

**Bosses, Bullets and Ballots:
Electoral Violence and Democracy in
Thailand, 1975-2011**

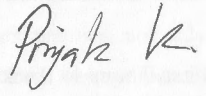
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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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I certify that this dissertation is my own original work. It contains no material which has been accepted for the award of a degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the dissertation.



Prajak Kongkirati

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Abstract

My research examines the relationship between political violence and democratic structures in Thailand since 1975. To examine this relationship, I focus specifically on violence in Thai electoral politics. The main objective of my research is to identify the primary factors and processes that enable or foment violence in elections and to explain the variation in Thai electoral violence across time and space.

Since democratization began in the mid-1970s, electoral processes in Thailand have been tainted with various forms of violence. Apart from targeted assassinations, other forms of election-related violence include attacking polling stations on election day, bombing candidates' and vote canvassers' houses, threatening election-related personnel, burning of political parties' headquarters, and post-election mass protests. In the last fourteen national general elections from January 1975 to July 2011, including several local ones within the same period, hundreds of people have died or been injured as a result of election-related violence. Arising from this are two important elements of variation that call for investigation.

First, the patterns and degrees of violence have shifted over time. Election-related violence first manifested itself in the 1975 and 1976 elections. The intensity and degree of violence increased in the 1980s and remained relatively constant until the late 1990s. Thai society then observed a sharp rise in violence in the 2001 and 2005 elections. Despite predictions that the deep political polarization which occurred after the 2006 military coup would intensify electoral competition and produce higher levels of bloodshed during polling, electoral violence declined in 2007 and 2011. In explaining the changes in forms and patterns of violence over time, I focus on the patrimonial characteristics of the state, the changes in electoral and party systems, the impact of decentralization, and the relative importance of ideological politics. These factors help to explain cross-temporal variation in electoral violence nationwide.

Second, electoral violence in Thailand is unevenly distributed in spatial terms. National-level factors cannot account for the very substantial geographical variation in levels of violence across the country, as data show that some provinces are more violent than others. Since electoral violence in Thailand is province-specific, my research focuses

specifically on the local factors that promote violent conflict. In short, rather than merely examining the macro-political picture at the national level, this research explores micro-political-economic conditions and micro-power structure at the provincial level of Thai politics, and the way in which national and local power interact. I compare three provinces harboring chronic electoral violence, namely Phrae, Nakhon Sawan, and Nakhon Si Thammarat, with three provinces that are relatively peaceful: Phetchaburi, Buriram, and Sa Kaeo. Each case represents different regional locations, socio-economic conditions, and political environments of provincial politics in Thailand. Collectively, they illuminate the dynamics of political contestation and violence in other provinces throughout the country.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

ANFREL	Asian Network for Free Elections
BV	Block Vote Electoral System
CNS	Council for National Security
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
ECT	Election Commission of Thailand
FPTP	First Past the Post Electoral System
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPP	Gross Provincial Product
ISOC	Internal Security Operations Command
NAP	New Aspiration Party
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board of Thailand
NMT	National Municipal League of Thailand
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy
PAO	Provincial Administrative Organization
PPP	Palang Prachachon Party (People's Power Party)
TAO	Tambon Administrative Organization (Sub-district Administrative Organization)
TRT	Thai Rak Thai Party
TTA	Thai Tobacco Growers, Curers and Dealers Association
UDD	United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship

Glossary and Terms

<i>Ammat</i>	Aristocrat, bureaucratic leader, traditional elite
<i>Amphoe</i>	Thailand's district level of local administration
<i>Bann yai</i>	Political boss's resident, powerful political family
<i>Hua khanaen</i>	Vote canvasser, vote broker
<i>Huana Nuai Khum Siang</i>	Vote controlling chief
<i>Itthiphon</i>	Influence, informal power
<i>Jao mae</i>	Female political boss, godmother
<i>Jao pho</i>	Male political boss, godfather
<i>Kamnan</i>	Sub-district head
<i>Kanmueang</i>	Politics
<i>Khanaen</i>	Vote, score
<i>Lueaktang</i>	Election
<i>Mae liang</i>	An unofficial title used in the North to address a respectable well-to-do woman
<i>Mueang</i>	City
<i>Nakleng</i>	Tough guy
<i>Muban</i>	Village
<i>Muepuen</i>	Gunman
<i>Muepuen daorong</i>	Rookie gunman
<i>Muepuen rapchang</i>	Hired gunman
<i>Nai</i>	originally means a member of the nobility, now used to refer to mister, master, or boss
<i>Nakkanmueang</i>	Politician
<i>Nakkanmueang bannok</i>	Provincial politician
<i>Nok song hua</i>	literally "two-headed bird", used to refer to vote canvasser who simultaneously works for two rival candidates
<i>Phai fai</i>	Unlawfully-cast ballot paper
<i>Phatthana</i>	Develop
<i>Pho liang</i>	An unofficial title used in the North to address a respectable well-to-do man
<i>Phu mi itthiphon</i>	Influential people
<i>Prachachon</i>	People
<i>Sapha</i>	Assembly

<i>Sapha nakleng</i>	Hoodlum assembly
<i>Sapha phurapmao</i>	Contractor assembly
<i>Sia</i>	A word used to refer to a very wealthy Chinese businessman
<i>Tambon</i>	Thailand's sub-district level of local administration, higher than the village level but lower than the district level
<i>Thesaban</i>	Municipality
<i>Thongthin</i>	Local
<i>Thurakit kanmueang</i>	Money politics

Units of Measurement

Baht The currency of Thailand; the Thai baht was pegged at Bt25 to \$US1 until 1997. It was devalued following the 1997 economic crisis. As of early 2013, it was valued at Bt30 to \$US1.

Rai 1 acre = 2.5 rai; 1 hectare = 6.25 rai

Note on Language, Translation, and Dates

All translations in this dissertation are mine unless stated otherwise. This includes all quotations from the original Thai text and the transcripts from my interviews. In regard to references, I include English translations for Thai-language works listed in my bibliography, as well as the transliteration of the names of Thai books and authors in Roman letters. For the transliterated words, I have followed the guidelines of the Royal Institute outlined in "Principles of Romanization for Thai Script by Transcription Method," with a few exceptions. I have transliterated "godfather/political boss" as *jao pho*, rather than *chao pho*, as I think it sounds more accurate. With respect to individual names, if there is already a transliteration familiar through general use, I have used it instead of following the Royal Institute guidelines. Finally, in Thailand, dates are calculated in terms of the Buddhist era (BE), which is common era (CE) plus 543 years. This means, for example, that 1997 CE is 2540 BE.

Map of Thailand



Part I: Introduction

Chapter 1

Electoral violence and political development in Thailand

Thailand's democracy and electoral violence

Since the revival of the parliamentary system and elections in the late 1970s, Thai society has witnessed the increasing frequency of assassination of Members of Parliament, nouveau riche tycoons, provincial bosses (or potential bosses), and vote canvassers by professional gunmen. These political killings are private-enterprise murders relating to national and local electoral competition, with political and business rivals contracting gunmen to take out opponents. The gunmen are mainly professional assassins, former security guards, petty gangsters, moonlighting policemen and military personnel. The violence has occurred both before and after elections: effective candidates were threatened with violence, kidnapped or killed by the rivals during the course of campaigning. Disloyal vote canvassers were also killed by their own bosses, and successful vote canvassers were eliminated by opponents from rival camps. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon, Benedict Anderson has advanced the "murder and progress" argument, i.e. that the increasing prevalence of politically motivated murders in the late 1980s reflected the high "market value" of Members of Parliament in Thailand, thereby signaling the greater importance of elections in determining who would obtain political power. The widespread murders of candidates and their canvassers, therefore, indicated the "progress" of parliamentary democracy in Thailand.¹ If this is the case, it is definitely "progress" with a price.

Since the 1980s, elections have gained increasing significance as mechanisms for assuming and maintaining power and for managing political change in Thailand. The decades of the 1980s and 1990s witnessed radically changing structures of Thai politics, from a "military-bureaucratic dictatorship" to a parliamentary political system. In essence, there was a gradual transfer of power from the old group of bureaucratic and military leaders to the new coalitions of national and provincial business elites.

¹ Anderson 1990.

Burgeoning parliamentary democracy further opened space for journalists, academics, activists, non-governmental organizations, and grass-roots people to mobilize and express their voices. Articulation and aggregation of interests grew from extra-bureaucratic forces and created certain impacts on the policy-making process.² At the same time, this period was the starting point of so-called *thurakit kanmueang* (money politics) and the commercialization of electoral politics, activities that led to corruption cycles, unruly electoral campaigns, and abuses of power.³ The widespread perceived negative aspects of money politics led to the formation of a political reform movement in the early 1990s. The major political outcome of the reform movement was a new constitution adopted in 1997, the primary goal of which was to curb money politics and reduce the influence of boss-styled politicians. After the new constitution was promulgated, scholars and political analysts expected all kinds of electoral fraud, including electoral violence, to disappear or dramatically decrease under the new rules of the game intended to make extra-legal methods ineffective and costly.⁴ Violence and intimidation, however, were still employed by many candidates and political parties—and even to a greater extent in some cases. More importantly, violence took new forms. In the 2001 polls, the first election held under the new constitution, violent protests in several constituencies disrupted vote counting and electoral announcements. In the July 2011 poll, Thai society still endured electoral violence during the course of campaigning.

In short, since democratization began in the late 1970s, electoral processes in Thailand have been tainted with various forms of violence. Apart from targeted assassinations, other forms of election-related violence include attacking the polling stations on election day, bombing candidates' and vote canvassers' houses, threatening election-related personnel, burning of political parties' headquarters, and post-election mass protests. In the last fourteen national general elections from January 1975 to July 2011,⁵ including

² Anek 1992; Hewison 1996.

³ Scholars who focus on the negative effects of electoral democracy in the 1980s and 1990s argue that it excluded people who lacked the financial means or political connections and that money politics has deepened political patronage and encouraged corruption. The commercialization of the electoral process, scholars note, means that faction leaders with the greatest patronage resources often gain important cabinet positions when a coalition government is formed (Surin and McCargo 1997; Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994; Sombat 1993).

⁴ On the causes and consequences of Thailand's 1997 constitutional design, see McCargo 2002; Hicken 2007b.

⁵ These ten national elections were held in January 1975, April 1976, April 1979, April 1983, July 1986, July 1988, March 1992, September 1992, July 1995, November 1996, January 2001, February 2005, December 2007, and July 2011.

several local ones within the same period, hundreds of people have died or been injured as a result of election-related violence. Arising from this are two important questions or puzzles that call for investigation. First, electoral violence in Thailand is unevenly distributed across the country—some provinces are more violent than others. Second, the patterns and degrees of violence have shifted over time. Election-related violence first manifested itself in the 1975 and 1976 elections. The intensity and degree of violence increased in the 1980s and remained relatively constant until the late 1990s. Thai society then observed a sharp rise in violence in the 2001 and 2005 elections, even with the newly implemented democratic constitution of 1997 and the emergence of programmatic and policy-oriented politics. Despite predictions that the deep political polarization which occurred after the 2006 military coup would intensify electoral competition and produce higher levels of bloodshed during polling, electoral violence declined in 2007 and 2011.

The changing trends and characteristics of electoral violence in Thailand occurred under the dramatic political changes of the past three decades: a brief democratic interlude from 1973 to 1976; semi-democracy in the 1980s; democratic breakdown (by military coup) in 1991; a long stretch of democratic institutions from 1992 to 2005; democratic (re)breakdown (by another military coup) in 2006; political upheaval from 2007 to 2010; and a return to electoral democracy in 2011. My research examines the relationship between political violence and democracy in Thailand since democratization began in the 1970s. To examine this relationship, I focus specifically on political violence in Thai electoral politics. The main objective of my research is to identify the primary factors and processes that enable or foment violence in elections and to explain the variation in Thai electoral violence across space and time.

It is not an exaggeration to say that academic analysis of political violence is the result of an urgent, real political problem. Throughout the world, many newly developing democratic countries have been coping with intense political conflict and violence at every turn. And yet little is known about how democracies can be set up to avoid or mitigate such serious problems. To find a solution to the problem of political violence in democracies requires us to understand the mechanisms and factors affecting political violence within a democratic context. Until recently, the study of democratization has been dominated by normative claims about the benefits of democratic rules and institutions. Democratization is frequently praised for its capacity to create conditions

for lasting peace, generate economic growth, and reduce human rights violations. According to this argument, the emergence and expansion of democracy leads to a reduction in political violence.⁶ In the past few years, however, many scholarly works have demonstrated that democratic transition and newly competitive electoral politics can be a major source of violence. A substantial body of work has developed to present the view that democratization, particularly in ethnically heterogeneous, weak civil society, and low income countries, is in fact linked to greater human rights violations and large-scale violence.⁷ One of the most important forms of political violence in new democratic society is election-related violence.⁸ Each year hundreds of people lose their lives in connection to electoral competition. The 2008 Human Rights Watch world report documents the inauspicious global phenomenon of election-related violence perpetrated in various forms not only by ruling parties but also by state officials, opposition parties and their affiliated organizations. The common goal of the violence is to change, manipulate and/or distort the outcome of elections. Recent serious cases include Lebanon, Chechnya, Cambodia, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Kenya, Iran, Ivory Coast, Afghanistan, Egypt, and Tunisia.⁹ The widespread nature of this phenomenon points to a pressing need for incisive analysis of violence in the context of electoral politics.

The prevalence of election-related violence in Thailand and elsewhere presents a significant dilemma. Elections, as a vital element of democracy, ideally provide opportunities for citizens to express their preferences and peacefully participate in political systems; they allow, moreover, for the peaceful transfer of power and make it possible to assign accountability to those who govern. In many places and at different times, however, the election process is frequently accompanied by violence. Under certain circumstances, as Timothy Sisk argues, electoral processes turn out to be violence-inducing, rather than violence-reducing.¹⁰ Systematic research is clearly required in order to understand how democratic and electoral processes in some countries have been chronically violence ridden. My research investigates the causes,

⁶ Pate 2008.

⁷ Klopp and Zuren 2007; Snyder 2000.

⁸ For pioneering studies on election-related violence, see Rapoport and Weinberg 2001; Fisher 2002; Bjornlund 2004; Large and Sisk 2006; Klopp and Zuren 2007; Basedau, Erdmann, and Mehler 2007; Sisk 2008.

⁹ Human Rights Watch 2008.

¹⁰ Sisk 2008.

patterns, consequences, and contexts of Thailand's election-related violence in broad comparative perspective.

Electoral violence: typology, geography, and temporal order

There is no consensus in the literature as to whether or not violence is a common phenomenon within democratic politics.¹¹ The debate, however, has been advanced in many different ways. Considerable research has examined how regime type or the level of democracy relates to violence. Much of it focuses on the question of whether some regime types exhibit a higher propensity for violence than others.¹² Another strand of research focuses on how changes in regime type lead to violent conflicts.¹³

The seminal work on this issue is Hegre et al. (2001). The authors employ a cross-national, large-*N* statistical study that uses data from 152 countries in the period from 1816-1992, and ask two research questions: 1) Are strong democracies and harsh autocracies conducive to peace, while semi-democracies are prone to violence? and 2) Do states in political transition experience more violence? They conclude that consolidated democracies and harshly authoritarian states experience less violence, and intermediate regimes (regimes intermediate between a democracy and an autocracy) are the most conflict prone. Furthermore, they find that political violence also seems to be associated with political change, whether toward greater democracy or greater autocracy. States in political transition, they conclude, thus experience more violence. In a nutshell, Hegre et al. posit a generalized proposition that countries which have a semi-democratic regime and are in political transition will experience the greatest degree of civil violence.¹⁴ The implications of their causal explanation and related generalized proposition are enormous. With this line of generalized argument, there is a growing literature based on large-*N* data sets and also case studies that posit a link between democratization and large-scale violence.¹⁵ These studies suggest an inverted U-shaped relationship between violence and democratization in which there is more violence in the transitional moment when incumbents and challengers confront each other and less

¹¹ See debates in Hegre et al. 2001; Zielinski 1999; Jagers and Gurr 1990; Krain 1998; Carothers 2007; Tilly 2003.

¹² Rummel 1994; Mann 2005.

¹³ Snyder 2000; Francisco 1995; Saideman et al. 2002.

¹⁴ Hegre et al. 2001: 35.

¹⁵ Muller and Weede 1990; Gurr 1993; Fein 1995; Huntington 1997; Uvin 1999; Zielinski 1999; Snyder 2000; Klopp 2001; Mousseau 2001; Gagnon 2005; Pate 2008.

violence when regimes are either mainly authoritarian or democratic.

The existing literature has clearly pointed out the potential relationship between democratization and violence, but many questions remain unresolved. To be more specific, the existing literature's effort to analyze the relationship between political violence and democracy is far from complete, and is in need of further development along three axes of variation: types of violence, locations of violence, and timing of violence. First, in terms of *typology*, most of the existing literature does not distinguish among various types of political violence. The mere level of violence cannot meaningfully tell us about the relationship between political violence and democracy.¹⁶ In fact, current arguments concerning violence and democratization tend to come out of ethnic conflict studies. They measure the level of violence by looking primarily at ethnic conflict, and use the ethnic conflicts and civil war data sets to establish the link between democratization and violence.¹⁷ It is highly problematic to measure the political violence in any country by only counting only the frequency of civil war. Civil war is only one specific type of political violence. In addition to civil war, there are several other types of violence that promote or demonstrate a country's political instability, i.e. genocide, riots, pogroms, terrorism, and electoral violence. Harsh autocracies classified by many studies as "peaceful" polities commonly have historical records of committing violence on a mass scale. I therefore argue that we need to disaggregate different types of political violence and examine how they come into play differently during the democratization period.

Electoral violence is a significant type of political violence that has received surprisingly little theoretical or methodological attention compared to other types of political violence. In this research, I will conduct a systematic study of electoral violence and wish to elucidate how electoral violence has its own distinct characteristics, different from other types of political violence. I employ a broad definition of electoral violence in my study, in which electoral violence means

acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process or that arises in the context of electoral competition. When perpetrated to affect an electoral process, violence

¹⁶ See Tilly 2003.

¹⁷ Mousseau 2001; Muller and Weede 1990; Hegre et al. 2001.

may be employed to influence the *process* of elections – such as efforts to delay, disrupt, or derail a poll – and to influence the *outcomes*: the determining of winners in competitive races for political office or to secure approval or disapproval of referendum questions.¹⁸

Under this definition, violent acts can be targeted against various kinds of people or things, including candidates, vote canvassers, voters, or election officials and include the destruction of campaign materials, vehicles, offices, houses, or ballot boxes. The widespread phenomenon of election-related violence tends to reflect the highly personal nature of political systems and/or the decay of the state's monopoly on the use of force. In contrast, mass killings and genocide are more likely to occur under autocratic regimes with strong state capacities.¹⁹ The changing modality of political violence in Thai politics from the state-sponsored killings of the 1950s to the 1970s (targeting opposition parties, student activists, peasant and labor union leaders, and leftist intellectuals) to the prevalence of electoral violence since the 1980s can be viewed as a crucial indicator of the changing nature of state-society relations in Thailand (see further discussion in Chapters 2 and 3).²⁰ Precisely because they have different causes and mechanisms, the mitigation of election-related violence is likely to be very different from the mitigation of civil wars, genocide, and terrorism.

The second axis of variation relates to *location*. Spatially speaking, most of the existing literature examines political violence from the national perspective, and is unable to account for variations in violence at the subnational level. Despite rising violence in democratic transitions, many regions and/or localities in the world still manage to escape the atrocities. Elections in many regions and provinces have been held without violence, even if they are rife with fraud, cheating, or vote-buying. Studies in the case of India show that electoral violence tends to be highly local or regional in concentration. Not every city in India suffers violence in elections; some cities are more violence prone than others.²¹ Even with respect to the mass violence that occurred in Rwanda, research traces significant local variation in the pattern of violence. The violence against Tutsis was

¹⁸ Sisk 2008: 5-6; see also Fischer 2002.

¹⁹ Rummel 1994; Midlarsky 2005.

²⁰ For the role of state officials and right-wing movements in state-sponsored killings during the 1950s-1970s, see Anderson 1977, and Kongkirati 2005, 2008. See also Anderson (1996) on how the decline of the Thai leftist movement made bourgeois democracy an acceptable alternative for the Thai elite because there was no more threat from below.

²¹ Varshney 2002; Wilkinson 2004.

more intense in some areas than in others, and the violence started at different times in different regions.²²

One can observe a similar situation in the case of Thailand, in which electoral violence is a provincial-based phenomenon—some provinces have experienced a higher level of election-related violence than others. Variations across space thus constitute a challenging puzzle in this research and require an examination of political violence at the micro level. To understand the relationship between political violence and democracy, research needs to be conducted at the subnational level.²³ In the course of investigating Thailand's electoral violence, we are compelled to ask why violence occurs in some provinces but not others. What factors or mechanisms make some provinces especially prone to violence? The list of possible factors can be divided into three major categories: socio-economic development, political institutions, and state structure. They include the levels of economic development in each province, the importance of illegal economic activities, the prevalence of criminal networks and local bosses, the degree of monopoly of power held by political elites, the existence of local civil associations, the strength of local media, the capacity and bias of the police, the nature of the political party and electoral system, and the impact of decentralization.²⁴ Among these many factors we can make a separation between local and national factors. State institutions, the political party system, the electoral system, and the impact of decentralization are political institutions that are nationally determined, while the rest are locally determined. National factors cause some countries to be plagued with a higher degree of violence in the election process than others; the historical development of a set of nationally-determined factors also helps us understand the rise and decline of electoral violence nationwide. Nevertheless, these national-level factors do not help us explain the geographical variation of violence within the country. Since electoral violence in

²² Straus 2006. Also see Straus 2007 for comparative research on mass violence and genocide.

²³ See King (2004) for his review of the trends in the study of political violence of what he called the "micro political turn." For the methodological discussion of how subnational comparisons can strengthen the case-study research design by increasing the number of observations and making controlled comparisons, see Snyder 2001.

²⁴ This list of possible factors is based on the varying theoretical lenses commonly used by scholars who study political conflict and violence and seek to explain the causes of violence. For analysis based on economic development, see Gurr 1970, 1993; Collier and Hoeffler 2001; for nature of economic activities and opportunities, see Leonard and Straus 2003, and Collier 2000; for state capacity, see Fearon and Laitin 2003; for criminal and local influential networks, see Brass 1997; for political party and electoral system, see Wilkinson 2004, and Bastian and Luckham 2003; for civil associations, see Varshney 2002; for impacts of decentralization, see Siegle and O'Mahony 2006.

Thailand is province-specific, my research focuses specifically on the local factors that promote significant variation, while holding the national factors constant.

By examining variations at the subnational level, scholars can better understand the dynamics of political violence in a democratic context. To date, there have been many fine studies concerning local power, local strongmen, and central-local relations in Thai and Southeast Asian politics.²⁵ These studies have drawn our attention to the hitherto neglected importance of local politics and its interaction with politics at the national level. While these studies throw much light on the structure and dynamics of local politics, however, political violence is generally not the primary focus of analysis. Thus far, there has been no systematic attempt to connect local politics with diverse patterns of coercion and violence. Without an incisive framework, the role of violence is either understated or over-dramatized in the literature on Thai local politics (as further discussed in the next section). Building on these pioneering studies, my research will integrate literature on local power and politics with studies on political violence with the goal of formulating a new analytical framework.

Third and finally, the existing literature on political violence does not pay adequate attention to the *timing* of violence. Why does violence occur at certain times, but not others? In the case of electoral violence, the timing of violence falls into three main phases in relation to the electoral cycle: pre-election violence, election-day violence, and post-election violence.²⁶ Benazir Bhutto's assassination in Pakistan in December 2007 was a case of pre-election violence, whereas violent clashes in Kenya in the same year were a clear example of post-election violence.²⁷ Electoral violence tends to take on different forms depending on when it occurs on an election timeline.²⁸ Generally, assassinations of political rivals are mainly used during the pre-election period in order to weaken the opponents' campaigns, violent attacks or ambushes often occur on

²⁵ A partial list would include Anek 1996; Arghiros 2001; Nishizaki 2002, 2006; Ockey 1998, 2002, 2004; Nelson 2005; McVey 2000; McCargo and Maisrikrod 1997; McCoy 1993; Lacaba 1995; Sidel 1999; Hutchcroft 2000; Aspinall and Fealy 2003; Hadiz 2003; Nordholt and Klincken 2007, and Trocki 1998.

²⁶ Some scholars break down these phases into more specified categories. Timothy Sisk (2008), for example, divides the cycle into five phases: phase I: the long run-up to elections, phase II: the campaign's final lap, phase III: polling day(s), phase IV: between voting and proclamation, and phase V: post-election outcomes and their aftermath. I use the standard three-phase division.

²⁷ Kenya has a long history of electoral violence going back to the 1990s when multi-party politics was introduced, see Klopp 2001. For a full investigation of the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya, see Human Rights Watch (2008); for Bhutto's assassination, see "Independent UN probe into Bhutto killing concludes second visit to Pakistan," 30 September 2009.

<[²⁸ Fischer 2002, 2004.](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=32376&Cr=bhutto&Cr1=></p></div><div data-bbox=)

election day with an aim to disrupt voting, while protests or riots are commonly mobilized to influence, manipulate, or challenge election outcomes. Apart from investigating the timing of violence in each election, it is very important to examine how the level, intensity, and pattern of violence change from one election to another. Variations across time constitute another crucial puzzle in the study of electoral violence. Examination of the underlying factors that explain different timing and historical development of electoral violence will help us prevent or mitigate the violence more effectively. The major task of my research is to gather the necessary empirical data to evaluate local dynamics, and to locate the causal mechanisms that account for spatial and temporal variations in the patterns of electoral violence in Thailand.

In summary, due to the fact that electoral violence remains an unmapped research field, my study has four goals. First, I demonstrate how election-related violence is different from other types of political violence and thereby deepens our understanding of the relationship between violence and democracy. Although there is growing academic recognition of the need to come to terms with the distinguishing characteristics of electoral violence, there has been no sufficient attempt to create a theoretical concept to explain this phenomenon. Until now, there have been only a few studies focusing on conceptual aspects of electoral violence.²⁹ Therefore my first goal is to develop a clearer conceptual understanding of electoral violence.³⁰ Second, I identify the factors and processes that cause violence in electoral politics. By shifting the focus of study from the center and national levels to the regional and local levels, my research offers a new theoretical contribution to understanding the causes, mechanisms, and dynamics of electoral violence. Third, I offer an explanation of the variation in timing of violence in electoral politics. Lastly, my research bridges a gap that has existed in the literature between studies of political conflict and violence and those of electoral politics. There is a body of “electoral engineering” literature dealing with the question of how electoral systems can be “designed” to prevent conflicts or promote peace in divided societies.³¹ Nevertheless, there is no similar body of literature dealing with the glaringly obvious reality that elections are, more often than not, *a major source of conflict*, rather than a tool to resolve conflict. A theoretical understanding of this political paradox is clearly needed.

²⁹ Rapoport and Weinberg 2001; Fischer 2002, 2004; Sisk 2008; Hoglund 2009; Hoglund and Piyaratne 2009.

³⁰ The significance of concept formation in the social science is discussed in Gerring 1999.

³¹ Horowitz 1991a, 1991b; Lijphart 1977, 2004; Reilly and Reynolds 2000; Reilly 2001; Kumar 1998.

To date, there have been few works that attempt to compare Thailand's experience with those of other countries, or to link its experience to a general theory of political violence. Even comparative studies within the Southeast Asian region itself are relatively rare. Compared to Thailand, research on Indonesian and Philippine political violence is much richer.³² Three edited volumes, Anwar 2005, Croissant 2006, and Abraham, Newman, and Weiss 2010, try to fill this gap by linking political violence in Southeast Asia to broader debates on political violence in the field of comparative politics. Nevertheless, most studies, including the three edited volumes, focus primarily on ethno-religious violence and violence in the context of armed conflict, rather than violence in the context of electoral politics. My research broadens the analysis of conflict and violence in Thailand, a country that has, since the 1980s, gradually become part of the so-called 'third wave' of democratization.³³ Broadening the geography of our debate might help us build a theory in more fruitful directions. I strongly believe that experience from Thailand—and other Southeast Asian countries—can offer valuable empirical insights and theoretical challenges to current debates on political violence and democratization. A stronger body of theoretical work, in turn, can shed new light on Thai and Southeast Asian studies.

Beyond culture, state capacity, and ruthless “godfathers”: heterogeneous power landscapes and the political economy of violence under patrimonial states

My theoretical framework draws upon a synthesis of existing literature on political violence as I seek to overcome the weakness of literature on electoral violence. Above all, explain Rapoport and Leonard (2001), “we lack a theory which enables us to explore the paradoxical and complicated relationships of ballots and bullets.” A few existing articles on elections and violence mention a long list of potential factors that might contribute to the occurrence and persistence of electoral violence, but none have conducted systematic investigations or attempted to make causal inferences. For example, Schimpp and McKernan (2001) mention grievance and greed, access to conflict resources, weak state capacity, and regional and international support. Hoglund

³² On Indonesia, see, for example, Anderson 2001; Columbijn and Lindblad 2002; Robinson 1995; Sidel 2006; Roosa 2006; Cribb 1990; Bertrand 2004; Searle 2002; Varshney, Panggabean, and Tadjoeiddin 2004; Coppel 2006; Hedman 2008; Klinken 2007; Aspinall 2007; Davidson 2008; Barron, Kaiser, and Pradhan 2009. On the Philippines, see, Hedman 2000; Gutierrez 2003; Torres 2007; Sidel 1999; and McCoy 1993.

³³ Huntington 1991.

(2006) identifies the nature of conflict societies, the conflictive dimensions of democracy and democratization, and the design of electoral systems and administration. Patino and Velasco (2006) refer to the personalistic nature of elections, the weakness of the state and electoral institutions, uneven development and poverty, internal security problems, and deepening social cleavages. Sisk (2008) lists social structural conditions, electoral-system choice and the stakes of political competition, the neutrality and competence of electoral administration, and the nature and functioning of the security sector. Therefore there is no substantive theory on electoral violence available for us to test or rely on. My research seeks to overcome this shortcoming by making a valid causal inference with a subnational controlled- comparison research method (explained below). I formulate my analytical framework by building on established theoretical and empirical insights from the literature on political conflicts and violence. In order to clear the way for the insights on which I build my analysis, the initial step is to highlight limitations in the current literature.

