot parallel voting system would disadvantage parties with a nationally-focused appeal, such as Move Forward.²⁶ However, the results of the 2023 election clearly demonstrate that national appeal can translate to success in constituency elections, even if this success was more apparent in urban than in rural constituencies.²⁷ Parties will adopt new electoral blueprints to respond to Move Forward's unexpected inroads into their stronghold constituencies and the tendency among voters to view both constituency and party list ballots as support for a political party. Whether parties develop strong party labels and effective social media-based campaigns to cultivate national support, or double down on traditional vote-canvassing tactics and candidate-centered, localised appeals, will depend on whether the system changes and the extent to which they have something compelling to offer voters. In Pheu Thai's case, however, the path it chooses will not only shape its own trajectory but also redefine the broader dynamics of party competition and voter alignment in Thailand for years to come.

ENDNOTES

¹ A notable exception to this prevailing pattern is the election in 1992, when parties had been split into "angel" and "demon" parties that supported or opposed coup-maker General Suchinda Kraprayoon's premiership.

² For example, Kuhonta (2011) described Thailand's political landscape during the 1970s as divided between the conservative military-linked parties, such as the Chart Thai Party, and the parties of the center-right, such as the Democrats and the Social Action Party, along with minor leftist parties. However, Kuhonta argues that most parties were espousing "vacuous programs" supporting democracy and the traditional institutions. See Erik Kuhonta, *The Institutional Imperative: The Politics of Equitable Development in Southeast Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), <http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=18640>.

³ The 1997 Constitution introduced several measures aimed at fostering stronger political parties and curtailing the influence of individual candidates and factions. Among these measures was the implementation of a mixed-member electoral system, which combined single-member districts with a national party list. This replaced the bloc vote system that had previously incentivised a focus on candidate-centred appeal at the expense of party labels. Taking advantage of the new system which came into effect at the same time as the Asian Financial Crisis, the Thai Rak Thai Party won the 2001 elections with a platform that included several economic policies designed as alternatives to the Democrat Party's neoliberal measures. These policies include, for example, the 30-baht universal healthcare programme, the agricultural debt moratorium, and village funds. See Allen Hicken, "Party Fabrication: Constitutional Reform and the Rise of Thai Rak Thai," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 6, no. 3 (2006): 381–407.

⁴ Allen Hicken and Joel Sawat Selway, "Forcing the Genie Back in the Bottle: Sociological Change, Institutional Reform, and Health Policy in Thailand," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (2012): 81.

⁵ A new single-ballot Mixed-Member Apportionment (MMA) electoral system was introduced to curb the influence of large parties like Thaksin's Pheu Thai Party and to fragment the party system so that the 250-member junta-appointed Senate, which was given the transitory power to select the prime minister alongside the 500-member House, could emerge as the dominant voting bloc in this process.

⁶ The looming possibility of losing an election in 2023 under the new election rules further emboldened the already visible fracture in the ruling inner circle between Prayut and his brother-in-arms and leader of the PPRP, Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan. Prawit was rumored to have formed a secret alliance with Thaksin to replace Prayut, whose term limit as prime minister was being challenged in the Constitutional Court.

⁷ Clear ideological misalignment emerged between Pheu Thai and Move Forward with regard to their stances on the royal institution. For example, while serving as Pheu Thai leader in 2020, Sudarat Keyuraphan warned against any rhetoric related to royal reform and asked protest leaders to stick to a previous set of demands that limited itself to calls for Prayut's resignation and amendment of the constitution.

⁸ Even relatively early on during the 2019-23 parliament, Pheu Thai was often accused of having a secret willingness to cut cross-aisle deals, such as during a no-confidence motion where it was alleged that Pheu Thai helped protect Prawit from being targeted during the debates.

⁹ Napon Jatusripitak and Jacob Ricks, "Age and Ideology: The Emergence of New Political Cleavages in Thailand's 2566 (2023) Election," *Pacific Affairs* 97, no. 1 (2024): 117–36.

¹⁰ "Pheu Thai announces 11-party coalition," *Bangkok Post*, 21 August 2023.

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2633114/pheu-thai-announces-11-party-coalition>

¹¹ On the same day as the vote, while Prayut was still in office, Thaksin Shinawatra flew back to Thailand, ending his self-exile of over a decade and a half. Although he was immediately taken to prison, Thaksin was quickly granted permission to leave for a hospital. Thaksin was later granted early release by the Justice Department, although Thaksin's medical issues were never fully explained. A Pheu Thai spokesperson said that Thaksin was suffering from deterioration of his neck bones, while the Pheu Thai defense minister said that Thaksin had broken his bones. It is worth noting that from December 2023 onwards, Pheu Thai assigned Deputy Prime Minister Pirapan Salirathavibhaga, the leader of the conservative United Thai Nation Party, supervision of the Ministry of Justice, thus generating a public impression that Thaksin's treatment had the tacit agreement of all

coalition parties. There has also been speculation that the deal involved an agreement from Thaksin not to take an active role in politics.