First of all, my research is an effort to overcome the limitations of the culturalist explanations of political violence. In this study I argue that to explain the occurrence, or absence, of political violence, cultural, economic, and political factors have to be taken into consideration. These factors are connected. I agree with Rogers Brubaker and David Laitin (1998) that culturalist approaches ought not to be segregated from other approaches in examining political violence. Cultural analyses alone, however, are not able to illuminate political killings. I reject the notion of a “culture of violence,” which suggests violence as inherent in and characteristic of particular culture in particular locations: “African,” “Islamic,” “Indonesian,” or “southern Thai,” for example. I do not think we can assert that some cultures are inherently prone to violence. This notion simplifies and stereotypes those cultures; moreover, it overuses and abuses the concept of “culture” itself.³⁴ For the well-known case, several scholars attempt to explain the prevalence of political violence in Indonesia by claiming that Indonesia has a violent culture. They refer to the “primitive” headhunting culture of many Indonesian regions as exemplars of Indonesian’s deep culture of violence. Others commonly make reference to the running amok as the typical or specific culture of Indonesia, especially in the countryside. They use these “local” cultures to explain why, during 1965-66, the killings spread so quickly and mainly in the rural areas and why many local people committed

³⁴ See Whitehead 2004: 8.

the killings.³⁵ Some scholars suggest that the Javanese shadow puppet play, or *wayang*, portrays the characters on the left of the puppeteer as both wrong and doomed to violent destruction, and thus inclined Indonesians to expect the Communists to be destroyed in a bloody ways.³⁶

Similar arguments have been made by scholars studying Thai politics. A number of scholarly works suggest “culture” is a main factor behind the violent political behavior of Thai people in some regions or provinces, emphasizing factors such as preferences for macho leadership styles and supernatural power, revenge killings, honor codes, anarchistic values etc. Some claim that certain provinces—Phetchaburi, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Chonburi—are more prone to violence than others because they have a strong culture of lawlessness, revenge murder, and village justice that predates the introduction of the parliamentary system and electoral politics.³⁷ The serious flaw of this cultural explanation is that these characteristics are not specific to particular provinces, nor do they primarily reflect a unique “culture” of the areas considered. Other provinces that share similar cultural characteristics were not tainted with violence. More importantly, the “culture of violence” notion, particularly influential in Thai criminological studies, fails to distinguish between ordinary crime and political-motivated murders. These two categories of violence have different causes and motivations; provinces that face a high rate of homicide are not necessarily plagued with political violence, and vice versa. Phetchaburi is a prime example; it is infamous for crime and concentrations of gunmen, but witnesses orderly and peaceful elections (see details in Chapter 10). To understand violent incidents in elections, we need to look far beyond local cultural norms and values.

Some scholars also argue that people in some regions are disposed towards acts of violence; they are quick tempered, rebellious, subversive, disorderly, and love fighting. One Thai scholar, for example, describes people in the southern region as skillful speakers who are strong-headed, stubborn, direct, frequently involved in heated arguments, and lacking consideration for the feelings of others. He claims that bullfighting, a popular sport in the south, is a cultural metaphor that truly reflects the

³⁵ See explanations and discussion of headhunters and people running amok in Carr and Tan 1976; Dijk 2002; Colombijn 2001, 2002.

³⁶ This explanation fails to deal with the complexity of Javanese shadow puppet philosophy. See Anderson 1965.

³⁷ On Nakhon Si Thammarat, see Natthawit 2000; Nippon et al. 1990; Worawan et al. 2000. For Chonburi, see Narit 2003; Atcharaphon 1992; for Phetchaburi, see Thawiro 2005; Pongsak 1998; Phakphum 2008.

character of southern people.³⁸ It is interesting to note that this type of character-based explanation is popular among southern Thai scholars.³⁹ They use it to explain southerner's voting behavior, their particular styles of electoral campaigning, and other political behavior in general. This explanation falls under the behavioral approach which unravels political violence by dealing with social-psychological factors facilitating violence. To examine the matter in this vein, behavioralist scholars develop and provide some plausible explanations. The classic explanation focuses on people's minds: some humans are violent by nature so violent events occur when violent people congregate. We can refer to this view of political violence as propensity-driven behavior. Scholars who consider politically violent action as propensity-driven behavior locate its cause within the actor, calling attention to genetic, emotional, or cognitive peculiarities that incline a given individual or category of persons toward particularly destructive behavior.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, there are many weak points and shortcomings in this explanation. The boundary between violent and peaceful people actually blurs. Many studies show that under certain circumstances, ordinarily peaceful persons can become involved in organizing or perpetrating violent activities.⁴¹ It is problematic how some scholars studying Thai politics make neat distinctions between violent and non-violent bosses by arguing that the latter type of boss gained their dominance through political shrewdness and skillful manipulation, not the use of force.⁴² I argue that non-violent bosses can be violent if necessary or if circumstances require it. The use of force and political manipulation could be employed by the same boss in a different situation. A key to their political success is their ability to know and make the right decision as to when and how they should use violent tactics. Fear can be as effective as loyalty in acquiring and maintaining power.

To sum up, attempts to use the notion of a "culture of violence" and/or a "character-based explanation" to account for political violence are unsatisfactory. Many scholars have criticized these explanations as cultural determinism which is inadequate to explain violence. Generally speaking, it is difficult to argue, either theoretically or empirically,

³⁸ Akhom 2000: 56.

³⁹ Akhom 2000; Sarup and Thongsai 2000; Ruohomaki 1999; Nakharin 2008.

⁴⁰ See a summary and critique of this approach in Tilly 2001.

⁴¹ See, for example, Browning 1998 and Staub 1989.

⁴² McVey 2000; Nishizaki 2004, 2006, 2008.

that political violence flows directly from deeply encoded cultural propensities to violence. To explain why political violence happens, it is essential to explore the various factors and mechanisms that enable and motivate the killings.

Beyond culturalist and behaviorist explanations, there are two additional strands of argument in the causal explanation of violence. The first and older strand, "the demand-side" argument, emphasizes individual motivation, resource mobilization, and strategies of political actors as the main factors causing violence. According to this argument, political violence occurs because there is a group of aggrieved people, with enough resources, who employ violence to change the conditions of their lives and achieve their political goals. "The demand-side" argument commonly focuses on two types of factors: those which motivate people to use violence and those which enable them to use it. The motivating factors include group grievances, discrimination, economic inequality, and a group's sense of identity.⁴³ The resources that enable mobilization include money, weapons, equipment, manpower, information, and organization.⁴⁴ More recent literature on political violence tends to reject the significance of group grievances, resource mobilization, discrimination, ethnic identity, and economic inequality in explaining violence and rebellion. Such scholars as Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Lacina (2006) claim that group grievance and economic inequality are too common to explain the occurrence of political violence because these factors exist in almost every country but political violence is still rare.

They look instead at the structural conditions that favor or facilitate violence. This second strand of research is known as the "supply-side" argument. According to this argument, the most important structural condition that allows political violence to occur and persist is the decay of the state.⁴⁵ Weak state structures, they argue, provide opportunities and incentives for people to employ violent strategies. The limitation of such states, so the argument goes, is their inability to enforce the law and manage intense conflicts. This contributes to the persistence of conflict. State weakness thereby

⁴³ The most influential theory along this line of argument is that of relative deprivation developed in Gurr 1970. Two decades on, Gurr (1993) still argued that group grievances and the strength of group's sense of identity are significant in causing ethnic conflicts. For other seminal works that give importance to individual or group motivation in explaining violence, see Tambiah 1996, Horowitz 2001, and Peterson 2002.

⁴⁴ The classic explanation of collective violence using resource mobilization theory is Tilly 1978. The early works of Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, developing the idea of "greed and grievance," also fit into the resource mobilization explanation. See Collier 2000, and Collier and Hoeffler 2001. They shifted their focus, however, in later works.

⁴⁵ Fearon and Laitin 2003; Leonard and Straus 2003.

not only permits political violence to continue but also indirectly encourages it since political actors can commit violence with little fear of legal punishment. As many theorists have demonstrated, state responses (or non-responses) play a crucial role in the success or failure of violent tactics.⁴⁶

From the perspective of theory building, the theoretical debate between demand-side and supply-side literature is not constructive or fruitful. Demand-side and supply-side factors function like two sides of the same coin; in combination, they produce political outcomes. I argue that a better causal explanation of political violence is the one that combines both factors in a single theoretical account. In other words, we need to look for explanations involving both actors *and* structures. Structural factors create the conditions and incentives, and determine the costs involved for actors in employing violence in connection to elections. The goals and strategies of actors are equally important in explaining how the violence is used and organized.

On structural (or enabling) factors, I argue that we need to go beyond the state capacity dimension. State capacity is significant but not sufficient as an explanatory factor. Weak state capacity, as many theorists argue, provides opportunities for political actors to employ violent strategies. In Thailand, the use of violence and other abusive methods by local bosses during election campaigns is common knowledge to local government officials. There have been, however, very few arrests or prosecutions for those legal violations. The fact is, in many provinces, local administrations are weak and their officials are incompetent and corrupt. Moreover, several government officials, police officers in particular, are involved in those crimes themselves and therefore ignore the legal violations. There is evidence showing that, in many cases, police officers are subordinates or business partners of godfathers in their province.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, not all weak states suffer from widespread election-related violence. In analyzing the state's role in electoral violence, the discussion should not be limited to the capacity of the state as an attributing factor.⁴⁸ The weak-state argument highlights only one dimension of violence propagation—that weak states fail to achieve a monopoly control on the use of

⁴⁶ Tilly 2003; Wilkinson 2004; Payne 2000.

⁴⁷ See details in all empirical chapters, especially Chapter 5 and 6. Also see Pasuk and Sungsidh 1996; Pasuk, Sungsidh, and Nualnoi 1998.

⁴⁸ Most scholars in the field propose “state weakness” or “weak state capacity” as one of the most important causes of electoral violence. See Sisk 2008; Schimpp and McKernan 2001; Fischer 2002 and 2004.

legitimate force in their territory and thus cannot control violence in the political sphere, including in the electoral process.

It is equally, or more important to understand why political actors, particularly business politicians, need to capture state power in the first place. Positions in public office provide material incentives, which lead us to discuss the character of the state apparatus. I argue that a state that exhibits strong patrimonial features—as opposed to “rational-legal” bureaucratic structure—provides not only opportunities but also strong incentives for predatory oligarchs to control state machinery. Under patrimonial states, which “lack above all the bureaucratic separation of the ‘private’ and the ‘official’ sphere,”⁴⁹ political offices constituted the major source of rent-seeking opportunities, providing an avenue to lucrative contracts, licenses, concessions, quotas, loans, and power to manipulate laws and regulations.⁵⁰ The stakes of winning elections under patrimonial states are extremely high as victory enables winners access to state coffers; in this structure, business-politico elites become actively involved in electoral competition using all necessary means, legal or illegal, non-coercive or coercive, to eliminate their opponents and win seats. The higher the level of spoils that political office provides, the more cut-throat electoral competition becomes. Therefore, an understanding of the development and changing character of the Thai patrimonial state is vital for the understanding of electoral violence; the issue is further discussed in Part II: Historical Development (Chapters 2-3).

In addition to national institutional settings, we have to consider Thai provincial economic and power structures (both formal and informal). National state structures establish structural incentives for the acquisition of power and the national capital is the desired destination of all ambitious power seekers. The first step to power, however, is located in provincial towns. Those who aspire to capture state power first have to control the provinces—the political space in which they build networks, negotiate and compete, and, if necessary, intimidate and kill their rivals. Electoral violence in Thailand is, as mentioned earlier, province-based. The main focus of this research is thus on the degree of existence and absence of power monopoly at the provincial level. I examine the formal and informal economic and political structures in selected provinces. Political struggle among elite and influential groups in each province is of special attention, in

⁴⁹ Weber 1978, II: 1028 quoted in Hutchcroft 1998: 5.

⁵⁰ The account of the way in which Philippine oligarchs and cronies capture state apparatus and penetrate the administrative departments of government through legislative control is highly pertinent for comparison. See Hutchcroft 1998.

order to understand the ways power seekers interact, either in contention or in compromise, with one another.⁵¹ In short, rather than merely examining the macro-political picture at the national level, this research explores the micro-socioeconomic conditions and micro-political processes at the provincial level of Thai politics, and the way in which national and local power structures interact. The location of each province is significant because different locations provide different economic opportunities and political environments. The main explanatory factor, however, is not the geography *per se* but the political and economic landscape of the province. The interdependent relationships between local economy and local politics are clearly explained by Emmanuel S. de Dios, in his work on the origins, functions and consequences of local power in the Philippines:

The nature of local political relationships depends primarily on the social and economic structure of the communities involved. Political leaders (always remembering the specific circumstances that they must compete in electoral contests) must adjust and accommodate themselves and their behavior to what are largely exogenous conditions, and to changes in the economic and social environment. They must do so if they are to appropriate benefits from political office, since the character of such benefits themselves is strongly conditioned by such environments.⁵²

Such an argument can be exemplified by looking at the type of local political economy that makes any province prone to violent electoral competition. The most obvious dangerous landscapes are border or “frontier communities”, where the central government has limited reach. In these communities, property rights are often in dispute, and illegal operations and smuggling prevalent. Private violence can be a popular means to assert authority and enforce business deals, given the weak existence of law enforcement entities in the area. It is also not difficult for perpetrators to run away from government officials as they can easily find hiding places in neighboring countries.⁵³

⁵¹ For the long debate over the character of power structures and control in local politics, see Dahl 1961 and Mills 1956. Mills argues that America’s governments are under control of a unified and demographically narrow power elite. Dahl, on the contrary, examines the power structures in the city of New Haven, Connecticut, as a case study, and finds that there are several different elites involved, who work both in contention and in cooperation with one another. This led to the pluralist argument of democratic politics proposed by Dahl.

⁵² De Dios 2007: 175-76.

⁵³ Cambodia is a popular destination for Thai politicians in this regard. At least two powerful political bosses went into exile in Cambodia to escape prosecution.

For these reasons, many scholars of Thai local politics make a connection between border areas and widespread violence among local bosses.⁵⁴ The causal linkage between these two variables is not entirely wrong but can be misleading. As I argue, the main explanation lays in the local political economy not the geography per se. Border areas are undoubtedly prone to illegal activities and lawless violence but my research shows that not all border provinces fall under the curse of geography. The best example is Sa Kaeo, a northeastern province, which shares a long borderline with Cambodia and stands as one of the most peaceful and orderly provinces in the country (see Chapter 12).

This leads to three further arguments. First, illegal activities and political mafia can exist in diverse geographical areas beyond the frontiers. Smuggling, contraband trading, and drug trafficking might heavily concentrate in the coastal and border provinces, but other kinds of illegal enterprises such as illicit logging, prostitution, and gambling, are found everywhere.

Second, it is not only illegal businesses that carry a high risk of violent electoral competition, but also two types of rent-seeking activities—natural resource extraction and government-regulated businesses. These two enterprises require very low skills and technology but generate high profits as they are monopolistic by nature; both also share similarities in their heavy dependence on government connections and protection for the success and continuity of businesses. In contrast to profit-seeking or productivity-improving economic activities in which “assets and incomes are won and lost on the basis of the ability of the business owner to develop the property,” rent-seeking is an activity in which “ownership of property alone guarantees the access to wealth... [and] the operation of the state determine the assignment of and the continued enjoyment of economic advantages.”⁵⁵ In general, this “property” includes government protection from competition through quotas, tariffs, access to loans and grants, and licenses and concessions. And once these properties are obtained, the obtainers need not develop them; rather, “they only need to maintain and expand their ownership of economic advantage.”⁵⁶ Since natural resource extractive businesses (like logging, mining, quarries, etc) and businesses on which the government imposes strict regulations (such as liquor or cigarette dealerships, tobacco curing, buses, gas stations, slaughter houses,

⁵⁴ Sombat 2000; Ockey 1993, 2000; Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994; McVey 2000.

⁵⁵ Montes 1988: 64-66, quote in Hutchcroft 1998: 20-21.

⁵⁶ As a result, the “internal efficiencies and investments” of their companies become a secondary concern (Montes 1988: 64-66, quote in Hutchcroft 1998: 21).

and construction) are enormously profitable, they attract plenty of aggressive contenders. And, in Thailand as in many countries, winning elections is the surest way to ownership of property and monopoly rents emanating from administrative offices. Under these circumstances, elections become a zero-sum-game with an economic monopoly at stake. The provinces with a high propensity to electoral violence are the ones in which the leading political actors come from business elites whose wealth is primarily based on illegal and/or rent-seeking economies. These violence-prone provinces are found in every region (north, northeast, central, and south). It is the political economy, not the topography or location, of these provinces that determine violent outcomes.

Third and finally, in addition to local economic structures, electoral violence is further shaped and determined by local power structures. Elections are peaceful in provinces under complete control of a single elite or one political dynasty, even though underground and rent-seeking activities are pervasive. It is peaceful because elections are void of real competition. Political monopoly is definitely hard to achieve, but once obtained it is highly rewarding; it wards off competition and acquires submissiveness from other people. Provincial bosses who control absolute power are able to discourage challengers easily and command local government officials to manipulate electoral process for their advantage. They need not resort to overt violence. On the other hand, electoral violence is most likely to occur when power monopoly is absent. The research findings demonstrate that both a polarized power structure (where two groups compete for power) and a fragmented power structure (where multiple groups compete for power) facilitate violence. Without a monopoly, no political group is able to enlist the local state apparatus's full protection and cooperation. The lack of a dominant political force also turns that provincial territory into a wide-open grab for power. As discussed above, all political bosses strive for a monopoly since it produces massive wealth, privilege and protection. But without monopolistic power, voting fraud and/or electoral manipulation are not options for struggling bosses. Therefore, political bosses have to fight fiercely against their business and political rivals to win. The path to power monopolies is prone to end in violence and bloodshed. But localized monopolies of economic and political activities are responsible for producing a local peaceful political order. In this sense, violence is the precursor of local monopolies and "peace." This guiding framework, pointing to the significance of the power structure, helps us understand that the mere existence of a godfather in any province does not necessarily render elections in that province bloody.

On the demand-side, or actor-factors, I agree with Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Lacina (2006) that resource mobilization is too common to explain the variation in violence. In general, guns, aggressive hoodlums, and unemployed young men are all in plentiful supply in developing countries—Thailand is no exception.⁵⁷ A combination of factors makes the supply of violence in Thailand relatively cheap and abundant. Most important is the large scale Thai illegal economy, which includes a wide range of enterprises, including drug trafficking, goods and human smuggling, contraband trading, illicit logging, prostitution, and gambling. Since the 1980s, the illegal economy has rapidly developed side by side with Thailand's economic growth.⁵⁸ Because of the unlawful nature of the businesses, the owners need protection, and in the Thai system, there are two available sources of protection: government and illegal rackets. Organized crime provides private protection services to entrepreneurs who lack access to official protection. The growth of the underground economy strengthened the power of underworld bosses and spurred the trade in arms and the business of hired gunmen. For several decades since the Cold War, Thailand has been part of cross-border arms trading—a lucrative business that gives handsome profits to the politicians, government officials and businessmen involved. Firearms are exported to neighboring countries, but large numbers of illicit weapons are sold within Thailand for use by organized crime and gangsters.⁵⁹ Guns are thus highly accessible and cheap in the underground market, as one local government official in Sa Kaeo said, "Contraband guns are everywhere. People know how to get them whenever they want." In provincial towns, notes the official, one need pay only 15,000 baht (USD 500) to possess an automatic handgun.⁶⁰ Thailand's underworld sells not only cheap guns, but also hired assassins. In the 1950s, professional hit men provided protection to those in urban rackets, particularly gambling and prostitution, eliminating enemies and trouble makers.⁶¹ With the resurgence of

⁵⁷ With the exception of some countries, such as Malaysia, that have strict gun control laws, thus making access to coercive resources more difficult and expensive.

⁵⁸ There are many overlapping terms for the informal economy, such as underground economy, black market, shadow economy, parallel economy. Pasuk, Sungsidh and Nualnoi (1998: 5-6) noted that this type of economy can be broken down into five categories: a) illegal activities, such as drug trafficking, smuggling, etc; b) tax evasion; c) income from corruption; d) informal sectors activities, such as self-employment and casual work; and, d) household work done by family members but not included in value-added of the formal economy, such as caring of the sick and elders. In this research, I focus on the first category—the illegal economy.

⁵⁹ Pasuk, Sungsidh and Nualnoi 1998: 127, 138-39, 152-53; Research and Development Division, Police Department 1996.

⁶⁰ Interview, local government official, Sa Kaeo, 4 April 2002. After interview, this government official offered to take me to the "black-market" to buy a cheap gun for myself.

⁶¹ See Suriyan 1989 for a firsthand account of the origin of hired gun business.

parliamentary democracy in the early 1980s, the contract-killing business expanded into political murders associated with elections. Contract killing was extremely profitable and thus attracted a lot of people. As a competitive business, the market price for political assassination was inexpensive. By the 1990s, the minimum price for killing key vote canvassers was 50,000 baht, while killing an MP cost 1 million baht.⁶² For business politicians, the price was, however, rather low compared to the total cost of their election campaign (which was about 60-80 million baht per candidate).⁶³

Since the 1980s Thailand has witnessed growth in violence-providing services; classified as the “*violence specialists*” and “*violence entrepreneurs*.” Gunmen, unlike other electoral stakeholders, specialize in exercising physical force. For them, violence is the enterprise, and a resource. According to the literature, they are “violent specialists”: “who control [coercive] means of inflicting damage on persons and objects” and have “extensive skills” in using violence. Generally speaking, Charles Tilly argues, “they deliver damage more efficiently and effectively than other kind of political actors. They deliver damage under discipline” and “often they do so at the behest of employers who themselves never engage directly in damaging acts.”⁶⁴ In Thailand, most violence specialists work through brokers or “agents”, who usually invest in hired gunmen as another branch of illegal business.⁶⁵ According to Charles Tilly, these agents are “violent entrepreneurs,” “activating, connecting, coordinating, and representing participants in violent encounters.”⁶⁶ They act as intermediaries bringing violence specialists together for business.

Because coercive resources—weapons, violence specialists and violence entrepreneurs—are pervasive in Thailand, they are not explanatory factors for variations in violence. Not all provinces with gunmen dens and a thriving arms trade suffer from violence. Some provinces with few gunmen, on the other hand, have violent

⁶² Wathana 1995: 30-31; Dittita 2005: 119-122.

⁶³ This estimated number is applied to MP seats in the 1990s; the information was revealed by candidates competing in that period (see Chapter 3 for details).

⁶⁴ Tilly 2003: 35, 232-33.

⁶⁵ Interview, senior police in the Crime Suppression Division, Bangkok, 11 April 2012.

⁶⁶ Tilly 2003: 34. “Violent specialists” and “violent entrepreneurs” are Tilly’s terms, but they might be more clearly described as “violence specialists” and “violence entrepreneurs.” For violence entrepreneurs in Russia, see Volkov 2002; in India, see Brass 1997; in Italy, see Gambetta 1996; in the Philippines, see Gutierrez 2003. Some scholars employ the term “violent entrepreneur” to explain the behavior of rebel leaders in African civil war, who make profit from mass violence mobilization against the state (see Collier 2000; Mueller 2000; Le Billon 2006; for a critique of this argument, see Kalyvas 2003, 2006; Wood 2003; Ballentine and Sherman 2003; Weinstein 2006).

confrontations between opposing candidates. The question is: why do certain candidates employ violent methods, and under what circumstances? Money, violent men, and coercive tools are not obstacles to the use of violence as argued by scholars.⁶⁷ It is *political demand* that determines the occurrence of electoral violence. Wherever demand emerges, supply follows. To understand the timing and location of electoral violence in Thailand, we need to move beyond the coercive resource factors and focus specifically on the motivating factors (the demand side) that compel political actors to use violent strategies.

The electoral murder market developed out of aspiring politicians' need to eliminate opposition. It is the provincial business-cum-political elites or *jao pho* (godfathers) who drove the demand for violence in Thai electoral politics.⁶⁸ They employ "violence specialists" to act on their behalf. The service of hired gunmen provides political bosses with distance from violent acts. When political murder occurs during elections, officials can, at best, link the murder to gunmen or gunmen's agents. Furthermore, for politicians, the hired gun business obviates the cost of building a private army. Thai political bosses normally have only four to five personal goons protecting them.⁶⁹ This pattern contrasts with how political bosses in some other countries build their own large networks and/or organization of violence specialists. In India, for example, Paul Brass describes the existence of "institutionalized riot systems"—the system of organized gangs created by politicians to foment riots "as a strategic tool" to win elections.⁷⁰ In Thailand, political elites employ many local people to work under their networks for vote-collecting (rather than the violence-instigating). This group of local people is known as *hua khanaen* or vote canvassers, whose main jobs is conducting campaign, canvassing votes, and buying votes for candidates. They are essentially "political entrepreneurs," not "violence entrepreneurs," as most activities are non-coercive. Violence specialists, on the contrary, engage in threatening opponents, burning opposition candidates' offices, and killing opposing candidates and vote canvassers. These specialists on violence are not necessarily part of the provincial boss's network. Most literature on Thai political

⁶⁷ For example, Hicken (2007: 53-54) argues that coercion is not adopted by every candidate because "most candidates lack sufficient resources (money, men, and connections) to use violence as their primary electoral strategy."

⁶⁸ The term *jao pho* originally means a local spirit and is "alluded to supernatural power to act above the law" (Baker and Pasuk 2005: 239). Since the late 1970s it has become a translation of "godfather" and popularly used by media and academics to refer to provincial bosses.

⁶⁹ Interview, underworld protection racket's owner, Bangkok, 6 April 2012. Only few eminent bosses are able to build a large entourage.

⁷⁰ Brass 1997. See also Varshney 2003 and Wilkinson 2006 for further discussion of political violence and mass organization in India.

studies conflates political entrepreneurs with violence entrepreneurs and thus fails to comprehend the complex operation and dynamics of electoral violence in Thailand.⁷¹

Provincial bosses are relatively new political actors, who entered politics after the October 1973 uprising and rose to power during the semi-democratic period of the 1980s. Local godfathers hold sway in the district or province, acting as heads of a patronage system in which they have enormous control over social, economic, and political activities. The power of local godfathers depends on their ability to monopolize the local economy and political system. They are involved in either illegal businesses or rent-seeking activities requiring coercive power and government protection for the extraction of surplus. By the 1990s, they had become leaders of political factions in several political parties.⁷² My research shows that, among all electoral stakeholders, provincial bosses are responsible for the most electoral violence in Thailand.⁷³ The more important point, however, is that political bosses only adopt violent strategies in specific circumstances, and the violence serves broader business-political purposes than merely acquiring votes.

Prominent bosses need violence to achieve two major goals: a) eliminating business-politico rivals who threaten their conquest of a monopoly in elections, and b) consolidating their power networks. For election victory, violence and intimidation is, as Allen Hicken and many other scholars argue, not the only strategy to win elections. Thai candidates use many strategies to win votes, including “targeting government pork and patronage to a candidate’s constituents,” “relying on name and frame to cultivate a personal vote,” “using patron-client relationships to engender loyalty and support,” or direct vote buying.⁷⁴ Boss-type candidates are usually in a stronger position than other types of candidates because of their superior financial and political resources. At the same time, for provincial business elites, because of their involvement in illegal and rent-seeking activities, winning elections are more important than for other types of candidates. When boss-type candidates face non-boss contenders, the boss-types need not to resort violence because they can defeat their competitors with stronger vote-canvassing networks supported by healthy war chest. Violence is, however, necessary

⁷¹ See, for example, Sombat 1987; Pichai, Somchet, and Vorawit 1988; Phoemphong 1990; Arghiros 1995; Callahan and McCargo 1996; Anyarat 2007; 2010.

⁷² McVey 2000; Ockey 2000.

⁷³ In Chapters 3 and 4, I discuss in detail all types of actors, including provincial bosses, who perpetrate violence in elections.

⁷⁴ Hicken 2002, 2007.

when confronted with the same political species—the rival boss—in the battle for the monopoly of power. Boss-types pitted against each other employ similar (dirty) tactics, and have similar power and wealth. Under these circumstances, the only option is to eliminate their opponents by force. Moreover, when rival provincial elites campaign against each other, business and political conflict intertwine, business rivals become political enemies, and electoral competition becomes a war of all or nothing. Therefore, provincial elections are most prone to violence when boss-style candidates confront each other over a power monopoly.

For consolidating power, bosses deploy violence to get rid of disloyal subordinates. These insubordinates are mainly vote canvassers who double-deal during election campaigns. Eliminating disloyal vote canvassers may not ensure electoral victory but preserves boss power. Bosses lose respect and control if they do not discipline insubordinates. In these circumstances, the use of coercion serves the long-term purpose of authority maintenance, rather than merely the immediate goal of electoral winning.

Unfortunately, the existing literature on local Thai politics has neglected, downplayed or otherwise oversimplified the motivations of provincial bosses and the role of violence and coercion in shaping economic accumulation and political competition.⁷⁵ Until now, there have been three competing frameworks on Thai electoral politics and local studies: the patron-client relationship, the “godfather” model, and the identity and everyday politics analysis. The patron-client view is the longstanding, and still influential, framework adopted by many scholars (as well as media and political commentators) to explain the function of the Thai political system and political behavior, particularly in rural politics.⁷⁶ The analytical focus of this classic framework is on personalistic and imbalanced relationships between persons of higher social status and those of lower status in face-to-face and long-lasting ties of reciprocity. Patron-client relations are portrayed as an enduring character of Thai social culture and values, primarily based on kinship, personal gratitude, smooth-interpersonal relations, and conflict avoidance. Political organizations and activities, scholars argue, build on and revolve around these traditional values. Relations between patrons and subordinates, elites and followers, are

⁷⁵ See Sidel (1999) for his critique on this issue in the Philippines studies.

⁷⁶ A partial list of significant works would include Akin 1969; Arghiros 2001, 2002; De Young 1966; Fishel 2001; Johnston 1980; Kemp 1976; Moreman 1969; Neher 1974; Nelson 1998, 2005; Porter 1976; Sharp and Hanks 1978; Pichai, Somchet, and Vorawit 1988; Phoemphong 1990.

largely “symbiotic, smooth, and reciprocal.”⁷⁷ In his critique on the shortcomings of patron-client framework, Kerkvliet rightly points out that even though “patron client and other personal relations are indeed significant in Philippine political life,” the framework “leaves out and obscures a great deal about Philippine politics.”⁷⁸ His critique can be appropriately applied to Thai political studies. The most serious problem with the framework is that it leaves little or no room for direct confrontation, open conflict and violent struggle between people. Under the patron-client framework, coercion and violence play no vital role in electoral competition, economic exploitation, and social relations. Relying on the static patron-client model, scholars and political observers have failed to acknowledge the evolving relationships between politicians, vote canvassers, and gunmen that emerged after the 1980s which are less reciprocal, more conflictual and unstable, and business-oriented.

The two other interpretations of Thai politics highlight issues that the patron-client framework omits, but they also have crucial shortcomings. The identity and everyday politics framework contribute to the field of Thai studies by demonstrating that there are other values and ideas, and different lines of cleavage and struggle beyond personal, familial factions that shape political organization and behavior. For instance, Yoshinori Nishizaki’s study on Banharn Silpa-archa argues that Banharn’s hegemonic power in Suphanburi stems from the fact that Banharn has successfully created positive provincial identity among Suphanburi residents through various kinds of projects and activities. Andrew Walker’s notion of a rural constitution based on his study of one northern village describes how the locally-embedded sets of values formulate and shape the political preferences and political actions of villagers.⁷⁹ These perceptions notwithstanding, the identity and everyday politics advocates share a disregard for the significance of violence in economic and political compositions. The difference lays in their (shifting) focus on ordinary people—the bottom-up view—showing how certain types of political leadership are more successful and more popular than others from the local people’s perspective. Using Nishizaki’s terminology, the alternative art of (non-coercive) domination is possible. The problem is Banharn’s domination of Suphanburi is rather exceptional and thus difficult to apply to the political successes of many politicians and families in other provinces, where electoral victory and dominance rely

⁷⁷ Quote from Kerkvliet 1995. For a classic definition of clientelistic relations, see Scott 1972: 93; and Lande 1966.

⁷⁸ Kerkvliet 1995: 401.

⁷⁹ See Nishizaki 2005, 2006, 2011; Walker 2008, 2012.

on coercion and manipulation. Some achieved power without making the residents proud of their provincial identity as Banharn did. I do not deny the significance of identity and everyday politics in the formation of political authority, but these features alone are not sufficient to explain the characteristics of Thai politics. More importantly, they do not explain historical and geographical variations of political domination and violence that has developed since the 1970s. By dismissing the coercive dimension in electoral politics, scholars deprive themselves of a complete understanding of power accumulation and contestation in the Thai polity.

Of the three frameworks, the literature on “godfathers” which emerged in the 1990s pays most attention to coercive forces.⁸⁰ In my opinion, the godfather proponents are heading in the right direction in countering the tendency of Thai academia of paying too much attention to the patronage system and the role of traditional values. Nevertheless, their arguments run a risk of going to another extreme of essentializing godfather and violence. Deliberately or not, their work, based on a few selective cases of famous godfathers in the 1990s, portray the ubiquitous power and ruthlessness of rural politicians. Gruesome murders and merciless killings overshadow other political stories. In fact, the power of godfathers varies from province to province and changes over time. Not every godfather enjoys monopolistic power. Some have to struggle with state bureaucrats, political activists, and adversarial bosses to climb to the top. And they have to expend perhaps more energy to maintain their hard-acquired power. Instead of picturing godfathers as invincible, this research suggests their vulnerability. My comparative studies show there is no single characterization of Thai provincial boss rule. Any attempt to understand local power dynamics and electoral violence needs to take variations into account. And *jao pho* are not violent men by nature; coercive force operates under a particular logic, as discussed above. For political bosses, even the most notorious ones, violence is a tool, not a trademark. Bosses resort to violence when required, i.e. for dealing with specific kind of threat. Once the situation changes, violence can be abandoned.

The creation and continuation of power of individual political elites and families in Thailand need to be explained by a different, and more comprehensive, analytical framework beyond those developed under the paradigms of patron-client, godfather, and

⁸⁰ A list of important works are Ockey 1992, 1993, 2000; Pasuk and Sungsidh 1992, 1994; Anderson 1990; Sombat 1992; Somrudee 1991, 1993; Somkiat 1993; Viengrat 1994, 2000; McVey 2000.

identity and everyday politics. In this research, I formulate an analytical frame that allows observers to explore the heterogeneity of the political and economic landscape that fundamentally exists in Thai polity. The heterogeneous geography of political economy (conditioned by a combination of national and local factors) provides incentives to and shapes the paths of actors. Different political and economic settings require politicians to assume multiple roles. They might act as patrons in their political strongholds but act like bosses in other areas and situations.⁸¹ Because elections at each level are interconnected I investigate a variety of localities and different levels of electoral contest (national, provincial, municipal, and sub-district) to understand the political dynamics of provinces. In the next section, I describe my research methodology.

A note on methodology, data, and materials

My study identifies the major factors that explain the causes, patterns, and consequences of election-related violence in Thailand. A good explanation needs to be able to account for variation over time and space since, as mentioned earlier, there are ebbs and flows of violence over the years, and violence is not evenly distributed across the country. This variance is at the heart of my research. Therefore I conduct a sub-national comparative analysis by collecting observations on the degree and character of electoral violence; the explanatory factors relate to multiple spatial and temporal subunits.⁸² I establish the province as the spatial subunit of my analysis.⁸³ Since electoral violence in Thailand is province-specific, as explained above (some provinces have experienced a higher level of election-related violence than others), I investigate the causal mechanisms at the provincial level. For my temporal subunit, I examine fourteen national elections and several local elections from 1975 to 2011 in each selected province to account for the variation across time.

⁸¹ In the case of the Philippines, see a succinct critique of Sidel's bossism framework by Hutchcroft 2003. Hutchcroft convincingly argues that the category of "patron" should not be entirely banished from the analysis of Philippine politics. See also De Dios 2007.

⁸² For the idea of multiple spatial and temporal subunits, see Brady and Collier 2004: 312-13.

⁸³ Thailand is divided into 77 provinces (*changwat*), which are geographically grouped into 4 regions (north, northeast, central, and south). The country is subdivided into 877 districts (*amphoe*); the number of districts in each province varies, from three in the smallest provinces to fifty in Bangkok. Subordinate levels are *tambon* (sub-district) and finally, *muban* (village). Each province is administered by a governor, who is appointed by the Ministry of Interior. The only exception is Bangkok, in which the governor is directly elected by its population.

To find causal mechanisms that explain violence, however, we cannot study only violent provinces since a set of common factors that appear in violent cases might also appear in the peaceful cases. Such factors would not be crucial to explaining the phenomenon of electoral violence. What we need to do is to conduct a comparative study of peaceful and violent provinces and find out factors that appear in all violent cases but not in the peaceful case. To study only violence-prone provinces, we will miss the chance to find the critical factors that differentiate peaceful provinces from violent ones. My research design is inspired by Ashutosh Varshney's study of ethnic riots in India, in which he studies six cities in India and divides them into three pairs. Each pair is comprised of one riot-prone and one peaceful city. His sub-national comparative research design allows him to identify the factors that appear in all peaceful cases but not in the violent ones.⁸⁴ Similarly, but slightly modified, my research selects six provinces in Thailand and arranges them into two groups: three violence-prone provinces and three relatively peaceful. In each province, the methodological tool of process-tracing is applied to identify the mechanisms and processes that account for divergent outcomes (presence and absence of electoral violence). In-depth research was needed in each province because, though the large-number studies are helpful in suggesting general relationships that might exist between factors, it cannot help us tease out the mechanisms and processes by which violence occurs. Only in-depth case studies can give us the details of how electoral violence is organized and where the motivation comes from as well as who perpetrates violence under what circumstances, against whom, and in what sequence.

The emphasis on the variance leads to an important methodological question of case selection. Which provinces should be selected? Information based on my data collection helped me identify the historical and spatial trends and thus map out the distribution of electoral violence across the country over the period of time. With this national-level picture, certain high-risk and low-risk provinces could be identified, and therefore allow me to decide which provinces were to be selected as case studies.⁸⁵ The list is comprised of three provinces harboring chronic electoral violence (Nakhon Si Thammarat, Nakhon Sawan, and Phrae) as well as three provinces that are relatively peaceful (Phetchaburi,

⁸⁴ Varshney's finding is that interethnic civic life is a critical factor that differentiates peaceful cities from violent ones. All peaceful cities he studied had a strong civic engagement between Muslims and Hindus, while all the riot-prone cities either did not have strong interethnic engagement or merely had intra-ethnic associations of Muslims and Hindus. See Varshney 2002.

⁸⁵ Data collection is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Buriram, and Sa Kaeo) (see map). Each chosen province assumes distinct characteristics and represents a different trajectory of power contestation and violence. *Nakhon Si Thammarat*, according to the data, is the most violent province when it comes to elections. It is thus crucial to investigate what makes this large province, dominated by one political party and located in the south (the region that scholars usually describe as free of godfathers and corrupt electoral practices) the most notorious spot. *Nakhon Sawan* is not a poor province as it is a hub of commercial trade connecting the central and northern regions and a center of the Thai-Chinese community, and the province has never been perceived as violence-prone. The data shows otherwise; Nakhon Sawan is one of the most high-risk provinces for violent elections. The fragmented power structure of the province, I argue, is the key. *Phrae*, is the most violence-prone province in the north. Unlike Nakhon Si Thammarat, the province is fairly small both in terms of size of population and area; and its level of economic development is lower than Nakhon Sawan. The distinctive feature of Phrae lies in its polarized political structure, witnessing long-standing fierce rivalries between two camps of bosses.

As for the relatively peaceful provinces, three were chosen with controlled variables in mind. All three provinces are well-known as hubs of hired gunmen and forceful, ambitious godfathers—especially Phetchaburi, the “gunmen capital.” The abundant coercive resources do not, however, render these areas prone to violent elections. Furthermore, the three provinces have different population sizes (which mean different numbers of allocated MP seats) and levels of economic development. *Phetchaburi* is a rather small province like Phrae, *Sa Kaeo* is a medium-sized province not different from Nakhon Sawan, while *Buriram* shares an equal number of MP seats as Nakhon Si Thammarat. Size is therefore not a determining factor of electoral violence. What really matters are the degree of power monopoly and the economic bases of provincial elites engaged in elections. All violent case study provinces share a common attribute: they witness an absence of a power monopoly and boss-type politicians competing with each other for domination. In all peaceful provinces, by contrast, political bosses monopolize power or there are no inter-boss struggles. In other words, bosses compete not with other bosses but rather with their own family members, with professional, non-boss candidates, or with leaders of mass movements.

My study of six provinces, while not representative of Thailand as a whole, nonetheless represents all Thai regions (Phetchaburi and Nakhon Sawan from Central Thailand,

Buriram and Sa Kao from the Northeast, Phrae from the North, and Nakhon Si Thammarat from the South). Each case represents different socio-economic conditions, cultural settings, and political environments of provincial politics in Thailand. Collectively, they illuminate the dynamics of political contestation and violence in other provinces throughout the country. Comparing each of them across the broad typology allows extrapolation to similar experiences in other provinces unexamined in this research. Overall, my subnational research design overcomes the chronic problem of scholarly work on electoral politics in contemporary Thailand, which is overwhelmingly dominated by single-case (one village, sub-district, district, or province) studies.⁸⁶ Scholars tend to extrapolate from their specific case's findings without making reference to possible variations existing in other localities. In fact, the absence of comparative studies certainly limits their analytical ability to make a generalization.

Until now, there has been no database on election-related violence in Thailand. Also absent is a large-*N* cross-national data set on election-related violence for scholars to use. Official electoral administrative bodies as well as non-governmental organizations working on election observation and monitoring have never collected data on violent incidents in election campaigns. I have created a database for my study, which will benefit other scholars in the future. The national-data set of the temporal and geographical variation of electoral violence is based on primary-sources, in particular careful examination of major daily newspapers. Methodologically speaking, in a country that lacks a systematic and reliable national database, it is not uncommon to use newspaper reports as a main source to record patterns of violence.⁸⁷ The reading of the newspapers covered fourteen national elections (1975-2011) and, in each election, both the pre- and post-election periods (from the day after the dissolution of the House to one month after election day). I cover the one-month period after the vote as many Thai candidates carry out violence after elections. These incidents are classified as election-related violence on two conditions. First, it has to be physical violence against persons or property (i.e. house, office, party headquarter, polling station, ballot box, and campaign vehicle), including threats and intimidation but excluding the countless verbal attacks made in Thai election campaigns. I also exclude campaign poster and billboard

⁸⁶ See, for instance, Arghiros 2001 (Ayutthaya); Nishizaki 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 (Suphanburi); Somrudee 1991 (Khon Kaen); Ueda 2000 (Nakhon Ratchasima); Hewison and Maniemai 2000 (Khon Kaen); Fishel 2001 (Phetchaburi); Chaiyon and Olarn 2008 (Rayong); Viengrat 2008 (Chiang Mai); Walker 2012 (Chiang Mai).

⁸⁷ See, for instance, the discussion of the methods used in the case of Indonesia in Barron and Sharpe 2005.

vandalism for similar reasons. Second, it has to be a violent act targeting electoral stakeholders. In Thailand, government officials dismiss all violent incidents occurring during elections as non-election related (i.e. personal or business conflict) as they do not want to be involved in heated political conflict among politicians and lose their jobs. According to the officials, the occurrence of election violence is, therefore, always very low. This creates the problem of systematic bias of data. In this research, I include all violent incidents aimed at election-related actors during the election campaign as electoral violence as it is untenable to separate out business and political conflicts—they are closely connected. I exclude the incident only when the report (and subsequent investigation) indicates it is purely personal, such as a vote canvasser being murdered by his wife because of his adultery. The number of violent incidents present in my database is thus higher than the number given by security officers, but for all the reasons noted above I am confident that my data, based on systematic reading of newspapers, presents a much better picture of realities on the ground.⁸⁸

Newspaper archives in Thai libraries are not complete (especially prior to 1997), so I relied on various supplementary sources.⁸⁹ For the 1975 and 1976 elections, I collected data from *Thai Rath* and *Prachachat Daily*; from 1983 to 1996, I relied mainly on *Thai Rath* and *Matichon*; and after 1997, the data is compiled from *Thai Rath*, *Matichon*, *Daily News*, *Khao Sod*, and *Krungthep Thurakij*. These newspapers are my primary sources as they are among the best-selling and most influential daily newspapers in Thailand. They also have credible staff investigating criminal cases and election campaigns. I admit that my national database created from newspapers is not perfect. Some violent incidents might not have been reported; the quality of journalists of each newspaper (in each period) differs, having the potential to create bias in the dataset; and some elections might have received more thorough investigative reporting than others. But under existing circumstances, we have no better alternative. To prevent the bias, I read and codified the data as meticulously as possible. Also, there is strong reason to argue that certain biases do not exist or, if they do, do not significantly distort the real situation. Murders and political crimes are gripping stories that sell in Thailand (and

⁸⁸ For example, in the July 2011 election, police officers said there were only 3 deaths resulting from electoral competition, while my data collection indicate 14 casualties (see Chapter 4).

⁸⁹ Most daily newspapers in Thailand do not provide online access to their old printed versions, and only a few libraries have old newspapers accessible to researchers. In this research, I conducted documentary and archival research in the Thai National Archives, the Thai National Library, and the libraries of Chulalongkorn and Thammasat Universities.

arguably everywhere), therefore there is little or no reason for major newspapers not to report them. And, after all, national elections are key events in Thai society. Even so, to cross check, my reading of newspapers is complemented by additional data from reports appearing in weekly and monthly magazines and from information available through the Ministry of Interior, the Royal Thai Police Department, local police stations, the Election Commission of Thailand, the People Network for Election in Thailand (PNET), and the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL).

In order to gain a deep understanding of local power dynamics, I conducted eighteen months of field research in six provinces of Thailand. At the provincial level, my research is based on the following sources of data: 1) documentary research for accounts of national and local elections in each province; 2) a reading of local newspapers to determine the timing, perpetrators, targets, and patterns of political violence; and, most importantly, 3) purposive and focused interviews with the key local informants, including politicians and their vote canvassers, gunmen and their agents, staff members of political parties, leading businessmen, family members of political murder victims, local election commissioners, local journalists, NGOs, and police. Besides provincial-based actors, my interviews included a number of key informants in Bangkok, notably government officials of the Ministry of the Interior, national electoral commissioners, senior police, journalists, party leaders and strategists, retired hit men, and prominent figures in the underworld. Because of the sensitive nature of the topics discussed, most informants agreed to interview on condition of anonymity. Therefore I do not reveal their names and exact positions in the references; the information I provide is general occupation or line of work of the interviewees, and dates and places of the interviews.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five major parts. Part I contains this introductory chapter, which lays out the significance of the study, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, methodology and thesis outline. Part II is comprised of three chapters dealing with the historical development of electoral violence in Thailand. Chapter 2 discusses the period 1932-1976 and elaborates the broad historical change in Thai political and economic structure and the evolving significance of electoral institutions prior to the 1980s. It explains the absence of electoral violence from the 1932 revolution to the 1973 student uprising—the period in which Thai society was ruled under authoritarian regimes with

patrimonial administrative state structures. Then the chapter explains the changing institutional settings and new patterns of political conflict after 1973 and identifies the causes and mechanisms that led to the emergence of state-directed electoral violence in the 1975 and 1976 elections.

In Chapter 3, which focuses on the period 1976-1996, I discuss the revival of the parliamentary system and electoral institutions that brought with it the privatization of electoral killings: frequent assassinations of Members of Parliament, provincial bosses and vote canvassers by hired gunmen. It outlines the essential structure of national and local economies and politics, and the linkages between patrimonial oligarchic rules, illegal and rent-seeking local economies, political boss domination, and electoral violence. Then it details the emergence of the supply and demand of electoral violence: the lucrative business of hired killings and the rise of provincial bosses. Chapter 4 provides data and analysis of the patterns and character of electoral violence from 1979 to 1996 with the explanation regarding the main actors, violent methods and timing of violence.

Chapter 5 focuses on the phenomenon of the rise of election-related violence brought about by a combination of factors in the 2001 and 2005 elections, and the decrease of violence in the 2007 and 2011 electoral competitions. As for explanatory causes and mechanisms, I examine the effects of the 1997 economic crisis, the new rules of the game set by the 1997 constitution, the decentralization process, the rise of the *Thai Rak Thai* Party and Thaksin Shinawatra, the 2006 coup, the emergence of ideological politics, and the changing roles and status of provincial elites and their effects on electoral politics and violence. Chapter 6 provides data and analysis of the patterns and character of electoral violence from 1997 to 2011, with the explanation of changing trends and level of electoral violence witnessed in this turbulent period.

Following Part II's discussion of historical development, Parts III focuses on the geographical dimensions of electoral violence. It discusses three violence-prone provinces in comparison with the three relatively peaceful ones. Chapter 7 examines the northern province of Phrae—a polarized power landscape—which suffers from violent struggles between two groups of formidable bosses competing for the control of the local economy and politics. Chapter 8 studies Nakhon Sawan, the most dangerous province in the central region, whose election campaigns are always tainted with

coercive tactics used by multiple groups to achieve dominance in the power-fragmented territory. Chapter 9 investigates the country's most violence-prone province Nakhon Si Thammarat. The analysis demonstrates that this southern province contains all the elements that make one province conducive to violent voting: the highly fragmented power terrain; rampant illegal, natural resource extraction; rent-seeking activities; and the active involvement of local bosses in electoral processes.

Chapter 10 examines why Phetchaburi, the notorious hub of gunmen and *jao pho*, interspersed with smuggling and drug trafficking routes, has managed to have remarkably peaceful elections for the past three decades. Despite the province harboring plenty of hit men, the (hidden) monopolistic control of one large clan that took over in the mid 1980s explains the absence of bloodshed. From the mid 1980s to 2011, electoral contests in Phetchaburi were essentially intra-clan political wrangles in which compromise, lobbies, and negotiation created election results, not bullets and bloodshed. Therefore Phetchaburi is a prime example in which the geography of supply and demand of violence do not necessary overlap. Chapter 11 discusses a challenging case, Buriram, which has turned from a ferocious, violence-prone province to a peaceful one in the space of a decade. From the late 1980s to the early 2000s, Buriram's electoral competitions were violent in line with several other provinces in which a prominent political family attempted to monopolize provincial politics only to be confronted by business rivals. When the family prevailed, the province became peaceful. However, a puzzle arose in 2007 and 2011 when a clan's monopoly was critically challenged but elections were peaceful. I argue that since 2006 the emergence of ideological politics paved the way for peaceful elections in Buriram. Ideological contest has broken the violent cycle of personal vendettas and channeled election campaigns toward political ideas and platforms. Chapter 12 investigates Sa Kaeo, one of the country's most peaceful provinces, which exemplifies how power monopolies determine orderly elections. The monopolized power structure is a fundamental condition overriding other potentially violent factors, namely a frontier geography, an illicit economy, and the direct involvement of bosses in elections.

The conclusion summarizes all arguments and findings. In addition, it discusses the implications of my study for the conceptual and theoretical developments in the field of electoral violence and local political studies, and how the case of Thailand can contribute to cross-national comparative analysis. Finally it shows how subnational

comparative research sheds new light on the understanding of the Thai state, electoral politics, and patterns of wealth and power accumulation.

Part II: Historical Development

Chapter 2

Authoritarian regimes and democratic transition: State non-electoral and electoral violence, 1932-76

To comprehend rising electoral violence and political developments across the past three decades, a broad understanding of political violence in Thai polity from 1932-76 is instructive. After the administrative reforms of King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, in the late 19th century, the Thai state gradually succeeded in centralizing political administration and monopolizing the use of force through the introduction of the modern army. The 1932 People Party revolution which overthrew the absolute monarchy was a radical regime change, bringing to Thai society a constitutional democracy. The post-revolution regimes, however, inherited a centralized, patrimonial state structure. The state's control of the means of coercion was a legacy of the previous state structure. Intra-elite conflict between rival ideological factions dominated the Thai polity from 1932-47, and factions used the state apparatus to eliminate opposition. After 1947, the military became the predominant political force through over a quarter century of military authoritarian regimes. Under military-led governments, state security personnel perpetrated violence against dissidents, students, farmers, labor union leaders, communist suspects, and progressive politicians. This military era saw the most intense period of state-sponsored murders. The 1973 student-led uprising toppled the military government and ushered in a democratic transition. The fledging democratic period lasted for only three years before royal-military elites and right-wing groups crushed the student-farmer-labor movements in the 1976 massacre, ending the short period of democratic exuberance.

From 1933-73, Thailand held nine general elections. All electoral contests were peaceful, not because governments provided effective security, but because there was no genuine competition. The governments controlled electoral processes and manipulated outcomes through the state apparatus. The lack of competition also stemmed from the fact that elections were not the primary mechanisms for assuming power in Thailand prior to 1973. Elite factions instead used military coups to control state power. Once in control, they conducted elections merely as political rituals to legitimize their administration.

After the 1973 revolution, elections gained increasing significance and thus became venues of intense competition, mainly between left-wing and right-wing groups, resulting in violent campaigns. This was most apparent in the 1975 and 1976 elections when deep political polarization and confrontation between progressive and conservative movements contributed to the eruption of electoral violence. The pattern and character of electoral violence observed in 1975 and 1976 were different from those of later elections when ideological battles were replaced by fighting among politicians for patronage and government spoils.

This chapter is divided into two main parts: the first part explains the absence of electoral violence in the 1932-73 period; the second part describes the context and mechanisms that led to electoral violence in 1975 and 1976.

Thailand's authoritarian regimes, state crimes and electoral manipulation, 1932-1973

Authoritarian regimes and state violence

The first quarter of a century after the 1932 revolution saw a crucial transition in Thai politics, from the authoritarian constitutionalism of People's Party rule (1932-47) to military absolutism under field marshals Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn (1958-73). Great political instability and violence marked this period, with serious conflict among individuals, groups, and ideological factions.¹ Violent conflict engulfed this 25 year period, with eruptions between elements of the People's Party, the royalist clique, and their main followers. Popular methods employed by the elites to eliminate their political enemies were assassination and forced disappearance. Perpetrators typically were men in uniform associated with ruling elites. The prime example of this mode of violent conflict was the antagonism between police chief Phao Sriyanond and army general Sarit Thanarat in the 1950s, in which both sides used uniformed "muscle" to sabotage each other. At times during the 1950s, rulers used state violence to target some progressive intellectuals, politicians, journalists, and religious minority leaders perceived as threats to the regime.²

¹ Kasian 2001: 76.

² On politics in the 1940s and the 1950s, see Thak 1979; Kasian 2001; Sutachai 1991; Anderson 1990.

After the 1947 coup, the Phibun government perpetrated many “dirty tactics” against the opposition forces—notably the socialists and progressive-minded politicians affiliated with Pridi’s faction. Police chief Phao established the infamous, covert force called the “Knights of the Diamond Ring” spearheaded by security personnel. These “Knights” abused state power to threaten, detain, kidnap, and murder many political enemies in a secretive, brutal manner. The most notorious case was the killing of four former cabinet members serving under the Pridi-supported administration in 1949. The four victims were prominent MPs from the northeast, known as long-standing fighters for democracy and the interests of impoverished rural people: Thongin Phuriphat, Ubon Ratchathani MP; Thawin Udon, Roi Et MP; Chamlong Daoruang, Maha Sarakham MP; and Thongpleo Chonlaphum, Prachinburi MP. In February-March 1949, police arrested the four MPs, accusing them of plotting to overthrow the government. On 4 March 1949, while in custody and being transferred to prison, they were shot dead by a group of policemen who accompanied their transfer. The government made a press conference concocting a story that Southern Malay-Muslim separatists ambushed the government vehicles and killed those four assemblymen. Nobody believed the government’s statement, but state-sponsored spectacular violence effectively terrorized the general public and government opposition. Apart from this shooting, throughout the Phibun-Phao regime, the Knights of the Diamond Ring carried out several other extrajudicial killings eliminating government threats.³

State crime reached its heyday during the Sarit-Thanom dictatorship, in which the military government employed both covert and overt violence against non-elite dissidents. In contrast to the previous era, the structure of power in this period of rapid economic development was a narrower and unified oligarchy. The military took dominant control by eliminating other group of elites, and Sarit legitimized his patrimonial rule with his revival and sacralization of the Monarchy. The Sarit regime went further than previous rulers by legalizing its arbitrary use of state violence through the constitution. State-sponsored violence targeting citizens classified as “enemies of the state” replaced intra-elite violent competitions. From 1965 onward, the Thanom regime mounted a counterinsurgency operation against the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). The number of clashes between communist insurgents and government forces rose from

³ Phao recruited the rogue police officers into the secret unit and gave them the signature ring, leading to the name “the Knights of the Diamond Ring.” On Phao and his secret police, see Phut 1981; Chit 1960; Chaiyong 1980; Chumsai 1995; Chitphon 1996. On four ministers’ murders, see Anan 1974; Charnvit and Thamrongsak 2001.

around one per day in the late 1960s to a peak of around three per day in 1977.⁴ In the early years of the state's counter insurgency campaigns, the state apparatus committed most of the violence. But as the conflict deepened and widened, the Thai state created paramilitary groups to help fight communist insurgents. Rural vigilantes, village toughs, and moonlighting security personnel formed these paramilitary forces. The Thai state used militias throughout the counterinsurgency campaign until the communist threat faded in the mid 1980s.⁵ In general, the literature suggests that the prevalence of vigilante violence reflects the state's weakness. However, the evidence from Thailand demonstrates that militia violence can arise out of state rulers' political and logistical support.⁶ Motivated by a desire for plausible deniability, the Thai state resorted to paramilitary groups. Under the counterinsurgency wars, hundreds of local civilians suspected of communist sympathies were killed by the state security apparatus and paramilitary forces. The two most notorious cases were the Red Drum slayings (1971-72) in which local peasants in Patthalung province, most still alive, were incinerated by the security forces in gasoline-filled, used oil drums; and the *Ban Na Sai* affair (1974) in which the whole village was burned to the ground, and many of the villagers summarily executed.⁷

Administrative patrimonial states, electoral authoritarianism, and electoral manipulation

Writing in the 1960s, major scholars characterized Thailand's post-1932 political structure as a "bureaucratic polity," in which power exclusively resided and was contested within the bureaucracy.⁸ Comparatively speaking, Thailand's bureaucratic polity, witnessed in the pre-1973 period, had many parallels with other countries classified as "patrimonial administrative states"—denoting political systems in which

⁴ By the mid-1970s, it was estimated there were some 8,000 armed guerrillas, 412 villages completely under CPT control, and 6,000 villages with a total population of 4 million under some degree of CPT influence. By 1976, the government estimated that 2,173 guerrillas and 2,642 government troops had died in 3,992 clashes. When the civil war ended in 1983, the death toll on both sides had risen to over 10,000 (Kanok 1983; Chai-anan et al. 1990: 63-64; Saiyud 1986).

⁵ It is important to note that the United States—the most powerful ally of Thai government during the Cold War—played a crucial role in Thai counter insurgency operations. The use of rural thugs as militias was imported and influenced by American counter insurgency program in Vietnam. Rural people were recruited and paid to be spies and executioners and undertook other tasks directed by state officials. Also, the flux of firearms resulting from American aid to the Thai military and police, as well as to the American "secret war" in Laos, intensified the level of violence in rural areas (Anderson 1990: 33-42).

⁶ This is similar to what Geoffrey Robinson (2010: 76-77) found in Indonesia, where civilian militia and paramilitary receive encouragement from state authorities to operate. For literature on the connection between paramilitary and state violence, see Sluka 1999; Corradi, Fagan, and Garretton 1992.

⁷ Mallet 1978; Haberkorn 2011; Jularat 2007.