¹² One other significant position that was wrestled away from Move Forward was the role of Speaker of the House of Representatives, which instead went to Prachachart politician Wan Muhammad Noor Matha. The Prachachart Party later joined the government coalition which excluded Move Forward.

¹³ It is worth noting that Bhumjaithai is usually seen as more flexible, and has historically been more amenable to dealing with the Thaksinite group. The party was originally a merger between the Neutral Democratic Party and the Friends of Newin Group, which had broken off from Thaksin's Palang Prachachon Party.

¹⁴ Lowell Dittmer, "The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game-Theoretical Analysis," *World Politics* 33, no. 4 (1981): 490.

¹⁵ Additionally, given their diminishing advantages, conservative MPs may find it more electorally beneficial to defect to Pheu Thai, limiting their ability to act as a monolithic force. There have already been persistent rumors that MPs within the Palang Pracharath Party, for example, may choose to defect to Pheu Thai.

¹⁶ Move Forward has so far remained steadfast in its relative silence on Thaksin and his lenient judicial treatment. Although party leader Chaitawat Tulathon ruled out forming a coalition with Pheu Thai, the door does appear to be open to cooperation in perhaps a future parliament.

¹⁷ We have excluded Thai Ruam Palang, which won two seats, because of their unclear stance on Section 112 and on Prayut in the run-up to the election.

¹⁸ One question worth answering is whether or not it is possible to further break down the classification of the conservative parties in order to construct a clearer ideological spectrum. In our view, at this early stage of this current parliament, the various conservative parties have not behaved in sufficiently different ways to distinguish them clearly. It is true that in the runup to the 2023 general election, the parties certainly had different emphases in rhetoric. The United Thai Nation Party, for example, was more stridently nationalist and vocally against Move Forward's proposals than the Palang Pracharath Party, which focused on "leaving behind political division." Since the parliamentary session commenced, however, we have seen the conservative parties behave in much more similar ways. All provided spirited defenses of Section 112, and several have attempted to more explicitly describe themselves as conservative parties.

¹⁹ When it comes to views on the conservative establishment, this discrepancy also occurs because the strategies required for winning elections can differ from those needed to secure the opportunity to govern.

²⁰ Napon Jatusripitak, "The Promise and Peril of Patronage Politics for Authoritarian Party-Building in Thailand," *ISEAS Perspectives*, no. 119 (2022): 5.

²¹ These activities can range from what Aspinall et al. (2022) term micro-particularistic vote-buying to meso-particularistic local community projects and various forms of community service. See Edward Aspinall et al., *Mobilizing for Elections: Patronage and Political Machines in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

²² Prachachart, which also made the switch, is heavily focused on just the three southernmost provinces and wins few votes outside that region.

²³ Noam Lupu, *Party Brands in Crisis, Partisanship, Brand Dilution, and the Breakdown of Political Parties in Latin America*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²⁴ Scott Mainwaring, Fernando Bizzarro, and Ana Petrova, "Party System Institutionalization, Decay, and Collapse." Chapter. In *Party Systems in Latin America: Institutionalization, Decay, and Collapse*, edited by Scott Mainwaring, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018), 21.

²⁵ In January 2024, the Constitutional Court ruled that campaigning to amend the lèse-majesté law is considered an attempt to overthrow the political system and limited such discussions to parliamentary debate.

²⁶ The 2023 election followed the 2019 election, which used a Mixed-Member Apportionment system. This system encouraged the formation of smaller parties that could compete for votes nationally and

convert those votes into party-list seats, without needing to focus on winning constituency seats. Parties that struggled to adapt to the parallel voting system used in 2023 may consider different political survival strategies. This could include merging with other parties or focusing on building stronger local constituencies. A prime example is the breakup of the Chart Pattana Kla Party, with its party chairman Suwat Liptapanlop joining Pheu Thai.

²⁷ Ken Mathis Lohatepanont and Napon Jatusripitak, “One Constituency, Two Parties: Ballot Splitting and Divided Loyalties in Thailand’s Election,” *Fulcrum*, 28 July 2023, <https://fulcrum.sg/one-constituency-two-parties-ballot-splitting-and-divided-loyalties-in-thailands-election/>.

<p><i>ISEAS Perspective</i> is published electronically by: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute</p> <p>30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace Singapore 119614 Main Tel: (65) 6778 0955 Main Fax: (65) 6778 1735</p> <p>Get Involved with ISEAS.</p> <p>Please click here: https://www.iseas.edu.sg/support/get-involved-with-iseas/</p>	<p>ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute accepts no responsibility for facts presented and views expressed.</p> <p>Responsibility rests exclusively with the individual author or authors. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission.</p> <p>© Copyright is held by the author or authors of each article.</p>	<p>Editorial Chairman: Choi Shing Kwok</p> <p>Editorial Advisor: Tan Chin Tiong</p> <p>Editorial Committee: Terence Chong, Cassey Lee, Norshahril Saat, and Hoang Thi Ha</p> <p>Managing Editor: Ooi Kee Beng</p> <p>Editors: William Choong, Lee Poh Onn, Lee Sue-Ann, and Ng Kah Meng</p> <p>Comments are welcome and may be sent to the author(s).</p>
--	---	---