⁸ See classic works of Riggs 1966 and Siffin 1966.

the bureaucratic elite or "political aristocracy" is the predominant social force and countervailing forces from civil society are weak.⁹ Under authoritarian regimes, bureaucratic elites enrich themselves by plundering public resources and extracting rents from a weak business class. They monopolize and/or nationalize businesses and industries for personal gain. Moreover, they use political influence to protect their profitable illegal enterprises (gambling, drugs, and natural resource exploitation etc). Businessmen who aspire to secure government contracts and business licenses need to establish close connections with bureaucratic elites, particularly military generals, and appoint them to the company board or pay them bribes.¹⁰

Under patrimonial administrative states, electoral competition has no real significance because elective posts have limited power and privilege. First of all, bureaucratic elites circumscribe the scope and jurisdiction of elective office. They allow voters to fill the House with elected MPs, but keep the administrative center of power away from people's representatives. Before 1973, no constitution required that the prime minister or cabinet members be elected. Moreover, most constitutions allowed bureaucrats to assume cabinet positions while retaining their official posts. Therefore, Thai cabinets in the period 1932-73 were dominated by leading civil servants and military officers, as well as technocrats.¹¹ Elected constituency MPs and businessmen rarely took up administrative posts (a situation that changed dramatically in the late 1970s, as the next chapter explains). Through this strategy of cutting representatives from the decision-making process, bureaucratic leaders walled off the policy arena from democratic interference. They also curbed elected politicians' legislative power by filling half of the assembly with appointed MPs, who had equal authority as their elected counterparts (as in the 1932 and 1952 constitutions), and by establishing the senate fully appointed by the prime minister (as in the 1947 and 1949 constitutions). Government rulers appointed assemblymen and senators from their personal networks, strengthening their regime with loyal friends and supporters.¹² In the pre-1973 period, elected MPs thus acquired no real power in either administrative or legislative domains. Consequently, the emasculated

⁹ The term "patrimonial administrative state" comes from Thomas Callaghy's work on Zaire (Callaghy 1984, chapter 1). The term was borrowed and further developed by Hutchcroft (1998: 46) to describe the Thai state before 1973 and Indonesian state during Suharto's New Order regime.

¹⁰ On Thai political economy from 1932-1973, see Suehiro 1989; Hewison 1989; and Sungsidh 1983.

¹¹ Only the 1946 and 1949 constitutions stipulated that cabinet members cannot simultaneously assume bureaucratic posts. These two constitutions were, however, short lived, and, in practice, all prime ministers still recruited their ministries from the rank of civil service. On occupational distribution of Thai cabinets from 1932-1973, see Rangsan 1988.

¹² Only the 1946 constitution requires the senate be indirectly elected, in which voters elect their electoral college who will respectively elect senators (Chaowana 2007: 119).

character of MP posts offered leading businessmen and provincial elites with little incentive to launch themselves into politics. Occupational backgrounds of elected MPs in the early period after 1932 were mainly retired civil servants, teachers, lawyers, writers and journalists or supporters of the People's Party.¹³ With almost nothing at stake, electoral competitions were unaggressive, orderly and peaceful, and, to a large extent, not exciting for stakeholders, including the candidates and their supporters. Voter turnout was very low, averaging 40% of eligible voters; the lowest level came in the 1948 election with a turnout of only 29%.¹⁴

The real site of power contestation occurred in the bureaucracy, where elites fought for control of perks and privileges. The higher the position one can ascend to the state apparatus, the more manpower, budgets, and rents one can control. Thai ruling elites enhanced their power through the expansion of their organizations. Bureaucracies were thus large and constantly expanding. Extra-bureaucratic forces, on the contrary, were weak and diminished as state elites deliberately suppressed, emasculated or destroyed them. Election-related institutions were poorly-developed. Political party legislation, allowing rights and freedom of party association and legalizing party organizations, was not passed until 1955. Most political parties established during 1932-73 centered on and evolved around prominent political figures. Parties were ad hoc and short-lived organizations created to support certain individuals' political ambitions in competition with their immediate rivals. No party had mass support, a clear vote base, or a well-developed party branch and organization, and most disbanded immediately after their leader's demise. From 1932-47, staunch supporters of the People's Party founded new political parties to protect the revolutionary agendas and solicit support for their faction leaders. The anti-revolution groups, led by royalists and bureaucrats from the old regime, responded by creating parties to oppose and compete with the pro-revolutionary movement. The notable royalist party, the Democrat Party, founded in 1946 and led by Khuang Abhaiwongse and Kukrit Pramoj ((1911-1985) was an attempt to undermine the popularity and power of Pridi Banomyong (1900-1983), the People's Party's leader.¹⁵

¹³ See a full-list of elected MPs in each province from 1932-57 in Department of Provincial Administration, Interior Ministry, volume 1 and 2, 1957. Chapter 7 on Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Chapter 8 on Phetchaburi provide detailed profiles of these MPs.

¹⁴ The average percentage is calculated from information in Department of Provincial Administration, Interior Ministry, volume 1, 1957: 7-8. Voter turnout rose to 50-70 percent in the 1980s-90s.

¹⁵ The Democrat Party developed from the *Kaona* (Progress) Party founded in 1945 by Kukrit Pramoj. Kukrit was one of Thailand's most influential royalist thinker and politicians. He was a great-grandson of King Rama II. He played many different roles throughout his colorful career, including founding *Siam Rath* newspaper (1950), becoming Speaker of the House (1973-1974), founding the Social Action Party

After the 1947 coup, the influence of the People's Party declined and some of their leading members were forced to live in exile. Power struggles shifted to rivalries among the three major state leaders: prime minister Field Marshall Phibun, police chief Phao, and army general Sarit. They established political parties to attack their enemies. Phibun and Phao founded the Serimanangkasila Party in 1955, in preparation for the 1957 general election, mobilizing extensive government resources to back party activities. Several cabinet members and leading bureaucrats, including Army-Navy-Air force commanders, joined the party as committee members, and the middle- and lower rank officials acted as party staff. The separation between state and political party was completely blurred. Media commentators and voters in the 1950s, correctly, called the Serimanangkasila Party the "government" party.¹⁶ Sarit was officially the deputy head of this government-backed party, but he also created his own party called Sahaphum to tacitly sabotage Phibun and Phao. Like their enemies, Sarit mobilized the state machinery to endorse his party. Later in the 1960s, rulers such as Thanom Kittikhachon and Praphat Charusathian adopted the Serimanangkasila-model, creating the government-sponsored Sahaprachathai to legitimize their authoritarian rule.¹⁷

Over a long period from 1932 to 1973 (except for the brief post-war years 1945-47), the Thai patrimonial administrative state oscillated between closed authoritarianism and electoral authoritarianism/autocracy.¹⁸ Under closed authoritarianism (Phibun government, 1938-45, Sarit government 1958-63, and Thanom government 1963-69, 1971-73), military rulers severely restricted civil liberties and prohibited all democratic institutions. Dictatorial leaders showed no attempt to legitimize their governing through popular support. They did not invest in holding elections, even sham ones. Apart from these full autocratic regimes, the other governments in the pre-1973 era fell into the regime type classified as "electoral authoritarianism," the regime that neither practiced liberal democracy nor operated as a full-blown authoritarianism. Electoral authoritarian leaders allow limited space for political participation and competition through electoral

(1974), and being prime minister from 1975-76 (see next chapter for further details on his roles and the Social Action Party). For historical background and early development of the Democrat Party and other parties associated with the People's Party leaders, see Murashima, Nakharin, and Somkiat 1991; Yut 1974; Noranit 1987.

¹⁶ Singhakhom 1969: 292-293.

¹⁷ Information on Sahaprachathai Party is based on Montri et al 1969: 1-48; Chaowat 1974: 264-66.

¹⁸ From 1945-47, Pridi's civilian faction dominated the administration and assembly. Pridi and his supporters passed the 1946 constitution, regarded as one of the most democratic constitutions in Thai history, eliminating the appointed MP. A brief democratic interlude ended in November 1947 when the army staged a coup and toppled the Pridi-backed government.

processes. By holding periodic elections, scholars explained, the rulers “try to obtain at least a semblance of democratic legitimacy, hoping to satisfy external as well as internal actors. At the same time, by placing those elections under tight authoritarian controls they try to cement their continued hold on power,” and their ultimate goal is to “reap the fruits of electoral legitimacy without running the risks of democratic uncertainty.”¹⁹ If, by definition, democracy is a system in which power can at least alternate between opposing parties, electoral authoritarianism is a system in which ruling parties almost always win elections and opposition parties almost always lose.

In a nutshell, scholars conclude, electoral institutions and processes occurring under electoral authoritarian regimes are “little more than a theatrical setting for the self-representation and self-reproduction of power.”²⁰ In general, ruling elites around the world have various tools (legal and illegal) to ensure their victory and deprive voters of genuine electoral choices. Thailand’s authoritarian rulers were no less imaginative than their counterparts when it came to electoral manipulation. The control mechanisms available for autocrats to stage non-democratic elections include excluding opposition candidates from the electoral arena, restricting access to information and resources, disenfranchising some groups of voters, and committing electoral fraud.²¹

Evidence from the 1957 and 1969 elections provides an informative account of these manipulative techniques. The February 1957 election, known as *Kanlueaktang Sökkaprok* (the dirty election), was regarded as the most corrupt and non-democratic vote in Thai history.²² This election was held when Premier Phibun wanted to enhance the legitimacy of his long-standing rule both domestically and internationally (particularly with the U.S.). Also, Phibun expected the democratic credentials gained from the election would give him greater leverage over other elite factions. To make the election appear legitimate, the Phibun government allowed some competition. Before the election, moderate and conservative politicians gathered their small groups of supporters to form the parties to stand in this election, including the revived Democrat Party led by

¹⁹ Schedler 2002: 36-37. Electoral authoritarianism is a conceptual term scholars used to describe hybrid regime that fall short of either closed authoritarianism or full democracy. For more conceptual and empirical discussion regarding electoral authoritarianism, see Levitsky and Way 2010; Brownlee 2007; Snyder 2006; Munck 2006; Case 2010 (on Southeast Asia); Carrion 2006 (on Peru).

²⁰ Schedler 2002: 36-37. And see Przeworski 1991 for definition of democracy.

²¹ Schedler (2002: 36-50) provides a list of electoral manipulations aggregated from around the world. Case (2006: 95-112) offers relevant discussion on Southeast Asian experience.

²² Following accounts of the February 1957 election are drawn from Chongkon 1974; Singhakhom 1968; Kriengsak 1974; Chumsai 1995; Chitphon 1996; Thongchai 1974; Department of Provincial Administration, Interior Ministry, volumes 1 and 2, 1957.

royalists. The progressive or left-leaning parties played no role in the competition. Through a series of state assassinations, government rulers virtually excluded the involvement of progressive and leftwing politicians in the electoral arena long before the election campaign started.

The exclusion of formidable candidates was merely one component of the government's plan to control elections. To ensure a decisive victory, government leaders mobilized state networks to support government-backed Serimanangkasila candidates, competing with 22 other parties for 160 MP seats. Shortly before the House dissolution, government dispensed largesse (over a hundred million baht) for building infrastructure and provided goods to people in opposition-strong provinces. Government leaders campaigned for their provincial party members using public money. The most notorious case was general Phao, who assumed multiple roles as secretary of the Serimanangkasila Party, the chief of police, and the deputy minister of Interior, and through the latter capacity had the official duty of administering the election. Phao made several trips northeast with his large police entourage, claiming to oversee polling preparation, but in fact campaigning for the government party. Leading bureaucrats, especially those from the Interior ministry ordered local officers— *kamnan*, village headmen, district chiefs, and provincial governors— to canvass votes for the Serimanangkasila Party. Civil servants became the government's so-called "*Huana Nuai Khum Siang*" (chief vote controllers)²³. These local officers were responsible for gathering local residents for a meeting and instructing them to vote for the government-supported party, with the main slogan "Our country will develop if you elect Serimanangkasila Party."²⁴ The education minister ordered local schools to cancel teaching, asking teachers and students to campaign for government candidates. The government also told municipal workers to get rid of the opposition's campaign billboards and posters. Government-controlled television and radio stations allocated a large amount of airtime for Serimanangkasila campaign advertisements, whereas officials restricted opposition parties' access to public channels.

²³ In Thai studies literature, the most common word for vote broker who gather votes for candidates during the campaign is vote canvasser which translates from Thai word *hua khanaen*. However, as far as the historical evidence shows, *hua khanaen* was not a popular word until the 1969 election. Before 1969, commentators used a few terms interchangeably, and *Huana Nuai Khum Siang* was one of them.

²⁴ Chumsai 1995: 124-125, 130; Kriengsak 1974: 102-21.

When their normal campaign was deemed insufficient, the government deployed police and soldiers to intimidate voters. They coerced opposing candidates to withdraw from competition and/or stop campaigning. Some journalists were also government targets. Under certain circumstances, security personnel solicited help from *nakleng* and *anthaphan* (local tough guys and hooligans) as officials knew these local toughs were able to command fear and respect. Government leaders hired local toughs and issued the Serimanangkasila Party's membership cards to those who electioneered for government party candidates. The card functioned as a "free-pass" ticket for hoodlums to carry out illegal activities—harassing government rivals and disrupting opposition party's electioneering—without being obstructed by the authorities.²⁵ The collusion between governmental authority and local gangsterism was by no means accidental; rather, it was an official electioneering strategy authorized by Phibun and Phao. From the very beginning, Phao organized meetings with national and local gangsters, asking members to support the Serimanangkasila party. Media reported that the meeting was in effect a "surreal gathering of criminals presided over by the police chief"; attendees were prominent gangsters engaged in extortion, gambling, prostitution, smuggling, and the opium trade.²⁶ In one government-sponsored banquet, Phao gave a long speech promising rewards for those who helped, and praising *nakleng* as people

who are brave, being real men... widely-connected, generous, highly respectable and trustworthy among people," and, he further noted, "My political party supports *nakleng* because *nakleng* are good people... I make friends with everyone who votes for the Serimanangkasila Party. Unlike the police department system, my political party does not exclude *nakleng*."²⁷

Local thugs assisted the government to weaken other parties' campaigns and controlled rural voters (for a detailed example, see the analyses of Phetchaburi in Chapter 10). Prior to 1973, it was government rulers, not provincial bosses, who were patrons of local coercive forces, giving local thugs protection and patronage. Starting in the 1980s, the mode of relationship changed. Local thugs came to be more attracted to the enormous

²⁵ Singhakhom 1968: 98-99, 295-97; Chongkon 1974: 383-421; Thongchai 1974: 94.

²⁶ *Thai weekly*, February 1957: 32, quoted in Chumsai 1974: 132

²⁷ *Thai weekly*, February 1957: 32, quoted in Chumsai 1974: 131-132.

wealth and influence of provincial bosses and less enamored with government officials (see next chapter).

Concerned that the pre-electoral schemes were not sufficient for victory, the government employed many dirty tactics on election day to distort the electorate's preferences. Officials manipulated the electoral rolls, disenfranchising a large number of opposition supporters. False registrations abounded. In some villages, residents' names were wiped from the list, and dead people's were added.²⁸ Local officers, with the help of hooligans, barred opposition supporters from going to polling stations. At the polling stations, officials allowed *phon rom* or "ghost voters" to cast ballots repeatedly for the Serimanangkasila party. They also heavily tampered with the ballots. Officials stuffed ballot boxes with ballot papers (called *phai fai* or ghost ballots) pre-filled out for the Serimanangkasila Party. In some precincts, goons threatened those witnessing the government's ballot stuffing. Electoral fraud occurred most heavily in the vote counting process, where officials did not count votes for opposition candidates, but gave extra votes to government candidates. In some precincts, government poll officers intentionally turned off the lights to change the tallies. In Bangkok, where the opposition parties, particularly the Democrats, were very strong, vote counting was delayed for two days. With the early vote counted in 8 districts (out of 13), tallies showed the Democrats leading the government candidates. But when the official results were announced, the Democrats won only 2 seats, while the Serimanangkasila candidates won the other 7 seats. Phibun was the winner with the highest number of votes. Nationwide, the Serimanangkasila Party won decisively with 86 seats, more than half of the assembly. The Democrat Party, the runner-up, grabbed 30 seats and the rest were distributed between small parties.²⁹

The government's brazen electoral fraud led to student protests. On March 2, 1957, four days after Phibun's party victory, Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, and Kasetsart students led a march, joined by Bangkok voters and opposition politicians, denouncing the government party and accusing it of rigging the results. The protesters called for a nullification of the election result and the holding of a new general election. The student-led demonstration had the tacit support of Field Marshal Sarit, Phibun and Phao's

²⁸ Chumsai 1995: 133.

²⁹ Prasert 1974: 866; Department of Provincial Administration, Interior Ministry, volume 1, 1957: 147-154.

political rival, who signaled to the students that he was on their side. The protest ended with the storming of Government House. Sarit managed to calm the situation, and after this incident the Phibun government's legitimacy deteriorated sharply. Meanwhile, Sarit built himself up as the people's hero. Students had become entangled in the power struggle between competing military figures in the Phibun government. Unintentionally, student groups helped weaken the Phibun-Phao faction and strengthen Sarit's authority. Eventually, using electoral fraud and civil unrest as pretexts, Sarit and his followers (Thanom and Praphat) staged a coup on September 16, 1957, toppling the Phibun government and introducing a strong-rule military absolutist regime. The students' agenda had been hijacked by autocratic rulers. The Sarit administration (1958-63) revoked the constitution and ruled the country by military decrees, dissolving the assembly, banning all political parties, civic associations, and elections.³⁰

After Sarit died, power passed to his political heir Thanom, who continued the military regime for another decade with the support of the American government. As mentioned in the previous section, state-directed violence reached its peak during the Thanom era. The government used security forces in an excessive and arbitrary manner to crack down on anti-government activists. A large group of politicians and activists were imprisoned without charges and some were executed, and those who managed to escape were forced to go underground or into exile. Again, the Thai political system was cleansed of radical, progressive groups. Therefore when Thanom called for an election in 1969—under growing domestic and international pressure; having had no election for eleven years—his Sahaprachathai Party (United Thai People's Party) faced no real challenge. The Sahaprachathai Party was a replication of the Serimanangkasila Party, and the 1969 campaign was a rerun of the 1957 "dirty" election. Government electoral fraud and malpractice were pervasive as the government-backed Sahaprachathai Party won the election handily by using the same old tactics. The election went peacefully. Prior to the poll, students from fifteen universities and colleges set up the student volunteer groups to observe the elections. Their voluntary role in monitoring the election was praised by the media and general public, but created no impact on making the election free and fair as the student organizations were still rather weak and inexperienced. Government officials intimidated students who tried to file complaints about voting irregularities.³¹

³⁰ Thak 1979; Kasian 2001; Sutachai 1991. On the student movements' roles in the 1950s, see Prajak 2012: 230-235.

³¹ See the Student Volunteer Election Observation Group (1969) for full report on electoral malpractice in the 1969 election, and see Seksan's memoir (1988) for a first-hand account of intimidation faced by

Also, the Thanom administration had learnt a lesson from the 1957 election well enough to rig the vote more subtly this time. Military elites were unified and had dominant control over the system, therefore no post-election protests occurred. In the provincial areas, military regimes still received cooperation from local thugs. Nevertheless, in some provinces—such as Phetchaburi, Ratchaburi, Nakhon Sawan, Buriram, Chonburi, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Prachuap Khiri Khan— provincial business elites involved themselves more actively in the competition. Most ran under the government's Sahaprachathai Party, reflecting good collaboration between state and local strongmen. Some of them were elected as first time MPs, with the support of state machinery.³² In the following elections, these local strongmen's political and business fortunes enhanced rapidly to the point at which they were able to build their own political machine and win elections on their own (see next chapter).

In short, the absence of electoral violence in the early period of Thailand's political struggle stemmed from two fundamental reasons. First, elective posts entailed no power, perks, or privileges worth fighting for. Second, there was no actual competition in electoral campaigns as authoritarian rulers suppressed opposition (both long before and during the campaign) and rigged the vote. Under autocratic control, electoral fraud was widespread, while electoral violence, non-existent.³³ Political realities underwent major transformations after 1973, with the increased significance of electoral institutions and extra-bureaucratic forces.

Thailand's democratic transition, political polarization, and state-sponsored electoral violence, 1973-1976

The Thanom regime was brought to an end by the mass uprising led by students on 14 October 1973. During the demonstration, soldiers fired into the demonstrators, killing 77

students. The student's election observation group later evolved into the Student Volunteer Group of Thailand, which organized many kinds of activities, including summer work camps in rural areas, cultivating a sense of civic duty among participating students (Prajak 2012: 235-240).

³² Well-known Phetchaburi political boss Piya Angkinan ran for national election for first time in this election under the Sahaprachathai Party (Chapter 8). In Nakhon Sawan and Buriram, the patriarchs of the Khamprakop and Chidchob families also competed in the competition (Chapters 6 and 9).

³³ It was not a coincidence that the one and only reported election-related violent incident in the pre-1973 period occurred in the August 1946 election, held under the most democratic environment under the Pridi government. In this election, a Democrat candidate for Bangkok MP, Tha-ngai Suwannathat, was attacked by grenade while he was campaigning on the stage. The assault injured a few people, killed one, and made Tha-ngai lose one of his legs (Singhakhom 1968: 49-50).

and wounding 857.³⁴ The intervention of the king on the side of certain military elites (Thanom's rivals) and students, plus the persistence of the protestors even after initial killings, rendered military suppression ineffective.³⁵ The 1973 uprising ushered in a highly unstable interim period of civilian democracy. Under the governments (October 1973 to February 1975) of prime minister Sanya Thammasak, a royalist judge, the country witnessed greater political participation than in any other period before or since. During this period, press censorship virtually disappeared to the delight of editors, newsmen, and readers; the democratic 1974 constitution was promulgated, creating the more open political environment; trade unions were rapidly formed, pressing a host of demands through strikes and marches; peasant organizations were created to urge land reforms; and even high-school children demanded the expulsion of hated principals. Several left-leaning and socialist parties were established to compete in the general elections.³⁶

After their success in toppling the authoritarian regime, the student movement maintained pressure on the new civilian government to sustain constitutional democracy, and it also formed an alliance with peasants and workers to fight for social and economic justice. This progressive alliance threatened the traditional beliefs, economic interests, and political power of the privileged class, including army and bureaucrat leaders, business tycoons, rural landlords, and royalists.³⁷ The ruling cliques strongly felt their long-enjoyed privileges and power threatened by the student-peasant-labor tripartite alliance. Some factions in the army were increasingly alarmed by the alliance's radical ideas which challenged the military's concept of a controlled orderly society and their national security policy. The student movement's campaign for the withdrawal of US troops from Thailand was especially threatening. Under military dictatorship, government bureaucrats were accustomed to exercising arbitrary authority and enjoyed virtual immunity from criticism. After the uprising, they found themselves being

³⁴ On that day, half a million people joined a student-led demonstration to demand a constitution. The student leaders extracted a promise from the military leaders to reintroduce a constitution within a year. But the dispersal of the demonstration on the morning of October 14, 1973 turned into violence (Charnvit 1993).

³⁵ Divisions within authoritarian regime can be traced back to the late 1960s. The most significant divide was within the army, but there were also signs of tension between the army and the palace, especially after the 1971 coup. In general, the king endorsed the military rule, believing its strong role was needed to uphold the monarchy and defeat the communists. Nevertheless, he frequently criticized the government's policies when he thought they had gone in the wrong direction, and he did so more strongly in the early 1970s. The presence of the monarchy as an independent power center within the regime eventually became vital to the success of student mobilization in toppling the regime (Prajak 2012: 243).

³⁶ Anderson 2000: 269-70; see Haberkorn (2011) for farmer movements.

³⁷ Pasuk and Baker 2005: 190.

criticized and questioned by the poor and the disadvantaged. Business entrepreneurs could no longer enjoy the extremely cheap labor that the military regime had guaranteed in the previous decades. Now, they had to negotiate with labor unions, which were supported by the student movement and left-wing politicians. Landlords also felt frustrated by the peasant's demand for land reform. Many ruling elites considered the civilian governments too weak and incapable of protecting their interests, and accordingly ventured to extra-parliamentary tactics. They created right-wing militias and paramilitary groups, whose leadership and logistical support was provided by the military elites, to weaken and disrupt the progressive coalition. State assassins carried out a series of clandestine assassinations targeting leaders of peasant, labor and student organizations. Confrontational and violent tactics by the Rightists, combined with government inaction, had debilitated the student movement.³⁸

The 1975 and 1976 elections took place in this context of tumultuous ideological struggle between the left and the right. The right-wing movements and conservative elites waged war on burgeoning socialist political parties and their candidates. Unlike the elections in previous authoritarian settings, electoral competitions in 1975 and 1976 were unruly and full of bloodshed. State security agencies and right-wing activists resorted to violence to attack left-wing candidates and their supporters. Electoral violence was, in essence, part of the establishment's larger violent campaign to eradicate the left-wing movements.

The January 1975 election

After the Assembly passed the new constitution in October 1974, Prime Minister Sanya dissolved parliament and called for a new election on 26 January 1975. The Thai people welcomed the election with enthusiasm as it was the first polling competition held in a democratic atmosphere for many decades. There were 42 political parties registered prior to the poll, competing for 269 seats. Except for the Democrats, the rest were new parties established after 1973. The Chart Thai Party was the most ultra right-wing party formed by military generals and provincial oligarchs; they recruited many former Sahaprachathai MPs to become their members. Another major party was Kitsangkhom led by Kukrit, representing the interests of royalists and national capitalist groups. Most importantly, three major left-wing parties entered the competition for the first time: the Socialist Party of Thailand led by Somkhit Sisangkhom, the Naeoruum Sangkhomniyom

³⁸ Prajak 2006.

(Socialist Ally) led by Khlaeo Norapati, and the Phalang Mai (New Force) led by Krasae Chanawong. These three parties gained popular support from the student-farmer-labor coalitions. After the election, there were 22 parties able to win seats but no party managed to win a majority of seats, leading to a large and unstable multi-party coalition. Seni Pramoj, the Democrat Party's head, briefly assumed the premier post but stepped down after his government's policy statement was not approved by the Assembly, giving way to the election of his brother Kukrit Pramoj.³⁹

Leftist parties campaigned impressively as their three major parties combined gained 37 seats nationwide. But their securing of many seats came at a high cost as several of their workers lost their lives. There were 20 incidents (12 assassination attempts, 6 mob clashes, and 2 acts of physical intimidation, causing 20 deaths and 10 woundings (see table 2.1). Government security forces and the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) carried out secretive operations in a large number of villages throughout the country, particularly those in the northeast, intimidating residents into not voting for progressive parties. The secretary of the Socialist Party, Bunsanong Punyodhayana, told media that local police threatened to imprison his party supporters if they voted for the socialist candidates.⁴⁰ Media and student's election monitoring groups reported that the state's heavy interference in election campaign was "anti-communist psychological warfare," in which local state apparatus, like *kamnan*, village headmen, and public school teachers, tried to brainwash villagers, accusing all leftist candidates of being Communists who conspired to destroy the monarchy, religion and the nation.⁴¹

Violent incidents occurred mostly during the campaign period, but election day was very turbulent as well (see table 2.3). In precincts that were Communist Party strongholds (such as Nakhon Phanom, Kanchanaburi, Udon Thani) or where Muslim separatist movements were strong (as in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat), the insurgent groups attempted to disrupt voting by attacking polling stations, assaulting poll workers, and stealing ballot boxes. For example, on 24 January 1975, in a remote district in Kanchanaburi, Communist rebels clashed with border patrol police and poll workers, killing one and wounding five officers. The provincial governor had to change the

³⁹ Chaowana 2007: 42-43.

⁴⁰ *Prachachat Daily*, 3 January 1975: 3.

⁴¹ *Prachachat Daily*, 6 January 1975: 3; 5 February 1975: 7.

polling station's location to avoid further attacks.⁴² Casualties resulting from the clashes between government forces and insurgents accounted for more than half of the total dead victims, demonstrating a significant threat the insurgency posed to election security (see table 2.2). Clearly, security personnel became both perpetrators and victims of election-related violence. Their heavy interference in electoral processes continued in the next election as they stepped up their violent operations against the socialist parties.

The April 1976 election

Facing strong pressure from daily protests and his own coalition parties, Prime Minister Kukrit dissolved the parliament on 12 January 1976 and called for a new general election on 4 April 1976. The election result meant no political party was able to win a majority of votes, paving the way for a coalition government led by the Democrat and Chart Thai Parties who garnered the first and second-largest number of seats. Kukrit's Kitsangkhom, the third-largest party, became the opposition, and Kukrit lost his Bangkok MP seat to the rising right-wing politician Samak Sundaravej. Seni Pramoj from the Democrat Party assumed the premiership, amid widespread rumors of a coup, trying to take his government through the crisis. The Seni government lasted for only six months.

The right-wing and security forces mounted a full-scale violent campaign to prevent left-wing allied parties from winning votes. Their acts of aggression were very effective—incessant waves of death threats, bombings, and assassinations paralyzed and destroyed the leftists' campaigns. Consequently, the Socialist Party of Thailand, the Naeoruan Sangkhomniyom, and the Phalang Mai suffered a heavy defeat: three parties combined won only six seats nationwide (compared to 37 in last time), and several of their party personnel and supporters were brutally killed. In total, there were 21 violent incidents (9 assassination attempts, 2 mob clashes, and 3 acts of physical intimidation, 6 blasts, and 1 arson attack) leading to 16 deaths and 19 woundings (see table 2.1). Even though the number of incidents and casualties were not significantly greater than those in the last election, the perpetrators were highly indiscriminate and ruthless—thus making this election more chaotic and terror-ridden.

⁴² *Thai Rath*, 25 January 1976: 1, 2, 16; 26 January 1975: 1, 2, 16. For violent incidents in Nakhon Phanom, Narathiwat, Yala, and Udon Thani, see *Thai Rath*, 26 January 1975: 1, 2, 16; and 27 January 1975: 1, 2, 16.

The main perpetrators of violence in this election were state agents and hired right-wing vigilante groups. The primary victims, as mentioned, were supporters and members of political parties that espoused socialist ideology. Early in the campaign, a gang of hooligans working for military leaders attacked the Phalang Mai Party's headquarter with grenades. The party building was left seriously damaged but, fortunately, all party staff survived the bomb.⁴³ In early February, two Phalang Mai MP candidates for Lopburi were shot dead while they were canvassing for votes. And a few days later, on 28 February, Bunsanong Punyodhayana, the Socialist Party secretary and a Thammasat University professor, was assassinated in central Bangkok while he was driving home.⁴⁴ Many leading public figures denounced this brutal act of what they called "barbaric political murder." Puey Ungphakorn, rector of Thammasat University, demanded that government bring perpetrators to justice and prevent electoral competition from descending into "the fighting through bullets."⁴⁵ He further commented, "It [the shooting] was abhorrent and appalling... any political parties were supposed to campaign with non-violent methods. There should have not been shootings or bombings. These [violent methods] degrade democracy."⁴⁶ Boonsanong's shooting demoralized the progressive candidates. Nevertheless, violent campaigning did not stop. On 24 March, at the Phalang Mai's campaign stage in Chainat, militias threw bombs into the crowd, instantly killing eight people and injuring 10— one of the most violent incidents in the history of Thai electoral campaigns. After this incident, all candidates affiliated with progressive allies requested government protection, but to no avail. On 28 March, in Udon Thani, right-wing militias stormed the campaign of the Socialist Party, harassing candidates and voters, burning billboards, and attacking campaign vehicles. Head of the Socialist Party Somkhit Sisangkhom had to terminate the campaign in the province to avoid further violent attacks. Two days before voting day, in Roi Et, Phalang Mai's campaign stage was again assaulted by hand grenades, but, fortunately, nobody was injured.⁴⁷ Election day was as turbulent as in the last election (see table 2.3). Various kinds of violence occurred: burnings of and shootings into polling stations, threatening voters, bombings, and clashes between the Communist and separatist insurgents in the southernmost provinces.

⁴³ However, there was one culprit accidentally killed by his own grenade (*Prachachat*, 16 February 1976: 1, 12).

⁴⁴ *Prachachat*, 18 February 1976: 1, 12.

⁴⁵ *Prachachat*, 1 March 1976: 12.

⁴⁶ *Prachachat*, 3 April 1976: 12.

⁴⁷ *Prachachat*, 26 March 1976: 1, 12; 28 March 1976: 12; 2 April 1976: 12.

By the end of the 1970s, the April 1976 election ranked as the most unruly polling competition in Thai history. Caretaker Prime Minister Kukrit admitted his failure to make the election fair and peaceful, saying "I felt that this election was very ruthless. There were so many shootings."⁴⁸ General Krit Srivara the former Army Commander-in-chief under the Thanom regime, who was accustomed to uncompetitive elections, remarked that this election was "murderous" and "disorderly."⁴⁹ From the victim's perspective, Somkhit Sisangkhom, whose Socialist Party won only two seats, lamented "considering the result, it was demoralizing. This election is the dirtiest, cruelest and most barbaric. Bunsanong certainly died free." He declared that "I will continue my political fight in the parliament." However, this veteran socialist warned the powers that be: "some party members who have been discouraged [by electoral violence] might pursue their struggles underground. That was their choice."⁵⁰ Somkhit's warning was prophetic.

The ultra right-wing's employment of forceful violence in the 1976 election might have succeeded in wiping the socialist groups off the electoral map, but it created a ferocious blowback. The escalation of violence led to political turmoil and ended with a brutal student massacre on October 6, 1976.⁵¹ According to police records, 43 people were killed, several hundred injured, over three thousand arrested on that day, and some five thousand later. One army faction staged a coup taking power from the elected civilian government on that evening, terminating three years of popular democracy and progressive movement's mass mobilization and turning Thai politics back to a dictatorship. In comparative perspective, what happened in Thailand during 1973-76 confirmed the proposition of the fragile and violent character of democratic transition by abrupt regime collapse.⁵² Nonetheless, it was not the mobilization of progressive reformers that was responsible for the breakdown of democratic transition, but the violence perpetrated by the royal-military-bureaucratic elites, with the deployment of

⁴⁸ *Prachachat*, 3 April 1976: 12.

⁴⁹ *Prachachat*, 5 April 1975: 4.

⁵⁰ *Prachachat*, 10 April 1976: 1, 2.

⁵¹ That morning, units of the Border Patrol Police from several provinces, units of police in Bangkok, along with right-wing paramilitary groups invaded Thammasat University, where five thousand people had gathered peacefully all night to protest the return of the former dictatorial prime minister ousted three years earlier by a student movement. They were firing rockets, hand-guns, and anti-tank missiles into the university. A handful of students who tried to escape were brutally lynched, raped or burnt alive outside the university (Thongchai 2002).

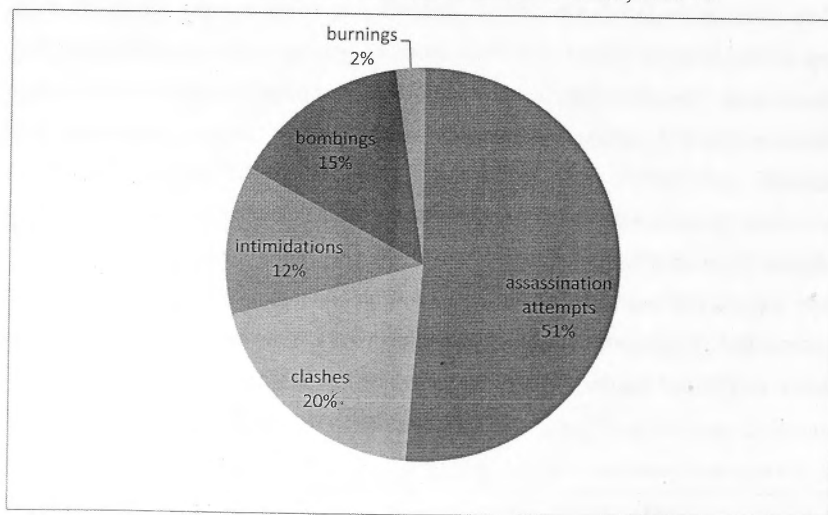
⁵² O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986.

right-wing groups.⁵³ After 1976, unprecedented number of radical students, intellectuals, political activists, and politicians took up the armed struggle, joining the Communist Party of Thailand waging guerrilla warfare with the Thai state in jungle areas—a deadly civil war that lasted for almost decade and killed thousands of people.

Table 2.1: Election-related violent incidents in national elections, 1975-76

Election Year	Violent incidents						Death toll	Wounded
	assassination attempts	fight, clashes, brawls, scuffles	physical intimidation	bombings	burnings	total	Total	total
1975	12	6	2	0	0	20	20	10
1976	9	2	3	6	1	21	16	19
Total	21	8	5	6	1	41	36	29

Chart 2.1: Methods of electoral violence in national elections, 1975-76



⁵³ There were, however, strategic moves between two competing military factions, trying to assert control in the midst of crisis: one faction instigated a massacre on the morning of October 6, 1976, but another faction staged a coup swiftly afterwards.

Factors, methods, and location of the assassinations carried out in 1975-1976

Electoral violence in 1975 and 1976 was concentrated in the provinces of Kerala and Karnataka. The majority of the victims were killed in the state of Kerala. The majority of the victims were killed in the state of Kerala. The majority of the victims were killed in the state of Kerala.

Table 2.2: Identity of election-related violent incidents' dead victims in national elections, 1975-76

Election dates	Dead victims					
	vote canvassers	Candidates	journalists, security officials, poll administrators and observers	gunmen	voters	Total
26/1/1975	5	2	3 (officials)	8 (insurgents)	2	20
4/4/1976	3	3	1	1 (right-wing members)	8	16
Total	8	5	4	9	10	36

Chart 2.2: Dead victims of electoral violence in national elections, 1975-76

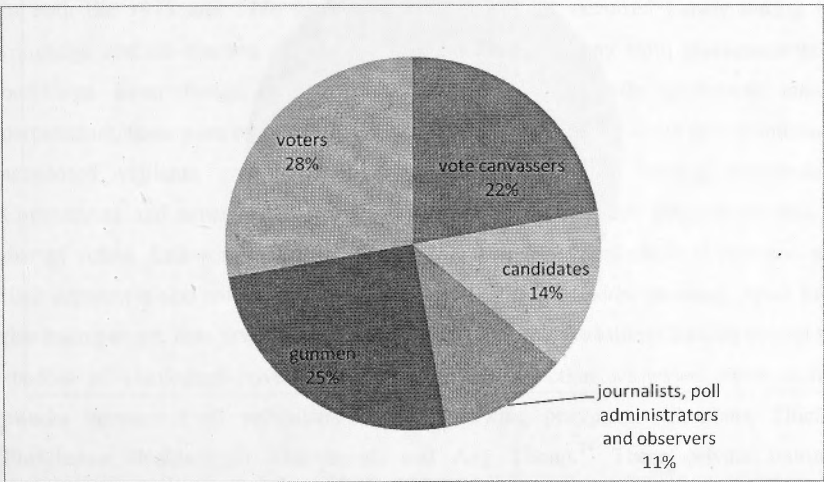
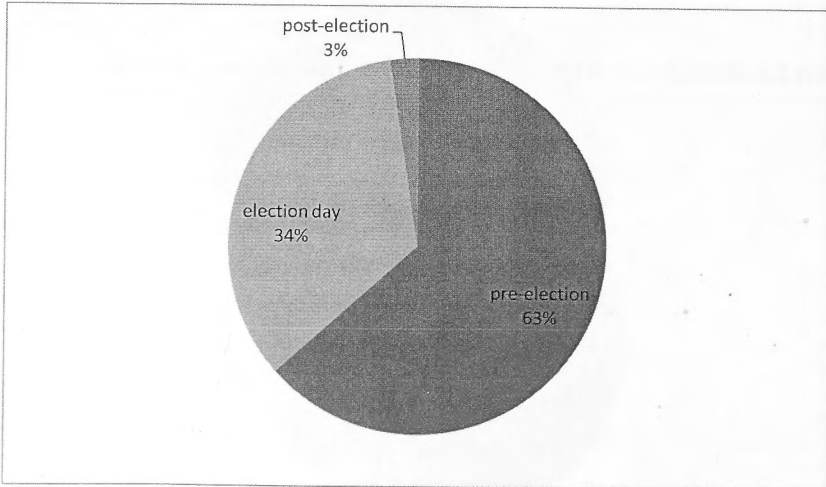


Table 2.3: Timing of election-related violent incidents in national elections, 1975-76

Election dates	Timing of violent incidents			
	pre-election (from House dissolution to election day)	election day	post-election (1 month after election day)	Total
26/1/1975	13	6	1	20
4/4/1976	13	8	0	21
Total	26	14	1	41

Chart 2.3: Timing of electoral violence in national elections, 1975-76



Patterns, methods, and logic of Thai state-sponsored electoral violence, 1975-1976

Electoral violence in 1975 and 1976 is inseparable from the royal-military alliance's violent campaign against their enemies that occurred outside the ballot boxes. Electoral and non-electoral violence were closely connected—both were caused and motivated mainly by ideological struggle at the national level. At stake was state power and ideological shaping of the state. Essentially, electoral violence was a continuation of state violence by other means. The rapidly changing environment after democratic change in 1973 forced traditional elites to rely on both electoral and non-electoral violence. Before 1973, as discussed earlier, authoritarian bureaucratic elites relied on various strategies to exclude progressive force from the electoral sphere and to win elections: assassination, imprisonment, unlawful detention, execution, kidnapping, military suppression, draconian laws, electoral fraud, and coup. These tactics rendered the elections from 1932 to 1973 both unfree and uncompetitive; the use of violence in elections was thus unnecessary. After the democratic uprising in 1973, the establishment lost their control of exercising the exclusionary tactics and electoral manipulation. Democratic constitutions, civil society, and civilian governments paved the way for more open political participation, more inclusive electoral space, and more transparent electoral administration. Therefore, royal-military elites needed to resort to brute force to eliminate election-related threats and to control electoral outcomes.

In both the 1975 and 1976 elections, violent incidents occurred mostly during the campaign and on election day, with various methods ranging from assassinations to bombings. Even though assassination was the most frequently used tactic among perpetrators, there were other methods to achieve their objectives. State agents and state-sponsored vigilante groups, militias, and thugs were the leading perpetrators. Communists and separatist insurgents followed their rank, their primary purpose to disrupt voting. Left-wing party workers were the chief target of electoral violence, and their supporters also suffered from indiscriminate bombing and/or shooting. Apart from this main pattern, data revealed that a few incidents of private killings lurking behind the shadow of ideological-driven violence. The 1976 election witnessed some violent attacks between rival politicians in the following provinces: Chonburi, Phichit, Phetchabun, Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Ang Thong.⁵⁴ These private murders

⁵⁴ See *Prachachat*, 14 February 1976: 1, 2; 12 March 1976: 1; 3 April 1976: 1, 12; 4 April 1976: 1, 12.

perpetrated by provincial elites were, however, marginal in the course of violence dominated by ideological struggle.

After 1976, the pattern, logic, and methods of electoral violence changed into a new form as a result of major political and economic changes at both the national and local levels. State-sponsored electoral violence disappeared, and the marginal acts— private murders perpetrated by provincial elites— became mainstream. Electoral violence turned out to be more privatized, specifically targeted, local-directed, and entrepreneurial. These new patterns are the focus of the next two chapters.

Chapter 3

Privatization of violence: Democratization and electoral violence, 1976-1996

Since the 1980s, elections have gained increasing significance as mechanisms for assuming and maintaining power in Thailand. The period the 1980s to the 1990s witnessed a radical change in Thai politics from a "military-bureaucratic authoritarian" to a parliamentary democratic system with competitive elections. These elections, unfortunately, were dominated by a new system of money and patronage politics and involved levels of electoral violence.

The revival of the parliamentary system and the competitive elections of the 1980s brought with it frequent assassinations of Members of Parliament, nouveau riche tycoons, local bosses (or potential bosses), and vote canvassers. These political killings are private-enterprise murders related to national and local electoral competition, with professional gunmen hired by the victims' political and business rivals. The gunmen were comprised of professional assassins, former security guards, petty gangsters, and moonlighting policemen.¹ Violence occurs both before and after elections as candidates and their supporters are threatened by their rivals with kidnapping or murder. Vote canvassers who betray a candidate may be killed to prevent this kind of behavior in future elections, and highly successful vote canvassers are sometimes also eliminated by their opponents.² In an attempt to explain this phenomenon, Benedict Anderson argued that the increasing prevalence of politically motivated murders in the late 1980s reflects the high "market value" of Members of Parliament in Thailand, and thereby signaled the greater importance of elections as a rule of the game deciding who obtains political power.

The chapter explains the causes, patterns, and consequences of election-related violence in Thailand. A good explanation accounts for variations over time and geographical area since violence ebbs and flows and is not evenly distributed across the country. These differences are at the heart of the investigation.

¹ Anderson 1998: 171-191; Ockey 2000: 74-96.

² Ockey 1998: 39-53.

This chapter has many foci. It outlines the essential structure of national and local economy and politics and the linkages between political murder and political development in Thailand's parliamentary democracy. It also identifies the emergence of the lucrative business of hired killing and its connection to the provincial elites' pattern of accumulation of wealth and power. Importantly, it explains the main causes of electoral violence from the 1979 to the 1996 elections.

The national political setting: parliamentary democracy and electoral competition under a patrimonial state

From 1979 to 1996, Thailand held 8 general elections, faced 3 coup attempts (1 successful in 1991 and 2 failed in 1981 and 1985), had two constitutions (the 1978 constitution and the 1991 constitution which was slightly amended after the May 1992 crackdown), and witnessed a large demonstration in 1992 against the unelected military prime minister. In rural areas, after the 1976 massacre when students and intellectuals joined the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) it strengthened and gained momentum. The government attacked the CPT in several parts of the country using enormous resources and manpower, and it was not until the mid 1980s that the CPT collapsed and was no longer a political or security threat to the Thai ruling elites. These two decades between the 1976 massacre and the 1997 economic crisis were a turbulent and unstable period in Thai politics. Nevertheless, it was during this period that a new political order emerged. Parliamentary democracy was steadily established to replace the authoritarian bureaucratic polity (even though interrupted briefly by the 1991 coup) and the balance of power had over time shifted from the bureaucratic elites to the metropolitan and provincial capitalists.³ Electoral politics became more significance as the primary channel to position, privilege, patronage and wealth. This changing political environment provided both opportunities and incentives for business leaders and local elites to enter politics.

For a brief period after 6 October 1976, Thai society was ruled under the civilian dictatorship of Thanin Kraivixien, a staunch anti-communist lawyer highly trusted by the

³ For general political context of the 1980s and 1990s, see Anderson 2000: 174-191; Chai-anan 1989; Anek 1992; Hewison 1997; Ockey 1992. On the political economy of the Thai state during this era, see Brown 2004; Hewison 1989; Pasuk and Baker 1995.

king. Thanin pursued authoritarian policies undermining all democratic institutions, including elections and political parties. He announced a 12-year plan towards "democracy," by which he aimed to establish absolute control over society without public participation or political contestation. Thanin's ultra royalist and conservative rule alienated nearly all societal groups, business elites, and extra-bureaucratic forces that had emerged since the Sarit Thanarat's era of rapid economic development. These groups had become a formidable force since the mid-1970s and they demanded wider political participation. The Thanin government's authoritarian turn was considered unacceptable and detrimental to their fortunes. They criticized Thanin's rule and, in less than a year, Thanin lost public support and was overthrown by military officers on 20 October 1977. The coup group appointed General Kriengsak Chamanand, a more reform-minded army leader, as the new prime minister. The Kriengsak administration was aware of the changing political landscape in which the bureaucracy could no longer rule the country without accommodating the interests of those—especially from the private business community—who demanded an open parliamentary system. The Kriengsak administration knew that the government needed to resume political participation through elections. The coup leader appointed constitutional experts and technocrats to draft a new constitution to pave the way for the next general election. Against this backdrop, the 1978 constitution was a social contract between two groups of elites, the old bureaucratic leaders and the new business elites, to share power under the agreed parliamentary platform.⁴

The mode of political compromise and power-sharing was manifest in several articles of the 1978 constitution. The constitution established a bicameral National Assembly, consisting of an elected House of Representative (of 301 members⁵) and an appointed Senate (with 225 members appointed by the prime minister). The Lower House had power to submit a motion of no-confidence against the government, meanwhile the senate had mandatory power to oversee and block the Lower House's legislation. Most importantly, the constitution stipulated that it was not necessary for the prime minister and cabinet members to be elected, allowing civil bureaucrats or army leaders to take positions without standing for election. Those who drafted the constitution designed the senate-by-appointment and unelected prime ministership to retain power bases for the

⁴ For the political role and ideas of the military group in the 1980s, see Chai-anan 1982; for the politics of 1978 constitution, see Saneh 1986.

⁵ The number of available seats for MPs is not fixed but changes according to population figures. The electoral law uses the ratio of 150,000 people per MP.

military and traditional elites within the parliamentary system.⁶ Under the 1978 constitution, in which elected and unelected power holders coexisted side by side in the assembly and government, the Thai polity was popularly labeled “a semi-democratic system.”⁷

The change in relative power between the state and business interests occurred under the overarching structure of a patrimonial state “lack[ing] above all the bureaucratic separation of the ‘private’ and the ‘official’ sphere.”⁸ Since democratization began in the early 1980s, the character of this patrimonial state was largely sustained. What had changed was the relative strength of bureaucratic and business elites and the direction of rent extraction. Under previous military authoritarian regimes, bureaucratic elites extracted rents from a weak business class, while under the semi-democratic regime a more powerful business class started to extract rents from a weakened bureaucracy. In this sense, from the late 1970s to the 1990s, the Thai polity experienced a major shift in the nature of power relations. At the beginning of this period, it was what Paul Hutchcroft calls a “patrimonial administrative state” that is a political system in which bureaucratic elite or “political aristocracy” is the predominant social force and countervailing social forces from civil society are weak.⁹ By the 1990s, it had gradually moved to a “patrimonial oligarchic state,” polity in which the business elite is the predominant social force having “an economic base largely independent of the state apparatus, but the state nonetheless plays a central role in the process of wealth accumulation.” In contrast to the patrimonial administrative state, Hutchcroft continues, “the influence of extra-bureaucratic force swamps the influence of the bureaucracy, [and] the major power resides not in a class of officeholders but rather in a private sector.”¹⁰ The intensity and speed of the institutional change from “patrimonial administrative state” to “patrimonial oligarchic state” was intermittent, a traditional bureaucratic elite resisted this direction of state transformation. But the combination of a patrimonial state with the burgeoning of Thai parliamentary democracy offered high

⁶The 1978 constitution also had a temporary clause, stipulating that within the first 4 years of constitution usage, the senate would have equal power to the Lower House, including power to use a no-confidence motion. Also, according to the temporary clause, civil servants and military officers are able to assume premierships and cabinet posts and retain their bureaucratic positions. Suchit and Pornsak 1984: 78-84.

⁷For a detailed discussion of the term “semi-democratic system,” see Chai-anan 1989.

⁸Weber 1978, vol. 2: 1028 quoted in Hutchcroft 1998: 5.

⁹The term “patrimonial administrative state” comes from Thomas Callaghy’s work on Zaire (Callaghy 1984, chapter 1). The term was borrowed and further developed by Hutchcroft (1998: 46) to describe the Thai state before 1973 and Indonesian state during Suharto’s New Order regime. See also Crouch 1979 on the Indonesian case.

¹⁰Hutchcroft 1998: 52.

incentives for business elites to become involve in electoral competition. Their goal was maximum access to the centralized state machinery, the major channel for rent-seeking opportunities. Public office provided an avenue to lucrative licenses, permits, concessions, quotas, loans, and power to manipulate laws and state regulations.¹¹ The stakes of winning election were higher than ever as victory gave capitalists access to state coffers and divided up the rents in a manner more favorable to non-bureaucratic forces. In this changed environment, major business leaders grasped opportunities at both national and local levels. With higher stakes, electoral competition became fiercer.

In analyzing the state's role in electoral violence, it is important to look both at the nature of the state and the goals of private actors.¹² The weak-state argument highlights only one dimension—the “supply” side—that weak states fail to achieve a monopoly control on the use of legitimate force in their territory and thus cannot control the use of force in the political sphere, including in the electoral process. It is equally, or more important to understand the “demand” side of political actors, particularly the business class, seeing why they eagerly need to capture state power in the first place. Considering political actors' acquisition of power, it leads us to discuss the character of the state apparatus. A state that exhibits strong patrimonial features—as opposed to “rational-legal” bureaucratic structure—provides not only opportunities but also strong incentives for predatory oligarchs to control state machinery.

However, not every geographical area under the Thai patrimonial state that electoral competition turned violent. The immediate causes of violence are rooted in local economic and political settings (as I will explain further).

Weak political parties and the Block-Vote electoral system

Apart from the patrimonial state structure, the 1978 constitution developed an electoral system that played a significant role in personalizing electoral campaigns and thus intensifying the use of violent tactics in elections. By examining the way institutions and institutional rules structure political arrangement and decisions, we gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of electoral violence.

¹¹ See Hutchcroft 1998 for the analysis of Philippine oligarchs.

¹² Most scholars in the field propose “state weakness” or “weak state capacity” as one of the most important causes for electoral violence (Sisk 2008, Schimpp and McKernan 2001, Fischer 2002 and 2004).

Prior to the constitutional reform of 1997, Thailand's election for the House of Representatives used the Block Vote (BV) electoral system which combines multi-seat constituencies with multiple votes and the plurality rule. The country's seventy-six provinces were divided into 142-156 electoral districts, with each district containing one to three seats (and most districts having more than one seat). Seats were allocated by province, and each province had varying numbers of seats which can change from one election to another, depending on the population. The least populated provinces can have only one MP seat, while the most populous province, Bangkok, has from 32 to 36 MPs.¹³ The multi-member constituency system allows voters to vote for candidates on an individual basis, rather than on a party basis, and voters, while not allowed to cast all their votes for one candidate, are allowed to split their votes among candidates from different parties.¹⁴ The parliamentary electoral system of this type structurally promotes high spending in electoral campaigns because it encourages as much fierce competition between candidates of the same party as it does between parties. It also promotes weak political parties. Almost all Thai political parties are short-lived alliances of factions tied together largely by personal and patronage networks, rather than a cohesive union of like-minded politicians. Factions can move from one party to another to enhance their chances of winning the election and joining a coalition government. In general, factions of powerful provincial politicians formed core elements of parties and their political calculations can affect the survival of a government. Withdrawal of tactical support of large factions frequently leads to government demise. The weakness of political parties in Thailand in the pre-1997 period was manifested in the fact that new parties emerged in every election and old parties disbanded. Statistics indicate that, on average, Thai political parties compete in less than three elections before disbanding. Many of them, in fact, compete in only one election.¹⁵ Party switching is also a common practice. Well-established politicians could expect 'transfer fees' of 10-20 million baht for changing parties.¹⁶

Even though the Block Vote system generates vote-buying, it produces a mixed effect on the use of coercive tactics. In one way, it helps candidates avoid one-on-one

¹³ See the number of MP seats in each province in Interior Ministry 1983; 1986; 1988.

¹⁴ Hicken 2006: 381-407.

¹⁵ On Thailand's political party weaknesses and short-lived character, see Hicken 2006: 388; Ockey 1994: Siripan 2006.

¹⁶ McCargo and Maisrikrod: 132-48. In the July 2011 election, the price in the political market could be as high as 50 to 80 million baht. Interview, national election commission's senior officer, Bangkok, 8 June 2011.

confrontation as they do not need to win most votes to get elected. For example, in a constituency that has three MP seats, the weakest candidate could collect just enough votes to win the third position and become MP. In this way, the Block Vote system helps diminish the conflict between strong candidates usually witnessed in the single-member districts or the First Past the Post system (FPTP), as there is only one available winner per district.¹⁷ However, the Block Vote system generates electoral conflict in two ways.¹⁸ First, constituencies with too many strong candidates competing for limited seats can be prone to violence. The 1979 Phetchaburi election is a prime example, in which four powerful local bosses fought fiercely for two MP seats, and used violence to reduce the number of competitors (see Chapter 10). Second, the Block Vote system produces intra-group conflict because voters have freedom to vote for candidates from different parties. As a result, Allen Hicken explains, “[T]his intra-party competition undermined the value of party labels to candidates and voters and contributed to making the parties factionalized and incohesive.”¹⁹ Consider Phetchaburi again, the candidate had to compete with his opposing team and his teammate to ensure victory. The strongest candidate tends to campaign separately and invest resources toward his own victory rather than share the campaign resources with his/her team members.²⁰ The weak candidates therefore have to campaign very hard, with every means possible, to not be left behind. The overall outcome is the widespread employment of personal campaign strategies by individual candidates from all parties. Hence campaigns conducted under the Block Vote system are full of tension, manipulation, and betrayal, frequently ending in bloodshed. The violent incident in the Phetchaburi 1979 election mentioned earlier was an insecure candidate ordering his gunmen to assassinate his (strong) teammate.

The patrimonial characteristic of the state, the Block Vote electoral system and weak, factionalized political parties were institutional factors that existed nationwide, and they made the Thai elections in the 1980s and 1990s generally prone to violence. These

¹⁷ The First Past the Post (FPTP) system is one of the simplest forms of plurality/majority electoral system, using single-member districts and majority vote. Voters can cast only one vote for their favorite candidate and the winning candidate is the one who received most votes. The 1997 constitution replaced the Block Vote system with the FPTP and list Proportional Representation (List PR) (see Chapter 5). For the general advantages and disadvantages of Block Vote and FPTP, see Reynolds, Reilly and Ellis 2005: 35-44; Farrell 2011; Norris 2004: 39-65.

¹⁸ Some scholars on electoral violence (Rapoport and Leonard 2001; Hoglund 2006; Sisk 2008) identify electoral system choice and its design as a crucial factor causing electoral violence, but they fall short of identifying the specific mechanisms and processes behind the linkages of electoral systems and violence.

¹⁹ Hicken 2005: 106.

²⁰ This practice was partly encouraged by the bloc vote electoral system which allows voters to “partially abstain by not casting all their available votes” (Hicken 2005: 105). For example, in a three-seat district, some voters cast their votes for only one or two favorite candidates.

national structural and institutional conditions created personalistic electoral campaigns and heightened the stakes of electoral competition, encouraging political actors to employ all tactics—legal or illegal, peaceful or violent—to win over their competitors. Consequently, Thailand, like the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and several African countries (such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and Kenya) who share dominant character of patrimonial states and personalistic politics, suffered from violent elections; election-related violence became endemic to electoral process in the country.²¹ Nevertheless, data reveal that electoral violence in Thailand has been unevenly distributed across the country: some provinces experienced a higher level of election-related violence than others, these national factors are thus insufficient to explain the pattern and causes of violence. The investigation needs to focus on the local factors, mechanisms, and processes that contribute to the geographical variation.²²

The next section focuses on local political and economic settings and the leading actors involved in perpetrating electoral violence.

Local settings: the political-economic foundations of electoral violence

Local economy: subnational enclaves, rent-seeking and illegal economies

In Thailand, two types of transformation dramatically changed Thai provincial life: the shift from a rural to an industrial economy which started in the 1960s, and the advent of parliamentary democracy began after 1973. Political and economic environment transformed into a new landscape with a new array of actors. Economic development programs and investment started to expand into rural areas in every region, and thereby produced more jobs, factories, capital, business services, and opportunities for local elites to develop into a capitalist class. Nevertheless the pace of provincial economic development was slow and its scale was small. The gap between Bangkok-based economies and provincial economies was staggeringly large. Even in the 1990s, scholars characterized the provincial economies as “backward,” consisting of three dominant characters— “small-scale business, weak manufacturing, and few exportable

²¹ For electoral violence in the Philippines, see Linantud 1998, Patino and Velasco 2006, Chua and Rimban 2011; in the case of Sri Lanka, see Hoglund and Piyaratne 2009; also see Klopp 2001 for Kenya.

²² The question of geographical variation is discussed thoroughly in Part III (Chapters 7-12) through the in-depth studies of six provinces.

manufactured products.”²³ For example, a study of Nakhon Ratchasima, the largest province and the economic center of the northeast region, found that by the late 1980s, businesses run by local entrepreneurs were small scale: only two companies in Nakhon Ratchasima “were ranked among the top 1,111 companies in terms of sales, profits, and assets.”²⁴ In fact, only a few provincial-based companies were on the list. There were two significant examples: the country’s largest bus company run by the Nirot family in Nakhon Sawan (see Chapter 8) ranked 944th in the country in terms of assets, while the tobacco company of Narong Wongwan’s family, the most powerful clan in Phrae (see Chapter 6), stood at the 1006th in terms of profit.²⁵ Generally, the provincial manufacturing sector was weak as only a very small number of local businessmen engaged in modern manufacturing, having “the ability to develop-high-valued and exportable new products... in reply to changes in the world market.”²⁶ This characterization generally applies to almost every province outside Bangkok. The main reasons for the provincial business comparative disadvantage were limited capital, and lack of technology and skilled-labor (mainly caused by the government’s policy bias of spending most of government resources in developing Bangkok as the single, dominant economic center).²⁷

Even by the 1990s, industrial investment in provincial areas was still limited and did not contribute significantly to provincial economic development. The agricultural sector was still the main source of jobs and income for locals. Only some local business elites had invested in manufacturing, concentrating on agricultural products or low-skilled and labor-intensive manufacturing.²⁸ More attractive to provincial entrepreneur was “unproductive profit-seeking activity,” in other words rent-seeking.²⁹ In contrast to profit-seeking or productivity-improving economic activities in which “asset and incomes are won and lost on the basis of the ability of the business owner to develop the property,” rent-seeking is an activity in which “ownership of property alone guarantees access to wealth... [and] the operation of the state determine the assignment of and the

²³ Ueda 1995: 87. See other studies of provincial economies and local entrepreneurs in Somkiat 1992; McVey 2000.

²⁴ Data from International Business Research (Thailand) Co., Ltd. 1990 quoted in Ueda 1995: 87.

²⁵ Ueda 1995: 115.

²⁶ Ueda 1995: 87-88.

²⁷ Doner and Ramsay 2000, 2003; Bello, Cunningham, and Li 1999.

²⁸ Ueda 1995; Bello, Cunningham, and Li 1999.

²⁹ Also, rent capitalism or “politically-determined capitalism” can be defined as system in which “money is in arrangement for appropriating wealth which has already been produced rather than in [arrangements for actually producing it].” Weber 1978, vol. 1: 240, quote in Hutchcroft 1998: 19. For a conceptual discussion of rent-seeking in Thailand, see Thane and Pasuk 2008.

continued enjoyment of economic advantages.”³⁰ In general, this “property” can include government protection from competition through quotas, tariffs, access to loans and grants, and licenses and concessions. And once these properties are obtained, the obtainers need not develop it; rather, “they only need to maintain and expand their ownership of economic advantage.”³¹

For Thai provincial elites, the two popular rent-seeking activities which required very low skill and technology but gave high profits were natural resource extractive businesses (logging, mining, quarries, etc) and businesses on which there were strict regulations imposed by government and hence opportunities for monopolistic profits if acquired (such as liquor or cigarette dealerships, tobacco curing, buses, gas stations, slaughter houses, and construction). Public-sector construction is, among others, a popular business enterprise. According to data from the early 2000s, there were 75 political families in seven different parties with strong economic bases in construction. These families were very successful in elections and dominated parliament. In the 2001 election, for example, 79 MPs (or 15.8 percent of the assembly) were members of families tied to these construction cartels.³² The attractiveness of the construction business lies in its large income and profits. Some local elites further enriched themselves by outsourcing projects they have successfully acquired to other contractors and then collecting commissions.³³ Construction also supports other locally owned businesses, such as quarries, lumber, bus services, etc. Moreover, provincial elites can use the government construction projects to build clientelistic networks: by allocating projects to business allies, relatives, and subordinates, and gaining popularity from locals by bringing development to the region. In sum, construction brought enormous wealth and prestige to provincial elites. It is no surprise to find large numbers of leading provincial business-cum-politicians (including in our six case studies) actively investing in construction. Since the 1960s, the construction sector has boomed as a result of the rapid economic and expansion of infrastructure development both in Bangkok and provincial areas (roads, highways, bridges, dams, airports, public buildings). As mentioned in Chapter 2, under military-rule in the 1960s and 1970s, businessmen sought rents by establishing close connections with generals, appointing them to the company

³⁰ Montes 1988: 64-66, quote in Hutchcroft 1998: 20-21.

³¹ As a result, the “internal efficiencies and investments” of their companies become a secondary concern (Montes 1988: 64-66, quote in Hutchcroft 1998: 21).

³² Most information on the construction business is drawn from Noppanan 2006: 280-357.

³³ The commission fee usually amounts to 30-40 percent of the project budget (Chaiyon and Olarn 2006: 358-415; Noppanan 2006: 282).

board or paying bribes. But only a small number of national-based companies managed to build strong relationships to earn them megaprojects worth billions of baht. The provincial bosses' companies normally acquired only small-size projects in their local areas. The parliamentary rule after the 1980s worked in favor of the provincial capitalists when they could establish relations with many different parties and have direct access to state resources through elections.³⁴ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the national government budget for public construction and roads maintenance increased exponentially, attracting a lot of local elites to invest. In turn, a group of cabinet members and lawmakers, who enriched themselves from the construction business, succeeded in pushing for larger government projects and increasing construction budgets.³⁵

Since natural resource extraction, dealerships, and construction require government contracts obtained through political connections, they create incentives for provincial businessmen to step into politics. Since these businesses are monopolistic by nature, it creates a zero-sum-game for stakeholders involved. Being elected as an MP enables one to secure contracts for business. Therefore wealth accumulation requires political connections, and acquiring and sustaining political power in turn requires considerable wealth. Conversely, losing elections means losing power and wealth. Also, the fact that provincial businessmen lived remotely from the central loci of power and were surrounded by limited local resources forced them to engage in national electoral politics more actively than their Bangkok-based counterparts, many of whom enjoyed proximity and financial clout over the policy makers. For provincial businessmen, sitting in the House gave them influence over the allocation of patronage and rents and of course the policymaking process; and they became aware that their votes mattered to sustain weak, multi-partied coalition governments.

Each Thai province has only a few wealthy business entrepreneurs, and, as previously discussed, local economic activities were not diversified or extensive—provincial business elites focused their investments in their own province or, at best, on a regional-scale. Generally, they have been unable to establish an economic footprint in the capital, let alone international markets. Their province forms their business “enclave” or

³⁴ Pasuk and Baker 2000; Hewison and Maniema 2000.

³⁵ The budget was worth 8,143 million baht in 1988, but then increased almost sevenfold to 59,716 million baht in 1996 (Noppanan 2006: 305). Banharn Silapa-archa's cabinet (1995-1996) was full of construction contractors, including Banharn himself.

"fiefdom" that they cannot afford to lose, and they need a solid base of political power to control their district areas. With these political-economic conditions, requiring heavy investment in rent-seeking, provincial business elites face higher stakes in elections than do other types of candidates. In fact, one can say that the higher the degree of candidates' involvement in rent-seeking, the fiercer the election becomes. The most dangerous situation occurs in rival bosses' competition for limited MP seats. Business and political conflict intertwine, business rivals become political enemies, and electoral competition is transformed from "mere" race for office into a war of monopoly and survival.³⁶

Another activity attractive to provincial elites is the high-risk, high-return illegal economy. The scale of the Thai illegal economy is large and extends across a wide range of enterprises, including drug trafficking, goods and human smuggling, contraband trading, illicit logging, prostitution, and gambling.³⁷ Studies show that since the mid 1980s, the illegal economy has rapidly developed side by side with the economic growth of Thailand. In the period 1993-1995, according to (conservative) estimates, the sum of these illegal activities "generated 286-457 thousand million baht of value-added per annum... [.] equivalent to 8-13% of GNP."³⁸ Illegal activities appeal to greedy businesspersons because huge profits can be made quickly. Provincial bosses like illegal businesses because they enable them to finance their clientelistic networks by providing employment and income for local people. However, illegal economic activity entails high risk. Theoretically, bosses put themselves in a vulnerable position as they could be arrested, charged and prosecuted by law enforcement authority. To reduce the risk, provincial bosses acquire political protection, either through connections or winning elections to obtain power. Under the unstable multi-partied coalition government, using connections is not appealing because power changes hands frequently, and bosses face the risk of relying on others to dispense protection for them. Having a political position is essential for protection from investigation and prosecution. There are many examples showing how illegal entrepreneurs moved themselves from a vulnerable to an

³⁶ See, in particular, Chapter 7 on Phrae, in which two tobacco-business families compete violently against each other in national elections; and Chapter 8 on Nakhon Sawan where competing construction business owners fight with one another for MP seats, leading to many deaths.

³⁷ As explained in Chapter 1, there are many overlapping terms for the informal economy. In this research, I focus on the illegal economy.

³⁸ Pasuk, Sungsidh and Nualnoi 1998: 7-8, 232 (quotation from page 7). These figures exclude several other unlawful business ventures such as trafficking of people to third countries, trading in protected animals and plants, and other forms of illegal gambling, like bookmaking on horse racing and boxing, billiard halls, the stock market lottery etc. The figure could amount to 20 percent of GNP if these were activities included (Pasuk, Sungsidh and Nualnoi 1998: 8).

“untouchable” position by being elected as MPs.³⁹ Being elected to parliament also gives access to allocation of legitimate rent-seeking opportunities. Rents and protection become two valuable “properties” emanating from patrimonial governmental offices. Once in power, provincial entrepreneurs-turned-legislators enrich themselves from both rent-seeking and illegal activities, as noted by Pasuk, Sungsidh and Nualnoi: “while there are many businessmen who seek rents without transgressing the line of criminality, ultimately the two spheres are closely enmeshed.”⁴⁰

In sum, with empowered parliamentary politics and rapid economic growth, the practice of rent-seeking and illegal business is connected to electoral politics. Their interconnectedness creates conditions for high-stakes elections, which leads to uncompromising competition and the use of violence in securing elective posts. The next section discusses the key characteristics of local power structures, political dynamics, and predominant figures.

Local politics: terrain of power contestation

Although rent-allocating and protection-dispensing occur in the capital, the primary battlegrounds are in the province. In order to make a political impression nationally, provincial elites have to strive for a solid local political base. Some locals launched their political career in the local administrative offices (district, municipal and provincial councils) before running for a national legislative position. The local elections trained them in electioneering skills and network building. Local political families usually put their relatives in these offices so they can acquire political experience and create local power bases.⁴¹ However, prior to decentralization (implemented in 1997), these local offices operated with only a small budget and limited political mandate, and were largely controlled by civil bureaucrats. Prominent elites regarded local offices as stepping stones to a more powerful and lucrative MP career.

³⁹ Prime examples are provincial bosses in Nakhon Sawan and Nakhon Si Thammarat, two provinces rife with illegal activities, who abused their political office’s power to protect their illegal business (see Chapter 8 and 9).

⁴⁰ Pasuk, Sungsidh and Nualnoi 1998: 5. Their study mentioned twenty to thirty MPs in the 1990s “prominent figures in the illegal economy either through direct participation, protection, or financing” (262). This is possibly a conservative estimate. My field research on six provinces suggests deeper and wider interconnection between illegal businesses and politicians in the 2000s (see, in particular, Chapter 9 on Nakhon Si Thammarat).

⁴¹ Almost all influential families in my case studies follow this practice; the best examples are the Nirod family of Nakhon Sawan (Chapter 8) and the Angkinan family in Phetchaburi (Chapter 10).

Since the 1979 election, each province witnessed an increase in provincial business-cum-political elites, popularly called as *jao pho* (godfather), in national parliamentary politics. Their spectacular rises and political roles had attracted attention from media observers and scholars.⁴² In spite of widespread attention, there are some misconceptions that my study will clarify. The four main misinterpretations are: first, not every provincial businessman is involved in elections, and not all are *jao pho*; second, not every *jao pho* has a monopoly over provincial political and economic resources; third, business-cum-political elites' power is not static but changes over time; and last, they are not "men of violence" by nature.

First, even though the local economic environment provides incentives for business elites to engage in politics, not all businesspeople enter politics. Several prefer business only and stay away from direct involvement in politics—particularly entrepreneurs whose businesses do not depend primarily on political connections or coercive power. For some businessmen, their revenue mainly come from the service sector such as hotels, shopping malls, and education; from trading (equipments, stationery, steel); or from manufacturing (sugar, textiles, glass, electronics, automobile parts). Instead of being enmeshed in risky political investment, they were able to enjoy direct access to the financial institutions in Bangkok or, in some cases, foreign investors, for loans and technology. This permits less reliance on local power and more reliance on market mechanisms. Despite the relatively small-scale local industry and manufacturing sector, some local figures were able to build their wealth from these low-risk businesses. And not all local businessmen entangled themselves in illegal business ventures. The volatile nature of provincial politics scared off many businesspeople.⁴³ Families or individuals who have been active in politics, on the contrary, generally run businesses that need political power to enhance and protect their wealth. These so-called "godfather figures" engaged in violence in elections.

Second and third, not every provincial boss enjoys monopolistic power in their own provinces, and their acquired power should not be viewed as a permanent attribute. The power of Thai provincial bosses is more limited than generally perceived and portrayed, and the monopolistic boss is the exception rather than the rule. Thai local bosses are far

⁴² See the list of important studies regarding the "provincial godfathers" in Chapter 1.

⁴³ A remarkable case is Nakhon Sawan, where provincial politics were dominated by underworld figures, making legitimate businessmen stay away from politics (see Chapter 8). See also Thawatchai (1998), Ekchai (1995) who identified some families that have economic bases in modern trade and manufacturing.

from being what Robert Nozick defines as a “minimal state,” namely one “which enjoys an undisputed control over the use of force in a certain territory and protects everyone, whether they like it or not.”⁴⁴ In comparison to their counterparts in African countries, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Thai bosses control limited territorial and coercive power. The flourishing “godfather” literature in the 1990s tended to portray the omnipotent image of the Thai provincial bosses, represented by only few spectacular cases. The colorful lives of *kamnan* Poh in coastal Chonburi, Charoen Phattanadamronchit (aka Sia Leng) in Khon Kaen, and Piya Angkinan in Phetchaburi are three most cited examples who overshadow (and distort) the actual political lives of the rest. The representation of these notable bosses is also inaccurate; instead of boundless and absolute power, they have had unstable and turbulent political careers.⁴⁵ The boss’s terrain is, in fact, confined to their home district or province. Only a very few managed to expand their power beyond their own province (and only for brief periods). Undoubtedly, most bosses had large businesses and controlled many subordinates. The power of local godfathers depends on their ability to monopolize the local economy and political system as the absence of competition created considerable profits and privilege. However, a monopoly is a rare commodity and needs to be established and maintained, rather than occurring naturally. Each province has more than one ambitious figure or family with ambition to amass wealth and power at the expense of others. A degree of political competition thus exists in every province. The successful boss is the most competent and cunning in exercising his or her financial, political, and coercive resources to weaken and/or even eliminate their opponents. The path to securing a power monopoly, in certain circumstances, is tainted by violence.

Apart from challenges from rivals, provincial bureaucratic elites contested godfathers’ power. In other words, godfathers have had to operate and exercise their power under an archaic bureaucratic structure long existed in the province since the absolute monarchy regime. It is misleading to think of them as local warlords or patrimonial lords who roamed freely in their territories, in which they operated like a parastate using power to administer and adjudicate, and control all activities and resources in the area.⁴⁶ Instead of functioning in the political landscape of a failed, crumbling, or dysfunctional state,

⁴⁴ Nozick 1974, Cited in Gambetta 1993: 7.

⁴⁵ See Chapter 10 for Piya’s and his Angkinan clan’s struggle.

⁴⁶ For example, the Philippines local bosses are able to possess enormous economic power and assume “quasi-military and quasi-judicial functions in their localities” (Hutchcroft 1998: 43; see also Sidel 1999; McCoy 1993). For the even more striking power of African warlord politics, see Reno 1998; Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999; Weinstein 2006.

Thai provincial bosses emerged and existed under local power structures that had previously been controlled by a coterie of bureaucratic elites: the provincial governor, provincial department heads, district chiefs, sub-district heads, village heads, as well as provincial police chiefs and military commanders.⁴⁷ The provincial bosses need to negotiate, cooperate, and/or sometimes strive against the state authorities to carve out their territorial power in their localities.

In the past, under the period of absolute monarchy and the People Party's regime (1932-1957), central rulers co-opted rural elites—bandits, monks, teachers, merchants—into government service, especially in remote areas beyond the state's reach. The Thai state depended on them carrying out many tasks but, at the same time, tried to domesticate their influence over local people. Overall, they succeeded as the central government controlled more economic and coercive power. The mutual, but unbalanced, relationship continued under the military regime of Sarit and Thanom in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s, as discussed, the provincial business elites were relatively richer and wielded more power through political positions, and were thus more confident of asserting their power in their localities—they wanted to be patrons, rather than clients of top bureaucrats. The contestation of power between long-standing state authority and emerging bosses manifested differently from province to province.⁴⁸ In provinces in which two warring factions fought or many warring factions battled bosses fiercely fighting and weakening each other's factions, the bureaucrats enjoyed relative autonomy. Phrae is the best example of polarization, while Nakhon Sawan and Nakhon Si Thammarat were two fragmented provinces (see Chapter 7, 8, 9 for polarized and fragmented landscapes). On the other hand, in provinces completely controlled by a

⁴⁷ Thai Royal Army structure is divided into four regions (central, northeast, north, and south), 14 military circles (mandalas), and 36 military districts (with provincial headquarters and commanders) in 36 provinces. This structure originally dates back to the absolute monarchy of the late 19th century. The military district is located in a large or strategically important province, but its territorial power also covered adjacent provinces. For example, Nakhon Sawan military district covers Nakhon Sawan, Kamphaeng Phet and Uthai Thani. All my case studies, except Phrae, are located military bases.

⁴⁸ Studies on Thai local politics in the 1990s provided different accounts of the balance of power between the bureaucracy and elected politicians. Varying interpretations, I argue, stem from different location of observation. Michael Nelson's work on Chachoengsao (based on his field research from October 1990 to March 1992) concludes that "the bureaucratic polity still seems to be very much alive in the countryside" (Nelson 1998: 3); Daniel Arghiros (2001: 227), who conducted field research in Ayutthaya in 1989-1990 and 1995-1997, shared similar conclusions. However, he noticed a significant change that local businessmen had become politically stronger by the "accumulation of elected positions." Other scholars focused on the rise of rural godfathers, especially James Ockey (1992; 1993) emphasized instead the change of power balance, in which local notables were wielding stronger power than and no longer kowtowing to local bureaucrats). Both Nelson and Arghiros based their conclusion on field research in provinces lack of dominant bosses, while Ockey's interpretation relied mainly on accounts of prominent godfathers in Chonburi, Phetchaburi, Khon Kaen, and Pichit.

single boss (or one clan), bureaucrats were under the boss's thumb (see prime example, Sanoh Thienthong of Sakeo, in Chapter 12).

In conclusion, the wealth and power of provincial notables varied from province to province—some bosses were more successful in business and political ventures than others. There is no unified characterization or pattern of local boss rule. Any attempt to understand the dynamics of local power and patterns of electoral violence need to take this variation into account. There were only a few bosses who achieved a monopoly, which gave them high levels of rent and protection. The rest had to compete constantly against their opponents to acquire and maintain oligarchic positions. Several of them, after losing many elections, lost their fortunes and political standing leading to their exit from politics. Some political dynasties declined or even collapsed after losing their charismatic patriarchs and lacking capable successors. Others disintegrated through intra-clan conflicts.⁴⁹ Political bosses, therefore, emerge and disappear as a result of changing political and financial circumstances. It is mistaken to portray the godfather's power as ubiquitous and permanent. Often forgotten is the fact that Thai provincial bosses are a short-lived phenomenon. In contrast to the Philippine political dynasties that date to the early 20th century, the majority of Thai political clans entered politics after 1973. Out of 97 clans active in Thai politics from 1933 to 1996 (20 in the north, 21 in central, 31 in northeast, 17 in Bangkok, and 8 in the south), only 18 local clans entered politics before the 1960s. And by 1996, all but two of these old clans had withdrawn or disappeared from national politics.⁵⁰ Their time in politics is relatively short: 25 percent of political families sustain power for only one or two terms of legislation, and of the 20 percent intermittently stood in election, only half managed to stay in power for more than two terms.⁵¹ Historically, their instability was caused by frequent military coups, which interrupted parliamentary institutions and the electoral process. Also, their short time in politics meant these bosses were under severe pressure from both business rivals and the local state apparatus. Moreover, by the time they had succeeded in climbing to the top of power in 1996 (through the Banharn administration), the political and

⁴⁹ See, for example, the Ketchart family in Nakhon Si Thammarat (Chapter 9), whose power declined after their family head passed away. For intra-clan conflicts, see Phetchaburi (Chapter 10).

⁵⁰ One is the Khamprakob in Nakhon Sawan and another is the Angkinan in Phetchaburi. These figures based on calculation from data in Thawatchai (1998: 42), which defined political clan as "any family that have more than one family member in the parliament" (not necessary at the same time) during 1933 to 1996. If he counted only the families that have more than one family member at the same time, the number of political clans would be significantly diminished.

⁵¹ Thawatchai 1998: 335.

economic landscape had been transformed in a way that seriously reduced their power (see Chapter 5).

My research suggests that the situations most prone to electoral violence were on the pathway from oligarchy to monopoly or from monopoly to oligarchy. When ambitious bosses are not content with their power-sharing mode (with fellow bosses) and aim for a monopoly, elections turn violent. On the other hand, when monopoly power is challenged, bosses fight violently to retain their power.⁵² To understand the role of Thai rural “godfathers” in democratic politics and their involvement in electoral violence, one must understand their ultimate vulnerability to challenges from rivals.

Last, provincial bosses are not “men of violence.” They do not employ violence out of whim or use violent methods routinely or randomly. They do not use violence because they are “barbaric”, or because they are acting according to a local culture that honors the practice of bloodletting or vengeful feuding. The political godfather is not a bandit, outlaw, or common criminal; the comparison and historical connection between these categories made by some scholars is misleading. Political godfathers are a distinct socio-political entity. They aim to be the local supreme leader, and thereby see petty criminals or local thugs as obstacles to order they are seeking to construct or maintain in their controlled territory.⁵³ For political bosses, as explained by Diego Gambetta on his classic work on the Sicilian mafia, violence constituted “a means, not an end; a resource, not the final product” to achieve political and business goals. “It may be argued,” Gambetta explains, that boss power “rests on the ability to use force, but it does not follow that it coincides with it.”⁵⁴ Even though coercion plays a crucial role in capital accumulation and political contestation in Thai local politics, coercive force operates under a particular logic.

As the pattern shows, the use of violence in Thai elections has specific targets and limited scope. Not every boss used violence in electoral campaigns, and for those who did, violence was not used repeatedly. Otherwise, the number of electoral violent incidents would be much higher. Precisely because political bosses perceived violence as

⁵² The dynamic is similar to American gang warfare (see Schneider 1999).

⁵³ Chapter 12 examines how political boss Sanoh Thienthong established order in his Sa Kaeo province by eliminating local thugs.

⁵⁴ Gambetta 1993: 2. The discussion in this section was significantly influenced by conceptual and theoretical arguments elaborated in Gambetta’s work.

a tool, they employed it only when necessary. Once the situation changed, the tool was dropped. Thai bosses' behavior is, in fact, not unique as studies elsewhere have found other powerful organizations who specialize in controlling coercive means (mafiosi, gangsters, protection rackets) generally seek "compliance without violence if possible," and their ideal "is to manipulate others without damaging anything."⁵⁵ Apposite are the examples of bosses who monopolized their respective provinces, and thus local government functionaries. There is no need to use violence when one has alternative means to manipulate, fix, rig, or steal votes.⁵⁶

The existence of *jao pho* in any province does not automatically render the province prone to electoral violence, as assumed or implied by many studies. For example, in November 1991, the Police Department estimated there were 97 godfathers in border and/or coastal provinces, and 71 in the rest of the country. In total, police identified 25 provinces outside Bangkok as areas plagued by godfathers.⁵⁷ But the data on electoral violence showed that violent deaths and injuries took place in 15 provinces in the March 1992 election, and only 11 provinces in the September 1992 election. As Gambetta explains, to define "bosses" as violent men is a grave misunderstanding. Political circumstances and only certain kinds of threat make some bosses prone to violence. Even a perfectly "benevolent patron," if the situation demanded, could engage in violence to become powerful.

The next section elaborates the demand and supply aspects of electoral violence and explains how specific actors, mechanisms and processes produce violent outcomes in elections.

Order and business of political murders: the demand and supply of electoral violence

If there is no conflict over vested interest, there will be no killings in elections. It is not worth it. No candidate shoots their opponents to win

⁵⁵ Tilly 2003: 198, 36 (respectively).

⁵⁶ See, for example, electoral competition in Buriram (Chapter 11) and Sa Kaeo (Chapter 12) after clans dominated the provinces. A monopolistic "patron" like Banham Silpa-archa had no reason to engage in any coercive methods, because he and his family achieved absolute provincial control. Suphanburi's elections were therefore calm and peaceful. For Banham's domination, see Nishizaki 2011.

⁵⁷ Figures quoted in Sombat 2000: 62, 71.

election just because they really want to use their MP position to help poor villagers. None at all.⁵⁸

The electoral murder market developed out of a need to eliminate opposition from those who sought office for personal gains. Provincial bosses drove the demand for violence in the 1980s-1990s, however, they did not carry out the attacks or assassinations. They operated on the demand side of the violence, while another group —“violent entrepreneurs” and “violent specialists”—operated on the supply side. Prominent bosses needed a supply of violence to eliminate both rivals who imposed threats to their attempt at power monopoly and disloyal subordinates who put their political network and control over resources in jeopardy.

Demand for murder: provincial bosses and their networks of influence

The emergence of representative democracy at a time of poor political party institutions, combined with a lack of civic associational life, opened up a vast political opportunities for the local notables to enter. Since military rule weakened and interrupted Thailand's political party institutionalization, parties had never had a chance to develop their long-term political strategy and policy, or their branches and mass bases support outside the capital. They therefore were forced to depend on local brokers to conduct campaigns and canvass votes for them. The absence of party-oriented, programmatic politics, in turn, made the majority of candidates lack of alternative means of differentiation; they have to rely on personal popularity and support network. In this way, the occupation known as “*hua khanaen*” (vote canvassers or brokers) emerged. The role of vote canvasser can be traced back to as early as the 1940s, even though it carried a different name back then.⁵⁹

Usually, candidates recruited local notables to act as their vote canvassers. These locals might be local government officials such as sub-district heads, village headmen, teachers, local merchants, or highly respected local leaders such as monks, and strongmen. These people assumed the role of vote canvasser to enhance their status in the local community and to obtain money and power from their supported candidates.

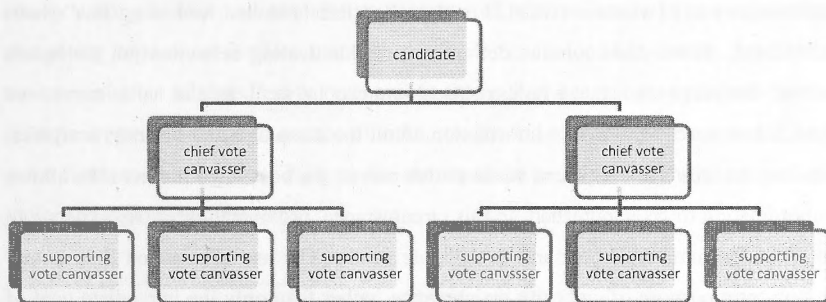
⁵⁸ Interview, provincial councilor and dominant clan member, Phetchaburi, 15 December 2009.

⁵⁹ Journalists used the term “Huana Nuai Khum Siang” (vote controlling chief) in the 1940 to 1950s (Singhakhom 1968). Prior to the 1969 election, the term “*hua khanaen*” appeared more often in the newspaper and literature (Chongkon 1974). For the translation, scholars used many terms interchangeably to translate the word “*hua khanaen*,” among them: vote canvassers, vote brokers, vote solicitors, and vote gatherers. But “vote canvasser” is most commonly used. In this research I follow the popular usage of vote canvasser.

And because political parties were weak, the electoral success of most candidates depended on the strength of their own personal networks—on how many local brokers they could win over to work on their behalf—rather than party policy or organization. Personal circles of influence play a crucial role in shaping electoral competition and the dynamics of politics, especially in rural areas. Voter mobilization by local networks is the key to electoral victory. Thereby, prior to 1997, the relationship between a politician and the local vote canvassers established the most crucial link in electoral campaigns. If candidates selected the wrong canvassers, i.e. the ones without significant status or networks, they could be doomed to fail.

Vote canvassers administered the election campaign, planned strategies, visited constituencies, and distributed goods and services, including hard cash (in vote-buying operations). If the situation required, they also engaged in smear campaigns and electoral fraud, cheating, and misconduct. By design, the Block Vote's multi-member districts created large electoral constituencies and thereby forced candidates to build as large a network as possible. The more powerful and affluent the candidate, the more high quality vote canvassers he or she could command. Over time, the vote canvassing system developed from simple circles of friends and families into a complex, pyramid-like structure with the candidate positioned at the top.⁶⁰

Chart 3.1: Vote canvassing networks



⁶⁰ The information and analysis on vote canvassers and their networks is drawn from Sombat 1987; Pichai, Somchet, and Vorawit 1988; Phoemphong 1990; Arghiros 1995; Callahan and McCargo 1996. For analysis of vote canvassing network's development after 1997, see Anyarat 2007; 2010.

The more complex the networks, the more decentralized they are, which led to the division of labor among people in the same network. Candidates typically had no direct contact with low-level vote canvassers, let alone a majority of voters in the district, as they farmed out all tedious work through the chief vote canvassers. The candidates only recruited the main vote canvassers, who usually were close friends, family members or long-time associates. The main vote canvassers were responsible for creating networks by managing other brokers at the lower levels, channeling money through them, assigning them their tasks, and taking care of them after elections. One important advantage of creating a highly hierarchical organization is that the candidate is distanced from, and commonly has no knowledge of, vote-buying and other unlawful operations carried out by their minions.⁶¹ But electioneering's outsourcing has its downside. Even though most candidates want to know every detail of their election campaign, they cannot afford the time and capacity to control everything taking place in their network. Monitoring thus became a fundamental problem.

When the boss failed to keep a tight grip on his subordinates, a wide range of unfavorable behaviors took place. Dishonest vote canvassers enriched themselves by embezzling campaign (and vote-buying) money before it reaches voters. It was common to find that voters received only 40 or 50 percent of original value set by the boss, which leads to disappointment and anger directed toward candidates (not the vote canvassers). Some vote canvassers were paid but did not collect votes.⁶² Also, greedy vote canvassers could switch sides and worked for a higher bidder or gather votes for more than one candidate or party (who are rivals). Locals called this behavior "nok song hua" (two-headed bird). These dishonorable, defiant and double-dealing behaviors put the boss's election campaign and the whole political empire in peril as the vote canvassers controlled resources and inside information about the campaign and business activities, including the boss's underground ventures. Moreover, the boss loses respect if he allows insubordination to go unpunished. In this circumstance, provincial elites use violence to control and command respect and consolidate power. The use of coercion thus served the long-term purpose of authority maintenance, rather than only the immediate goal of poll winning. Nevertheless, the more often coercive force was employed, the clearer it reflected the weakness of the candidates and his patronage network. Frequent internal

⁶¹ For example, when vote canvassers are caught by the police on charge of preparing money to buy votes, they do not reveal for whom they are working or tell the police that their bosses are aware of their action (see Chapter 11 for the real incident occurred in Buriram in 1995).

⁶² See all case studies in part 3 and 4 for these political behaviors.

violence reflected a losing grip on supporters, and failing to demand loyalty from them. As discussed in the first chapter, to understand the dynamics of local politics and electoral violence, one needs to go beyond the extant patron-client framework. Many vote canvassers work as “election entrepreneurs,” enriching themselves by being a political broker; they do not carry out the job because they owe any patron a debt of gratitude. Thereby they worked for the highest bidder or those who have a better chance of winning (because they knew they could benefit more from elected MPs). Instead of engaging in a “long-term, enduring, mutual” relationship, many vote canvassers built short-term, instrumental relations with the candidates for whom they worked. And as the commercialization of electoral politics accelerated in the 1990s, campaigns witnessed increasing numbers of brokerage-type canvassing replacing the old clientelistic style.⁶³ This is why vote canvassers were primary target of violence in elections.

Besides punishing vote canvassers who double-crossed them or were incompetent and corrupt, candidates also used violence to deal with threats from outsiders. Particularistic campaigns, in contrast with programmatic or ideological campaign, were typically filled with personal conflicts and animosities because candidates had no institutional support or policy platforms (see the discussion regarding electoral and party system above).⁶⁴ All political parties attempted to win the support of and recruit local godfathers to run under their banner. If all influential bosses campaigned together under the same party, the competition was relatively smooth. But when rival bosses ran against each other under different parties, elections were tense and had the potential to turn violent. Nevertheless, rivalry among bosses had not always been solved with violence. In some provinces, competing bosses or families came to an agreement of power-sharing by dividing territory, number of seats, and/or rents among themselves because they realized they had no capacity or inclination to destroy all other groups and monopolize the power.⁶⁵ At the same time, the bosses who enjoyed the monopolistic power could refrain from using violence (as discussed earlier).

⁶³ Every scholar, both Thai and foreign, studying Thai local politics in the 1990s observes the phenomenon of “commercialization of electoral politics.” See, among them, Surin and McCargo 1997; Sombat 1993; Somrudee 1993; Pichai, Somchet, and Vorawit 1988; Phoemphong 1990; Arghiros 1993; Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994. Importantly, popular fiction and non-fiction books (in Thai) noticed the existence of vote canvasser as a profit-making occupation, which emerged under the parliamentary democracy, well before scholars. See Seththaphon 1976; Ton 1980; Khomkrit 1984; Withun 1986.

⁶⁴ A nuanced conceptual and theoretical discussion regarding programmatic and particularistic politics is offered in Hutchcroft (forthcoming 2013).

⁶⁵ This kind of situation occurred in Buriram politics before 1995 (Chapter 11), and in Phetchaburi after 1992 (Chapter 10).

Importantly, findings from six provinces show that, when conflict arose, provincial elites attempted to employ all non-coercive means to solve their disputes. These included negotiation, manipulation, deal-making, bluff, deceit, bribes, and exchange of interest. For political bosses, threats of violence are preferable to the actual use of violence. Truly powerful bosses deployed threat persuasively so their opponents comply before violence erupts.⁶⁶ Violence was a last resort when other possibilities had been exhausted, and when bosses face stiff resistance. Evidence from this thesis suggests two circumstances in which bosses are recalcitrant or unwilling to cooperate. First, when they wish to acquire a political monopoly. This usually happens when a young but ambitious generation of provincial elites replaced their predecessors; or when the business fortune of one political boss was enhanced considerably, surpassing others, to the point they believe they can dislodge all of their competitors and be the supreme boss.⁶⁷ The second dangerous circumstance is when a monopoly is seriously challenged. After enjoying rents and power without having to share them with anyone else for many years, top bosses and their clans did not accept the idea of having their opposition taking over their political enclave.⁶⁸ In a nutshell, electoral violence is most likely to occur when the power monopoly is at stake. Polarized and fragmented power structures therefore facilitate conditions for violent power struggle.

The political processes and logics behind the electoral violence help explain the type of candidates involved in the undertaking of violent actions. Rent-seeking businessmen or illegal business owners (boss-type candidates) dream of monopolizing power. Poor or professional candidates (teachers, lawyers, doctors, retired civil officers, NGOs, journalists) do not have the capacity or political ambition for a monopoly on power; therefore they were not a threat for provincial bosses.⁶⁹ When faced with these tame contenders, boss-type candidates need not resort to violence because they can defeat them by exercising a stronger war chest and vote-canvassing network. Violence is only

⁶⁶ There is rich evidence of all these tactics in all six case studies. The godfathers in Phetchaburi, Buriram and Sa Kaeo are no exception.

⁶⁷ Elections in Buriram started to turn violent precisely when the Chidchob clan wanted to monopolize provincial politics in the mid 1990s (see Chapter 11). Elections in Nakhon Sawan deteriorated violently when the emerging local notable attempted to topple all other old dynasties in the late 1990s (Chapter 8).

⁶⁸ This dynamic took place in Phrae when the Wongwan family lost their control to their former allies, the Supasiri family, and they attempted to take it back. The Supasiris, on the other hand, did everything to protect their political dominance (Chapter 7). It also happened in Nakhon Si Thammarat when the most influential clan, the Ketchart, struggled to save their long-standing political territory (Chapter 9).

⁶⁹ Beyond businessmen, these are common background occupations of Thai MPs. Among 97 political families, 60 families came from business families, 28 from bureaucracy, seven from law, and two from media (Thawatchai 1998: 332).

necessary when they are confronted with the same political species—the rival boss—in the struggle for power monopoly. Electoral violence in Thailand is a war of the “strong” against the “strong.” Most casualties, however, were supporters and those from the lower ranks of the boss network (see the violence pattern in Chapter 4).

Over time, pre-eminent provincial elites refrained from killing rival elites as they learnt that doing so was too costly for all sides.⁷⁰ Killing high-profile rival candidates during elections brought negative public attention, police investigations, and immense political pressure. More importantly, the family of the dead comes after the murderers and masterminds for vengeance. Gunmen are reluctant to take the job; they think it “too big a deal.”⁷¹ The murder of Phetchaburi top boss *kamnan* Chong Khlaikhlueng in the 1979 election led to rampant revenge killings (see Chapter 10), demonstrating the deadly consequences of high-profile murder. Widespread blood spilling made everybody feel unsafe and was bad for business. These consequences taught other bosses a lesson: target only minions so they all could be spared from the anarchic violence of (electoral) warfare. After all, some bosses said, they were not barbaric, but businessman-cum-politicians who calculate the costs and benefits of violent acts.⁷²

Violence and intimidation is truly not the only strategy to win electoral competition.⁷³ As Allen Hicken and many other scholars argue, candidates pursue a variety of personal strategies to win votes, including “targeting government pork and patronage to a candidate’s constituents,” “relying on name and frame to cultivate a personal vote,” “using patron-client relationships to engender loyalty and support,” or direct vote buying. Nevertheless, the fact that the coercive method is not adopted by every candidate is not because “most candidates lack the sufficient resources (money, men, and connections) to use violence as their primary electoral strategy.”⁷⁴ As discussed, first of all, the violent strategies were adopted by only certain type of candidates (the political boss) and under specific circumstances, and they served broader business-political purposes than merely gaining votes. Eliminating disloyal vote canvassers might not have

⁷⁰ Interview, Phetchaburi boss, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009; interview, Nakhon Sawan boss, 3 September 2010. See further discussion in Chapter 8 and 10 on the dangerous consequences of the elite killing.

⁷¹ Gunmen know that they will get an enormous payment for taking the job, but most of them are also aware that the murderer of a candidate almost always gets caught. Interview, underworld protection racket’s owner, Bangkok, 6 April 2012.

⁷² Interview, Phetchaburi boss, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009; interview, Nakhon Sawan boss, 3 September 2010.

⁷³ Hicken 2002 and 2007.

⁷⁴ Hicken 2007: 53-54.

brought the bosses electoral victory but could have been seen as necessary for respect within his group. "Money, men, and connections" are not obstacles to the use of violence as the supply of violence in Thailand is relatively cheap and abundant. It is the political demand that determines the occurrence of electoral violence.

After elaborating the demand-side of electoral violence, the next section discusses the supply of violence.

Supplying the means of murder: gunmen and killing dens

From the 1980s to the 1990s, capitalist development, parliamentary politics and professional gunmen developed hand in hand. The increased demand for coercive force (in settling disputes or eliminating business-political rivals) generated a supply of violence. Provincial elites authorized, subsidized and financed violent acts, but, as explained earlier, they preferred to keep themselves as far as possible from the bloodshed. The violence thus needed to be executed secretly and methodically.

The existence of "professional gunmen" in Thailand thus served a specific function, politically and economically—albeit erratically. The gunmen, unlike provincial bosses, specialize in exercising physical force; violence is a means and an end, a resource and also the final products. Violence is their sole commodity. They are, according to the literature, "specialists in violence" or "violent specialists": "who control [coercive] means of inflicting damage on person and objects" and command "extensive skills" in using violence. On the average, Charles Tilly argues, "they deliver damage more efficiently and effectively than other kind of political actors. They deliver damage under discipline" and "often they do so at the behest of employers who themselves never engage directly in damaging acts."⁷⁵ As mentioned in the previous chapter, before the 1970s when the Thai bureaucratic state succeeded in controlling coercion, most violent specialists worked within or on behalf of government. By the late 1970s, with new national and local political settings, the Thai state had lost dominant control and large numbers of violent specialists operated outside government, including "men in uniform" who started to exercise their coercive power for personal material gains.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Tilly 2003: 35, and 232-233.

⁷⁶ In general, government violent specialists include military personnel, police, guards, jailers, executioners, and judicial officers. Non-government violent specialists include private security guards, private police, paramilitary forces, militias, vigilante groups, guerrilla fighters, terrorists, thugs, bandits,

A large supply of hired gunmen emerged in the late 1970s. These mercenaries can be classified into three categories by different degree of institutionalization, commoditization, and independence from the provincial boss network: first, gunmen working directly under bosses or bosses' gunmen; second, gunmen working for a "den of hired gun" or "a hit men company"⁷⁷; and, third, independent or sideline gunmen. Each type of gunman has a different modus operandi, and one person can shift along the way or occupy more than one category.

*Three types of gunmen: boss's gunmen, hired assassins, and independent killers*⁷⁸

Boss's gunmen: clientelistic killers

It is important to appreciate that all outlaws and robbers require protection in order to operate as bandits and to survive at all. If they lack protection, they remain lonely wolves to be quickly dispatched, and those who hunt them down may be the landlord's retainers, the police, or the peasants. Our task is therefore first to discover the people on whom the bandit relies.⁷⁹

Boss's gunmen are part of the boss's personal network— an employee, whose task is essentially being a violent enforcer. Political bosses recruit assassins for protection.⁸⁰ The boss's gunmen are mainly local thugs, criminals, former security guards, petty gangsters, and moonlighting policemen and military officers. Compared to other types of gunmen, they are protected strongly by their patrons who are influential politicians.

enforcers, gangsters, mafias, as well as gladiators, boxers, bullfighters, and wrestlers. The separation is not always clear cut as, under certain conditions, government recruits non-state violent force to carry out (rather secretive or dirty) government missions. See Nagengast 1994; Menjivar and Rodriguez 2005; Sluka 2000; Tilly 2003.

⁷⁷ Commonly known in Thai as *sum muepuen rapchang*.

⁷⁸ Information on boss's gunmen, hired guns, and independent hit men are mainly drawn from several confidential interviews and the following sources: Pongsak 1998, 2002; Worawat 2010; Dittita 2005; Chavalit 2007; Suriyan 1989, 2001; Piak 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Khan 1998; Narit 2002; Narong 2002; Chaiwat 2011; Somkiat 2011; Sirirat 2005; Matchon criminal news section 1989, 1995; Special criminal news unit 1993; and the Research and Development Division of the Royal Thai Police Department 2004, 2005 (unpublished).

⁷⁹ Blok 1972: 498.

⁸⁰ In the same way that Indian political elites recruited wrestlers and local thugs, Russian politicians deployed gang members, and the Philippine bosses built their coterie of goons to protect their political enclaves. On the case of India, see Brass 1997, Wilkinson 2006; on Russian case, see Volkov 2002; on the Philippines, see McCoy 1993.

Using this type of gunman reduces chances of being caught or prosecuted by the state authorities. At the same time, it is risky because the violence could be easily traced back to the local politician. It is not easy to access this type of assassin as they are, technically, not a gun for hire. Their first and foremost job is to provide security for their boss and/or oversee their boss's business empire. Clients who want to use the boss's gunmen need to be the boss's friends.⁸¹ Usually bosses lend their gunmen to only their associates or trusted political allies. It is common that a boss in one province has connections with fellow bosses in other provinces and they share mercenaries. Occasionally, bosses request gunmen from friends (when their own gunmen are under government blacklist). Also, bosses provide hiding places for friends' gunmen.⁸²

Gunmen assume a specific role in the personal support network of politicians. They are not vote brokers or political entrepreneurs. Vote canvassers and gunmen are two different types and separate sets of people. Their tasks assigned by the boss during the elections are different. The former's task is to manage the election campaign, visit constituents and gather votes, but the latter's task is to provide security for the boss and/or to deploy coercive force against enemies. Under some circumstances, gunmen became involved more closely in the electoral campaign. Their job is to block or frighten rival vote canvassers:

many times vote buying required or was buttressed by coercive force. Because some of our competitors have local thugs, some of whom are armed, blocking us from their territories. So we need to have our own force, either police under our payroll or hoodlums, to show them that we are not afraid. Otherwise you could not buy votes even though you have plenty of money.⁸³

Therefore gunmen and vote canvassers require different skill sets and personalities. There have been only a few exceptional cases of people who took on the dual role of

⁸¹ Pongsak 1998: 61-63.

⁸² Interview, former Chonburi boss's gunman, Chonburi, 14 August 2011.

⁸³ Interview, underworld protection racket's owner, Bangkok, 6 April 2012. This underworld boss used to provide his (violent) service to some politicians and parties, in Bangkok and some provinces in the south and the north, in the 1995 and 1996 general elections. See also the incidents in Phrae (Chapter 7) and Buriram (Chapter 11) showing the use of coercive force in support of vote-buying operations.

assassin and vote broker.⁸⁴ On the other hand, there were few other cases in which politically skillful gunmen were supported by their political boss to run for elections, but this kind of practice was rare and uncommon as well. One exceptional case was a prominent gunman nicknamed “Chaikhao,” who miraculously progressed from boss’s gunmen to mayor and then the election campaign leader for the Chart Pattana Party in Chonburi in the September 1992 election. He was shot dead a few weeks before the general election and hence had no chance to celebrate the victory of his team.⁸⁵ Even though having gunmen as vote canvassers or elected local politicians provide the bosses some advantages, their reckless and precarious lives make them unpopular choice for holding political position for the bosses.⁸⁶

Influential provincial bosses usually employ more than one gunman. Normally, bosses do not assign assassinations to their closet aides (i.e. personal driver or bodyguard) as the police could trace back to them easily. A low-profile henchman would be chosen instead. Mostly, gunmen kill without payment as they already receive salary and other benefits from their boss. In the 1990s, a wealthy boss would pay 1,000-2,000 baht a day to his gunmen. However, sometimes gunmen earn extra pay for difficult jobs or external jobs requested by the boss’s friends.⁸⁷ When the gunmen are in trouble with authorities, bosses bail them out. Some bosses paid the police prior to the murder to ensure the case would not be investigated. If gunmen are imprisoned, bosses take care of their families.⁸⁸

The demise of a boss naturally leads to the disintegration of his gangs of gunmen. Gunmen have to look for protection from a new boss, or otherwise enter the business of

⁸⁴ For example, a famed Phetchaburi gunman nicknamed “Phon” (1961-1997), who was a gunslinger for a formidable village headman, but at the same time a capable vote canvasser who helped collect votes for the village headman’s boss winning MP elections several times.

⁸⁵ “Chaikhao” was Conburi boss’s right hand man trusted to oversee the tourist district’s illegal businesses. The police had charged him for many murders but never succeeded in prosecuting him. After being elected mayor, he seemed untouchable. Interview, former Chonburi boss’s gunman, Chonburi, 14 August 2011, and see also Narit 2002 and Wattana 2005: 30-35.

⁸⁶ There was a case of former Phetchaburi MP helped his gunman, son of local Islamic clergy, become village headman in his hometown. This was an exceptional case as the father of the gunman happened to be a respectable figure in the community and the gunman helped protect villagers from petty thieves. For the boss, to have his gunman elected as a public official was beneficial as the gunman could then legitimately carry weapon in public. See the fascinating case of the Muslim gunman in Pongsak 1998: 83-98.

⁸⁷ See examples of boss’s gunmen operations in Phrae (Chapter 7) and Buriram (Chapter 11). The police succeeded in linking the assassination to the bosses’ families. Also see informative interview of gunman working for an MP in the northeast in Worawat 2010: 95.

⁸⁸ Interview, experienced lawyers who had represented many gunmen, Phetchaburi, 18 April 2012. For example, the Phetchaburi boss had to pay 60,000 baht to the police so that his Muslim gunman was released from prison. After that the boss fielded his gunman to run for the election to obtain protection (Pongsak 1998: 83-98).

hired gun.⁸⁹ The operation of boss's gunmen underwent noticeable change after the mid 1980s. The number of gunmen working under provincial elites diminished and the boss-gunman relationship became more fragile, unstable, and less clientelistic. As discussed in Chapter 1, the patron-client model that has dominated the studies of local relations in Thailand, including boss-gunman relations, is insufficient to understand the local political dynamics. It fails to explain the complexity of the gunmen's world in Thai society which evolved from a boss model to a business model. Some boss's gunmen still exist but they simultaneously operate as hired gunmen (with or without their boss's consent). Financial gain has become the motivation for killings rather than returning a favor or seeking revenge on behalf of bosses.

The legend of Phet Thamrongdaeng (aka Koming) marks the shift from clientelistic killings to political killings as business in Thailand which began in the period 1980s to 1990s. Koming started out as a fisherman before he became a gang leader in the central and the south. Later he became a pirate, robbing and killing many boat people and migrants from Vietnam, and became involved in the smuggling of goods and arms. An influential boss-turned-MP in Prachuap Khiri Khan recruited Koming to work as his right-hand man, overseeing his underground business empire. He excelled at eliminating competition and making handsome profits for his boss. Within a few years, he attracted gunmen from the central and southern regions to work for him. With his boss's approval and a large gang of gunmen under his control, Koming developed his contract killing business. At its peak in the late 1980s, Koming's "killing company" had roughly 200 hit men for hire, the largest gunmen den in the country. This den was located in Prachuap Khiri Khan but took jobs in the central, the south and Bangkok, including many election-related murders of the 1980s and 1990s. When Koming was arrested in 1992, the business was taken over by other dens.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ The case of infamous gunman "Nuay muang petch," (Nuay of Phetchaburi) who started his career working with powerful Phetchaburi boss *kamnan* Chong Khlaikhueng is an example. After *kamnan* Chong was shot dead in the 1979 election, "Nuay muang petch" moved to work for *kamnan* Poh in Chonburi. In the end, he worked independently as a hired gun den's owner in Phetchaburi (Piak 2004: 33-55).

⁹⁰ The police apprehended Koming on 27 September 1992 and his henchman and 5.4 kilograms of heroin. He was prosecuted and sentenced for drug trafficking. The information on Koming's life and his gunmen den are drawn from special criminal news unit 1993: 5-17; Suriyan 2001: 59-71; Piak 2004: 55-58.

Do murders happen because of gambling? Well, anything involving vested interests can lead to murder. So can politics. So can land dealings. So can cheating on commission fees for land deals. Newspapers always link gambling with murders. This is not true. Murder can happen anywhere, even in the music business. We see contract killings all the time (Chatchawan Kong-udom).⁹¹

The involvement of contract hit men in electoral violence has been reported since the 1975 election, and by the mid-1980s professional hired guns had taken over electoral killings. The political murder of a former MP from Samut Songkram on 16 November 1976 signaled the emergence of private violence. According to the police, the death of the MP stemmed from political conflict with his opposing candidate during the campaign. A few months after the election, a team of hit men shot him dead with heavy weapons at close range. Two weeks later, the police arrested one of the perpetrators. The arrested gunman confessed that he had received 30,000 baht to undertake this job, and his team was comprised of three members (whose team leader was an off-duty soldier dismissed from his unit due to misconduct). Based on police investigation, these “hired gangs for murder” were also contracted to kill other politicians.⁹²

Hired gunmen work for anyone who has enough money to pay them. They are more accessible, impersonal, efficient, and entrepreneurial—professional business operators in the purest sense. A hired gunman is a laborer who uses his skills in the use of force to make profits. As a profession, hit men accumulate skill, develop contacts, build organization, and calculate the cost and benefit of each job. The business of hired gunmen was linked to the growth of organized crime and underground business in urban Bangkok in the 1950s. Hired guns provided protection to illegal economic sectors (gambling, drug, prostitution) by eliminating rivals, trouble makers, or “unexpected difficulties.”⁹³ In the late 1970s, the contract killings expanded into and became connected with electoral competition. With the growing demand, the business made

⁹¹ Pasuk, Sungsidh, and Nualnoi 1998: 21. Chatchawan Kong-udom is well known in the Bangkok underworld and one of the most powerful casino owners in Thailand. He cultivated close relationships with many police and military figures, politicians and parties. In 2000, he was overwhelmingly elected Bangkok senator.

⁹² *Thai Rath*, 17, 18, 20, 30 November 1976; also see Anu 2002: 63-65.

⁹³ See Suriyan 1989 for a firsthand account of the development of a hired gun.

enormous profit and attracted a lot of people. Overtime, the hired gun market became structured, well-established, and competitive.

Like Koming, many former boss gunmen ran hired-gunmen dens, recruiting and controlling assassins. Drug traffickers and gambling den owners also invested in hired gunmen as another branch of their illegal businesses.⁹⁴ In Charles Tilly's terms, these hired gun's agents assumed a role of "entrepreneurs of violence" who played critical roles in "activating, connecting, coordinating, and representing participants in violent encounters."⁹⁵ They act as intermediaries by bringing violence specialists together, meeting with the clients, and facilitating (violent) business transaction. Gunmen agents are responsible for recruiting hit men, planning schemes, and providing logistics and equipment.

Usually, gunmen do not have direct contact with the client who hired them. Jobs come to them through agents or the den owner. This is a precautionary practice for both sides as the clients do not want to be linked to the culprits in any circumstances. Gunmen are also afraid of being "eliminated" by their influential clients if they failed in the job and are considered as a loose end or a person who knows too many secret. As one gunman noted, "if things had gone wrong we would be killed to cut the links in order to protect the clients."⁹⁶ Therefore it was better for both sides not to know the identity of each other. Moreover, gunmen normally have no knowledge of the client's motive for murder, and, in some cases, not even the true identity of the victims. Their agents usually provided them with only vague details of victims. From the agents' perspective, the less the hit men know about their job, the more effective they will be.⁹⁷

The hired gunman usually works with partners. The size of the team could be varied, from a duo of two (gunman and driver) to a large team of up to ten people (gunmen, drivers, plotters, navigators, etc.). The disadvantages of working in a large team are twofold, namely less pay and more chance of a leak. However, large teams are needed when the job involves a high-profile target who has his/her own bodyguards. For a

⁹⁴ Interview, senior police in the Crime Suppression Division, Bangkok, 11 April 2012.

⁹⁵ Tilly 2003: 34. For violent entrepreneurs in Russia, see Volkov 2002.

⁹⁶ See the interview with this gunman in Worawat 2010: 99.

⁹⁷ Because some gunmen may be nervous when they knew their targets are powerful politicians (Dittita 2005: 111-180; Worawat 2010: 93-113).

prominent target, gunmen usually take longer than a month to accomplish the mission.⁹⁸ The service of professional gunmen brings an important advantage to political bosses as it provides them with protection, cover and distance from the shooting. Most of the time, the police can trace the murder only back to the gunmen's agents, or better yet the owner of the hired gun den.⁹⁹ Moreover, the hired gun dens help obviate the burden of building and sustaining an ongoing force of violent followers—instead of having a hundred gunmen on the payroll as was the case for big bosses in the early 1980s, political bosses in the 1990s generally have only four to five goons.¹⁰⁰

The hired gun business attracts a wide range of people, including the unemployed, young hoodlums, local thugs, farmers, low-skilled workers, taxi and motor cycle drivers, handymen, and athletes. It also provides opportunities for corrupt police and military officers. Some state agents condone and profit from the contract killing business. They use their professional training in coercion for personal gain with many officers moonlighting as hired gunmen. Clients prefer the service of “official violence specialists,” because they are not only the calmest and best-trained, but also have inside information on the criminal justice process and institutions.¹⁰¹ Many of them are protected by higher ranking officers, the so-called “mafia police/military officers” who engage in illegal business. For government, the “uniformed hit men” are the most dangerous and difficult to apprehend.¹⁰² The most scandalous case was Lieutenant Colonel “Tueng” (nickname) who became famous in the 1980s as a brutal, corrupt officer. He and his subordinates extorted money, collected debts and smuggled contraband. When the construction business boomed in the 1990s, he protected contractors and helped dishonest land developers evict residents; if residents resisted he used violent force, driving them out and burning their properties. Finally, he created his own hired gun business, simultaneously assuming the roles of agent and hit man. His den was comprised of 5-6 low-ranking state agents and undertook only high-profile cases. The job that brought him national fame and ended his long, murderous career was

⁹⁸ Interview, lawyers for gunmen, Phetchaburi, 18 April 2012.

⁹⁹ Interview, senior police in the Crime Suppression Division, Bangkok, 11 April 2012; interview, senior crime reporter, Bangkok, 11 April 2012.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, underworld protection racket's owner, Bangkok, 6 April 2012. Only a few eminent bosses, such as in Phrae and Buriram, are willing or capable to build a force larger than twenty to thirty personnel.

¹⁰¹ Interview, underworld protection racket's owner, Bangkok, 6 April 2012.

¹⁰² Interview, senior police in the Crime Suppression Division, Bangkok, 11 April 2012. See also other sources which have the same conclusion: Narong 2002; Chaiwat 2011; and Chavalit 2007.

the assassination of the Yasothon provincial governor in 2001.¹⁰³ Lieutenant Colonel “Tueng” is only one example, among many, of public officers turned (private) contract killers. Data indicate many active and off-duty government violence specialists remain closely engaged in the violence business until the present day. Collusion between the state security forces and the violence business runs very deep.¹⁰⁴

Numbers of hired gunmen

The size of hired gun dens varies from small (3) to large (100), but the average size is about six to eight members. The hired gun business is a cartel in which owners avoid confrontation with each other; they carve out their own business territory and respect others’ terrain. Sometimes they even share customers or cooperate in a difficult job.¹⁰⁵ Paradoxically, the hired gun is a non-monopolistic business that exists in support of the political struggle for monopoly.

The total number of hired guns active in the market has been changing over time as a result of gunmen’s deaths, arrests, or retirements. In 1989, the police reported that there were large gunmen hubs in the following provinces: Phetchaburi, Chonburi, Nakhon Pathom, Bangkok, Ayutthaya, Lopburi and Saraburi. In the north, Chiang Mai was a hotspot for the hired gunmen and owners were mafia members.¹⁰⁶ In early 1992, the police chief identified a total of 819-900 hired gunmen throughout the country.¹⁰⁷ Prior to the 1995 election, the police had the number at 1,000 as many rookie hit men were recruited to the business. The central region had the highest concentration of hit men, with 261 hired assassins operating in eight different provinces. Police records showed that 77 of them were in Phetchaburi, the infamous capital of gunmen. Suphanburi,

¹⁰³ This murder was caused by a conflict over a large construction project in Yasothon province. The police investigation led to the arrest of Lieutenant Colonel “Tueng” and his co-conspirators. On 29 September 2006, the Supreme Court gave him a death sentence along with his two close military aides. On the King’s birthday in 2007, he was granted a royal pardon, reducing his punishment to life imprisonment. In 2010, he received another pardon, reducing his sentence to 50 years. A year later, he was granted a special royal pardon again, which reduced his sentence to 13 years (*Matchon*, 7 December 2011). On the career of Lieutenant Colonel “Tueng” and his involvement in criminality, see Sirirat 2005: 53-54; Chaiwat 2011: 139-141; *Manager Daily*, 27 October 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, senior police in the Crime Suppression Division, Bangkok, 11 April 2012; interview, two investigative reporters on military affairs, 12 April 2012, 20 April 2012; Chaiwat 2011: 139-141 On mafia soldiers, see Sirirat 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, underworld protection racket’s owner, Bangkok, 6 April 2012; interview, senior police in the Crime Suppression Division, Bangkok, 11 April 2012.

¹⁰⁶ In Phetchaburi and Chonburi, kingpins controlled the dens, whereas in Nakhon Pathom, a local politician owned the den and policeman worked as the den’s agents. In Bangkok, gambling den mafias operated three large-size hired gun dens. In Ayutthaya, Lopburi and Saraburi, gunmen dens operated under the control of one influential boss (*Matchon* criminal news section 1989: 52-55).

¹⁰⁷ *Matchon*, 16 January 1992: 1, 24; *Matchon*, 19 March 1992: 21.

against conventional wisdom, was the second most dangerous province with 55 hit men. The second highest concentration was in the eastern region, with 59 professional gunmen spread over eight provinces. Chonburi was the most notorious with 16 assassins.¹⁰⁸ In a later report, one month before the 1996 election, police listed 762 professional hit men as their targets. Most were located in the central and southern regions.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, a province that has a high concentration of gunman is not necessarily an electorally violence-prone province, and vice versa. Because hired gunmen are a highly mobile workforce that offers to work in areas far from their den's location, they are very capable of answering long-distance demands for violence.¹¹⁰

Price of hired gun

Generally, the price of assassination ranges from 10,000 to over a million baht depending on the target's importance. The more prominent the victim, the higher the chance that the murder would make headlines and the gunmen would be apprehended by the authorities. The standard operation runs like this: the client will pay half of the agreed price prior to the murder and the rest of it once the job is done successfully.¹¹¹

Personal records kept by one hit man, working for a den in the south, revealed how the price of a murder job changed over the 1980s-1990s. From 1984 to 2005, this gunman (nicknamed "Lek" or small) had carried out 9 assassination attempts (eight successful and one failed) and received 30,000 baht for the first murder in 1984; 50,000 baht for the second murder in 1987, 30,000 baht for the third murder in 1989; 60,000 baht for the fourth murder in 1992; 50,000 baht for the fifth murder in 1995; 40,000 baht for the sixth murder in 2003; 100,000 baht for the seventh murder in 1999; 70,000 baht for the eighth murder in 1997; and 100,000 baht for the last murder in 2005, in which he failed and was arrested.¹¹² The information shows that the pay increased over time (even though it was not a straight line increase). The pay gunmen received per job in the

¹⁰⁸ *Matichon Sudsabda*, 30 May- 5 June 1995: 5, 88-89.

¹⁰⁹ *Thai Rath*, 7 October 1996: 1, 18.

¹¹⁰ For example, many hired gunmen working for the den in central Phetchaburi travelled to take on jobs in Chiangmai to the north and Phuket to the south. Therefore the geography of supply and demand of electoral violence are separated and not necessary overlapping. Interview, lawyers, Phetchaburi, 18 April 2012; interview, two local police officers, Phetchaburi, 17 April 2012. Phetchaburi, Thailand's gunmen capital, is an example of the separation between supply and demand for electoral violence (see Chapter 10 for further information).

¹¹¹ Interview, former Chonburi boss's gunman, Chonburi, 14 August 2011.

¹¹² The fascinating life story of this methodical gunman is found in Worawat 2010: 106.

1980s, however, was five to seven times higher than the average annual salary of lower-rank bureaucrats; hence they could live comfortably on only two jobs a year. But if they wanted more income, they could acquire revenue from security, drug dealing, or debt collecting. This suggests that, since the 1980s, being a hired gunman has been a profitable occupation.¹¹³

Because all targets pursued by “Lek” were mere vote canvassers and/or small-scale businessmen, the prices were relatively moderate. In the 1980s-1990s, killing key vote canvassers cost 50,000-100,000 baht. Earnings from contract killings were much higher if the targets were MPs or prominent political bosses. The minimum price for killing an MP was 1 million baht, and the price went up to 3 million baht for a prominent political boss.¹¹⁴ And by the 1990s, MP lives were the most valuable, surpassing drug kingpins or gambling-den owners.¹¹⁵ For the rival of the targeted MP, the price is, however, not too high in comparison to the total spending they need to put out to win an election.¹¹⁶

One gunman-turned-hired gun agent, nicknamed “the moustache of Phetchaburi,” epitomized the gunmen business in the 1980s and the 1990s.

He started his career as a gunman and later became an agent of hired gunmen. After successfully building his reputation and amassing large sums of money in his home province of Phetchaburi, “the moustache of Phetchaburi” moved to Bangkok to seek a larger fortune. Soon after he settled in Bangkok, a powerful gambling den mafioso asked his gang to provide security and protection for his business ventures. Later on, he expanded his protection racket to the lucrative hired motorcycle business. His den attracted many capable gunmen. At the peak, “the moustache of Phetchaburi” had around 100 hit men working for his “hired killing company,” and only took on jobs

¹¹³ A rubber-plantation farmer turned hit man told one researcher that one assassination job earned him more than his annual income. Another gunman, son of rice farmer from Nakhon Si Thammarat, took part in a “big” assassination plot which earned him 250,000 baht, while his parents earned only 40,000-50,000 baht a year from their farming (Dittita 2005: 113-116, 150).

¹¹⁴ In the 1995 election, four gunmen killed a key vote canvasser of Bunchu Trithong, the most powerful boss of Lampang. A shooter was later arrested and said he received 80,000 baht for the job (*Matichon*, 25 June 1996: 13). In the late 1990s, four gunmen assassinated a Surat Thani MP with a price of 1 million baht at the behest of the MP’s major political rival. In 1989, Sia Huad, one of the most influential bosses in Chonburi, was shot dead, and his rivals paid 3 million baht to eliminate him (Wattana 1995: 30-31; Dittita 2005: 119-122).

¹¹⁵ The assassinations of the two most powerful gambling mafioso in the 1980s and 1990s cost 600,000 baht and 150,000 baht respectively (*Matichon* criminal news section 1989: 16, 32-33).

¹¹⁶ On average, a winning candidate paid 60-80 million baht to secure an MP seat in the 1990s. Buriram MP Panawat Liangphongphan revealed this information after he survived an assassination attempt on his life (see Chapter 11 for details).

valued at more than 100,000 baht. According to the police, the “company” was so large that 90 percent of contract killings by Phetchaburi gunmen in the early 1980s came from “the moustache” den. The den of the “moustache” was in high demand because of the effectiveness and meticulousness of both its gunmen and agents. Even the police did not hesitate to acknowledge this reputation: “[the moustache] was ingenious in the way he undertakes his job. That is why he has never been caught by the Metropolitan police.”¹¹⁷ He aspired to be a powerful godfather and therefore spent his savings to open his own gambling dens in both Bangkok and Phetchaburi. In Phetchaburi, he ran an underground lottery and transportation service and engaged in drug trafficking. His wealth was growing very fast as well as his status. Finally he launched into politics by supporting some candidates in elections. His fast growing influence threatened many influential figures in the province. On October 6, 1988, he was shot dead along with his wife and minions, by, ironically, hired gunmen. The police failed to arrest any culprits but the authorities and local observers alike believed that the death of “the moustache” came as no surprise since he had involved himself in several illegal business conflicts with top local bosses.¹¹⁸

Independent gunmen: aspiring assassins

By the mid 1990s, the market for hired gunmen was more fluid and less orderly. The business tempted ambitious characters to enter the market as lone assassins. Their emergence exemplified the commodification and privatization of violence of the era at its best. Skill in using violence becomes a resource and product for sale in open market, with no requirement of connections, respect, debt of gratitude, or enduring mutual dependence.

These gunmen work alone. They are independent gunmen who try to make money and build a reputation from a murder job but have no connection with powerful bosses or hired gun agents. Many were young hoodlums, drug addicts or delinquents. But not all came from poor or criminal families, as research shows that several independent hit men came from middle-class or educated families.¹¹⁹ In the market for assassins they were not the first choice as they were poorly-trained and had no protection. They were

¹¹⁷ Interview with police, see the quote in Matchon criminal news section 1989: 50. And see special team of criminal news reporters 1993: 51-63.

¹¹⁸ Matchon criminal news section 1989: 49-51.

¹¹⁹ There was a case of lone gunman who was a sale manager of a large company in Bangkok, living comfortably in condominium in business district prior to becoming a hit man. See other examples in Dittita 2005: 150-156.

second- or third-rate gunmen. Nevertheless, they were cheap and stayed under the police radar. Some of them were willing to murder for only 5,000-10,000 baht to enter the business. If they become successful, they climbed the ladder to work for a boss or agent.¹²⁰

Patrimonialism, electoral democracy and provincial bosses' violence

Thailand's oligarchic patrimonial state and parliamentary democracy that began to emerge from the late 1970s provided opportunities and incentives for provincial business elites to enter electoral competitions. Their political involvement made election campaigns fierce and uncompromising. When boss-style candidates confronted each other in elections with a power monopoly at stake, elections were most prone to violence. The demand for gunmen to eliminate opposition in elections provided work for violence specialists and entrepreneurs. The market for political killings expanded in line with rapid economic development and personalistic political struggles. Violence was in abundant supply, both inexpensive and available in various guises. However, the demand for violence, not its supply, determined the timing and location of electoral violence. As long as the structural and institutional incentives and benefits generated from elective posts remain unchanged, the violence demand would exist and supply follow. Electoral violence is part of the political struggle in provincial areas. It needs to be situated and understood in the broad context of local power and economic structures. Electoral violence from 1979 to 1996 targeted political rivals, not the electoral process or institutions. Electoral democracy largely benefited the bosses, and chaotic violence disrupting or dismantling the electoral processes was the last thing they wanted to happen. Thailand's political and economic settings, both national and local, changed dramatically after 1997, and the pattern of electoral violence changed accordingly (as will be discussed in Chapter 5).

The next chapter provides a broad picture and trends of electoral violence from the election of April 1978 to that of November 1996, the last election prior to the 1997 Constitution that changed the Thai political structure and electoral system.

¹²⁰ Interview, underworld protection racket's owner, Bangkok, 6 April 2012.

Chapter 4

Violence in Thai elections, 1976-1996

This chapter examines the general pattern of election-related violence from 1976 to 1996. It describes the actors and violent methods in electoral competitions, and discusses the distinctive characteristics of electoral violence in this period. Before discussing patterns of electoral violence, it is necessary to briefly summarize the broad character of political struggle from the 1980s to the 1990s. In general, the national political struggle during the semi-democratic period witnessed a few incidents of intra-elite conflict, including fighting between army factions. The violence was less severe than during the period 1932-1957 because conflicts mainly concerned competition among elites to control public office and extract rent. Additionally, the transition from authoritarian (1976-1977) to semi-democratic rule came from a contingent elite bargain (pact), not a regime change by collapse. Experience from other regions shows that democratic transitions by "elite pact" are relatively stable and less violent¹, and the Thai experience was no exception. This elite pact stood for fifteen years, until it was broken in 1991 when the army leaders staged a coup to topple the civilian government of Chatichai Choonhavan. The coup was clearly an attempt by the military to adjust the power balance settled by the pact as they were dissatisfied with their loss of power. Initially, the middle class and general public welcomed the coup that claimed to eliminate the corrupt elected government, but the urban populace was soon disenchanted with it when one of the coup leaders appointed himself as the prime minister after post-coup elections. The episode led to the 1992 "Black May" event, which resulted in bloodshed and the resignation of the military prime minister.² Parliamentary democracy under civilian rule was restored and electoral contests proceeded with no further interruption.

¹ Linz and Stepan 1996.

² On May 17, 1992, around 200,000 people joined a mass demonstration in Bangkok calling for a new constitution and the resignation of the Junta leader. The junta responded with a plan designed for a communist insurrection, using fully armed soldiers imported from the jungle areas on the borders. Soldiers shot into the crowd. Violent suppression of the demonstration continued over three nights. On the night of May 20, the king summoned protest's leader Chamlong Srimuang and junta's leader Suchinda Kraprayun to the palace, and ordered them to stop violence. In the end, the junta's leader resigned. The death toll of this event was initially estimated at several hundred, but later reduced to around 40-60. More than hundred demonstrators have been missing. The manipulative and tense relationship between the army general and the monarchy was once again playing a decisive role in the outcome of the event. The bloodshed crackdown was stopped (but only after the mass killings, and after the event unfolded that the coup leaders had lost complete legitimacy and support among the general public), and the unpopular military prime minister was sacrificed to save the entire royal-military-bureaucratic power bloc. See analysis and details of event in Callahan 1998; for the politics behind Suchinda's action and resulting decisions, see Wassana 2002.

The constitution was amended to enhance the power of elected representatives at the expense of unelected bureaucrats, stipulating that the prime minister was to be selected from elected MPs and the Speaker of the House of Representative, not the Senate President, was the ex-officio President of the National Assembly of Thailand. From the vantage point of the present, the 1991 coup was a disruptive event that failed to stop the power shifting to civilian rule.

Table 4.1: Thai Prime Ministers, 1976-1997

Name	Political party affiliations	Terms
Thanin Kraivixien	none (coup appointed PM)	October 1976- October 1977
Kriangsak Chomanand	none (coup appointed PM)	November 1977- February 1980
Prem Tinsulanond	none	March 1980- April 1988
Chatchai Choonhavan	The Chart Thai Party	April 1988- February 1991
Anand Panyarachun	none (coup appointed PM)	February 1991- April 1992
Suchinda Kraprayun	none (coup leader)	April 1992- May 1992
Anand Panyarachun	none	June 1992- September 1992
Chuan Leekpai	The Democrat Party	September 1992- July 1995
Banharn Silpa-archa	The Chart Thai Party	July 1995- November 1996
Chavalit Yongchaiyudh	The New Aspiration Party	November 1996- November 1997

The relatively peaceful environment in the capital in the period 1979-1997 (with the exception of the 1992 event) contrasted with violent scenes in the rural areas, in which a new type of political violence had emerged out of the parliamentary democracy. From the 1980s to 1990s, provincial bosses competed fiercely with their political and business rivals for domination, leading to the widespread occurrence of violence during electoral campaigns. As explained in the previous chapter, local power structure and political economies of competition underlie these eruptions. The following sections identify the patterns, actors and methods of electoral violence from the election of 1979 to that of 1996.

General patterns of electoral violence, 1979- 1996

From 1979 to 1996, there were eight general elections (April 1979, April 1983, July 1986, July 1988, March 1992, September 1992, July 1995, and November 1996). A

large number of political parties and factions competed for seats in the House. No party was able to win a majority of votes to form a single-party government; instead multi-party coalitions usually formed government, and intra-coalition conflict usually led to the dissolution of the House and a call for new elections. Over these eight elections, however, a distinct pattern of political cleavage and electoral violence emerged: personal conflicts between rival candidates rather than political party confrontation or mass mobilization protests. Many personal conflicts resulted in political assassinations (a popular method of eliminating opposition in the 1980s). To understand the overall pattern, it is necessary to examine the methods, perpetrators, victims, timing, and degree of electoral violence in chronological order.

The April 1979 election

The first national assembly elections after the promulgation of the 1978 constitution were held in April 1979. It was also the first election after the 1976 coup, consequently the atmosphere was full of enthusiasm and anticipation. There were 1,623 candidates vying for 301 MP positions, including many ex-officers and retired bureaucrats. Most outstanding was Col Narong Kittikhachon, the notorious son of former premier Thanom Kittikhachon, running for MP in Phetchaburi.³ Since the House had not yet approved the Political Party Act, candidates were allowed to run either independently or under the banner of political groups or factions.⁴

Even before campaigning started, the Interior Ministry identified 34 provinces as "dangerous."⁵ The list basically covered half of the country and appeared to be very random. It also turned out to be inaccurate as violent provinces like Pattani, Yala, Lopburi, Chiang Mai were not included in the original list; it even excluded Phetchaburi, the most turbulent in this poll from the watch list. This poor intelligence reflected the ineffectiveness of the Interior Ministry in their job of overseeing elections.⁶ In fact, violence erupted in fourteen provinces, scattered around the country with no regional

³ Narong had no connection with the province except knowing a local political boss who was willing to help him in the campaign (see Chapter 10).

⁴ The Political Party Act was passed by the House in 1981 (as further explain below).

⁵ These provinces were Suphanburi, Phang Nga, Krabi, Chaing Rai, Nakhon Sawan, Ang thong, Uthai Thani, Kanchanaburi, Kamphaeng Phet, Trat, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Trang, Yasothon, Nong Khai, Prachinburi, Nan, Uttaradit, Ratchaburi, Sakon Nakhon, Payao, Phetchabun, Samutprakarn, Mae Hong Son, Surat Thani, Khon Kaen, Surin, Buri Ram, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phatthalung, Roi Et, Chaiyaphum, Ubon Ratchathani, Nakohn Phanom, and Loei (*Matichon*, 10 March 1979).

⁶ The Interior Ministry's tasks of overseeing and administering elections were taken over by the independent Electoral Commission after the 1997 constitution.

concentration.⁷ The total number of violent incidents was fifteen: ten were assassination attempts and the rest were clashes and ambushes. Most occurred during the pre-election period, rather than on the election day or afterwards—a pattern that has held in following elections up to 2011 (see table 4.2). Nine people died and seven were wounded as a result. Among those killed, five were vote canvassers, three were government officers (who worked on the voting day), and one was a candidate. The most notorious case was the assassination of Chong Khlaikhueng, MP candidate for Phetchaburi from the Kitsangkhom Party (see Chapter 10). Apart from Chong, two other candidates in Lopburi and Nakhon Sawan had attempts made on their lives but survived.⁸

Profiles on perpetrators revealed significant changes from past elections. Some conservative candidates in rural areas mobilized groups of Village Scouts (reminiscent of 1976 state violence), to support their campaigns. These right-wing mobilizations concerned the government, thus the Interior Ministry issued an order to every provincial governor to ask Village Scouts to resign if they wanted to canvass votes.⁹ The government wanted to reduce the role of the ultra right-wing movements in the semi-democratic era; indeed to stifle either right- or left-wing groups and insulate electoral competition from the influence of mass movement. The government feared political linkages between political parties, politicians, and mass movements (as had happened in 1975 and 1976) that gave rise to the popularity of socialist parties. For the military-bureaucratic elites, the ultra royal-nationalist groups were instrumental in crushing the student-labor-peasant alliance in 1976, but were generally viewed as dangerous if involved in electoral politics since they empowered the provincial bosses at the expense of the state. The traditional elites could not afford the privatization of right-wing forces.¹⁰ Moreover, these de-linkages were consistent with bureaucratic elites' attempts to weaken the organizations and support bases of political parties. Though the government succeeded in preventing the involvement of right-wing forces in the electoral race, they failed to secure the voting from a communist attack. On polling day,

⁷ These provinces were Chiang Mai, Chaing Rai, and Nan in the north; Phetchaburi, Bangkok, Kamphaeng Phet, Lopburi, Nakhon Sawan, and Phetchabun in the central; Nakhon Si Thammarat, Pattani, Surat Thani, Trang, and Yala in the south.

⁸ See *Matichon*, 17 April 1979: 1, 12; 21 April 1979: 1. Lopburi and Nakhon Sawan suffered from chronic electoral violence. The case of Nakhon Sawan is fully investigated in Chapter 8.

⁹ See *Matichon*, 30 March 1979: 3.

¹⁰ In *Prajak 2006*: 1-33, I explain how the Thai state mobilized right-wing movements in the 1970s and demobilized them in the post-1976 changing political environment. See also Bowie (1997) on the changing role of the village scouts in Thai politics; and Haberkorn (2011) on the progressive alliance.

communist insurgents ambushed public officers and attacked the polling stations in several provinces where they were strong: Nan, Chiangmai, Trang, Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Surat Thani. The clashes resulted in a few deaths and injuries.¹¹ The effects of the civil war between the government and the Communist Party of Thailand had clearly spilt over into the electoral arena and threatened electoral security. Attacks from rebel groups, as an attempt to disrupt the electoral process and destroy its legitimacy, were common in other countries under civil war situation.¹² Nevertheless, the greatest threat to safety in the 1979 election did not come from the communist guerrillas as much as the bosses' thugs and hired gunmen. Most violent incidents were executions by individual assassins (given full elaboration in the following section).

The April 1983 election

This election was held after prime minister Prem Tinsulanond dissolved parliament only a few weeks before the government's term ended.¹³ There were 1,862 candidates from 14 parties and independent groups competing for 324 seats, including former premier Kriangsak Chomanand and several retired military generals who formed their own party. The race was more competitive than that of 1979. Voter turnout was up by almost seven percent and media again reported that voters were enthusiastic.¹⁴

As it turned out, this election was more violent than previous ones, with 17 incidents, leaving 16 killed and 10 wounded (see table 4.2). Assassination remained the crime du jour, and involved walk-in or drive-by shootings by a lone or small team of gunmen. There was only one bombing, targeting two political party headquarters in Bangkok, and senior army officers believed men in uniforms perpetrated it (with the goal of exacerbating the conflict between the army and certain political parties). The police were never able to apprehend or even identify the culprits.¹⁵ The election day itself was relatively calm compared to 1979, with only two vote canvassers shot dead.¹⁶

¹¹ *Matichon*, 23 April 1979: 1, 11; 26 April 1979: 3.

¹² In countries such as Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal, the insurgents have usually chosen to carry out the attacks on the election day to frighten the voters, election observers, and poll workers. They have also aimed to send a political message, through violent acts, that they did not accept the legitimacy of the electoral institutions (Alston 2010: 15-17).

¹³ The army and some political parties pushed for changes in certain constitutional articles which would sustain the power of the senate and prevent the institutionalization of political parties. It was not surprising that some political party faction leaders preferred the factionalized party system as it served their interests. The army and its allies lost votes in the House but managed to put pressure on Prem administration to dissolve the parliament. Suchit and Pornsak 1984: 93-109.

¹⁴ *Matichon*, 16 April 1983: 1, 11; 19 April 1983: 10.

¹⁵ *Matichon*, 27 March: 1, 12; 28 March 1983: 3.

¹⁶ *Matichon*, 19 April 1983: 10.

The victims' profiles were different this election. Election observer, government official and/or media personnel were not targeted; all victims were either candidates or their subordinates and supporters. Among those killed, twelve were vote canvassers, followed by two candidates (one in Chiang Rai and one in Nakhon Sawan), and two candidate supporters. It was clear that violent conflicts were now confined to the politicians' political networks. The common character of those slain was their involvement in illicit activities (prostitution, gambling, smuggling, etc.) and/or businesses of natural resource extraction.¹⁷ Vote canvassers who shifted their loyalty were also reported murdered (in Pathum Thani, for example). During the height of the campaign, many candidates sought government protection.¹⁸ After the election, some winning candidates were targets of assassination by their rivals. There was no violent attack from the communist insurgents this time due to the movement's collapse and defeat. In Nakhon Si Thammarat, an insurgent stronghold, local strongmen and their thugs emerged to take control of the territory left behind by the insurgents. Dominant political families became new bosses as well as new threats to election security. Interestingly, there was evidence that some ex-guerrillas were recruited as hit men and given orders from politicians to eliminate their opponents; thus revealed changing opportunities of making money from their violent skills (see Chapter 9).

The July 1986 election

Due to inter- and intra-party conflict, prime minister Prem dissolved the House and called for a new election. After the poll, the legislative assembly elected Prem as prime minister for a third term even though he did not run as a candidate. The balance of power between the elected parliamentarians and traditional forces of power, namely monarchy and military, remained largely the same under the "semi-democratic" system with the palace and the army's favorite premier at the helm. However, Prem's new cabinet was dominated by provincial business elites, followed by few technocrats and retired civil servants, indicating the higher standing of the provincial bosses in the national political

¹⁷ See an interesting report about the victims' "dirty background" and "shady businesses" (*Matichon*, 21 April 1983: 5).

¹⁸ Among them were Banham Silpa-archa and his Chart Thai Party's team members in Suphanburi who were guarded by five policemen throughout their campaign (*Matichon*, 7 April 1983: 9).

scene.¹⁹ Also, in this election, provincial bosses stepped into leading positions in all major parties, some even rising to party head (see the next section).

Politicians and voters were even more enthusiastic about this election. This was reflected in the ten-percent increase in voter turn-out as well as the remarkable doubling of the numbers of candidates from 1,880 to 3,613 (the available seats increased only slightly from 324 to 347).²⁰ The police operated nationwide to make voting safe by taking several measures, one of which was the suppression of gunmen during the election campaign. The police officers attempted to seize gangsters' weapons and arrest gunmen, and also closely monitored some local gangsters associated with influential candidates. The "Center for the Overseeing of Peaceful Order in the Election" was established.²¹ A national list of mercenaries was made and the police found nearly 1,000 gunmen operating throughout the country. Provinces like Phetchaburi, Chonburi, Lopburi, Angthong, and Nakhon Sawan were identified as "hot spots," with high numbers of gunmen. It was reported that the "market price" for a hit man to kill a candidate was as high as 600,000 baht.²² Despite having a tighter security plan, the authorities failed to prevent the hired, professional gunmen from executing their jobs. They, with bosses' thugs, were responsible for almost all of the violent incidents during this election campaign. The 1986 election had become the most violent election yet with 34 incidents (15 assassination attempts, 16 life threatening, and 3 brawls), 18 dead and 7 wounded (see table 4.2). Assassination attempts dominated the violence but were matched by various coercive, threatening methods— for example, home visits from mobsters; residences or offices being attacked at night; or cars being chased and attacked.²³

¹⁹ The percentage of cabinet members who had background as merchants or businessmen in the Cabinet rose from 41.8 percent during 1983-1986 to 51.1 percent during 1986-88 (Rangsan 1993: 210-211).

²⁰ The 1986 election's voter turn-out was 61.43 percent, by then the highest voter turn-out ever.

²¹ From this election onward, every government followed the practice of creating an (ad-hoc) center (although with changing names) to oversee election security. The center was usually headed by a high-ranking police, and was dissolved soon after the election ended. See an interview of the senior police officer who was head of the Center in the 1986 election in *Matichon*, 7 July 1986: special page 3.

²² *Matichon*, 22 July 1986: 2; for the police's watch list see *Matichon*, 3 June 1986: 1, 16. Meanwhile, the vote-buying rate in this election, according to the survey, was 100 baht per head. The winning candidates reportedly spent 12-20 million baht (per candidate) for vote-buying operation, including payment to vote canvassers (Phoemphong 1990: 122, 129-133; Sombat 1987).

²³ *Matichon*, 16 July 1986: special page 3; *Matichon*, 26 July 1986: special page 3; *Thai Rath*, 27 July 1986: 1, 2.

As for the victims, they were mostly vote canvassers: 15 vote canvassers were killed, while only one candidate was shot dead, followed by one hit man and one voter.²⁴ During the campaign, some vote canvassers (in Korat, for example) received death threats from their own candidates if they failed to deliver the winning result. The Interior Minister Sitthi Jirarat said in an interview, "being vote canvasser is a path to death."²⁵

Vote canvassers were killed for different reasons. In some cases they were caught between two opposing candidates and they were killed because they refused to work for no-one or because they chose to work for one candidate at the expense of the candidate's rivals.²⁶ Many vote canvassers were killed because they were "too good", the opposing team felt compelled to kill them in order to "weaken the candidate for whom the vote canvassers worked." A murder case in Phichit province was very revealing: authorities arrested three gunmen soon after the election as the police found evidence linking them to the murder of the Chart Thai Party's key vote canvasser. They confessed they were hired by a hit man agent who received a "killing order" from an opposing candidate; this opposing candidate had believed the targeted vote canvasser was key to his rivals' electoral victory.²⁷ Some vote canvassers who performed poorly and failed to get their candidates elected were shot dead after the election.²⁸ Many of the vote canvassers killed, however, had shady backgrounds: they were involved in underworld activities, gambling, drug trafficking, or they were gangsters or former assassins themselves.

The July 1988 Election

Prime minister Prem dissolved the parliament and called for a new election on 24 July 1988. After the election, no party was able to win a majority of seats, leading to a multi-party coalition. Pressure from a group of professionals, intellectuals and democratic advocates forced Prem to turn down the offer to reassume the premier post, giving way to the election of Chatchai Choonhavan, head of the Chart Thai party. He was the first elected prime minister since 1976.

²⁴ The MP candidate, a former provincial councilor in Udonthani, was murdered at home by unidentified gunman. A gunman, who murdered a vote canvasser in Prachinburi, was gunned down by police officers in Bangkok after he resisted arrest. And a voter in Suphanburi was shot dead by his own neighbor in the violent fight on election day after he refused to vote in accordance with his neighbor's instruction. See *Matichon*, 23 May 1986: 1, 16; *Matichon*, 25 July 1986: 2; *Thai Rath*, 29 July 1986: 8 (respectively).

²⁵ *Matichon*, 15 July 1986: special page 3; the quotation was from *Matichon*, 26 July 1986, 2.

²⁶ There were reports that in some provinces key vote canvassers were "bought" at the rate of 30,000 baht (*Matichon*, 29 June 1986: special page 2).

²⁷ *Thai Rath*, 30 July 1986: 1, 2, 20.

²⁸ The incident occurred in Lopburi (*Thai Rath*, 29 July 1986: 8).

In this election, the degree and frequency of violence dropped slightly compared to the previous one (but was roughly the same as 1979 and 1983). There were 17 incidents (7 assassination attempts, one coordinated polling station burning, one bombing, and 9 acts of physical intimidation), leading to the death of 7 and the wounding of 12 (see table 4.2). Assassination remained the most popular method of violence. There was only one bombing, aimed at intimidating the candidate rather than killing him.²⁹ On election day, a group of hooligans working for a local boss patrolled stations and intimidated rival poll workers.³⁰ The most spectacular incident on election day was the burning of seven schools in Narathiwat province; four of those burnt were polling stations. The police believed Malay-Muslim separatists were responsible, but there were no statements from insurgents and the police were not able to arrest anyone.³¹ This was the first time, however, that authorities alleged southern separatists were perpetrators of election-related violence in the far south region. Violence of this character has erupted intermittently on the election days in Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani, the three provinces plagued by violent struggles for autonomy. In spite of that, since 1983 the election days have been relatively peaceful as most violence occurs in the pre-election period.

Apart from the incident in the southern border province, the chief perpetrators of electoral violence were professional gunmen. Even though the Police Chief had created incentives for his staff by offering bonuses for officers who suppress gunmen and/or seize illicit weapons during the election campaigns, the gunmen still managed to wreck havoc.³² Nakhon Si Thammarat was especially turbulent as vote canvassers who changed sides were murdered. Vote canvassers who failed continued to receive death threats.³³

The 1988 election was the first in which candidates were safe. There was only one candidate who received a bomb threat (as mentioned), but no candidates had their lives targeted. Rivals used violence against their key vote canvassers and supporters.³⁴ The most spectacular case was a failed assassination attempt of Ang Thong province's most

²⁹The unknown culprits threw a bomb into a house of the Democrat Party candidate for Nakhon Ratchasima at night, leaving the house damaged but nobody injured (*Matchon*, 2 June 1988).

³⁰The incident occurred in Pathum Thani, the central province which is notoriously controlled by an influential the Hansawat dynasty (*Matchon*, 25 July 1988: 8).

³¹*Matchon*, 25 July 1988: 1, 2.

³²The police bureau was alert immediately after the House dissolution. Several provinces were monitored closely for the movement of hit men, namely Chonburi, Phetburi, Lopburi, Kanchanaburi, and Pitsanulok (*Matchon*, 10 May 1988: 2).

³³*Matchon*, 24 July 1988: 20; *Matchon*, 6 May 1988: 1, 2.

³⁴Five vote canvassers were murdered during the pre-election period.

influential boss Somchai Roekwararak, aka "Sia Yae," who supported fifteen candidates associated with different parties in twelve provinces.³⁵ On election day, five assassins riding a pick-up truck drove past the crowded polling area and fired M-79 grenades at Somchai and his wife while they left the polling booth. Two people who stood next to Sia Yia were killed; Sia Yia and his wife were injured, as were ten others.³⁶ The incident, shocking the public and hitting the headlines, was notorious for three reasons: timing, location and victims. Normally, assassinations take place before the election day and at a private place or less crowded area. More importantly, there was no consideration of ordinary voters who may have been close to the intended target. The indiscriminate manner of the killing made this episode a departure from the usual repertoire of electoral violence.

The March 1992 election

This election was held a year after the 1991 coup. Army leaders planned to maintain their power by appointing conservative legal experts to draft a new constitution that restored military power in the political system through the senate and an unelected prime minister. The constitutional drafters did not make any changes to the electoral system and political party laws, clearly wanting to keep the weak, factionalized party system which was easy to control. The changing international political environment plus Thailand's strong connection to the globalized economy, however, made it difficult or almost impossible for junta leaders to continue to govern the country without legitimate elections. Thereby they formed their own political party, called Samakheetham (United Dharma). The most crucial obstacle to their success was their lack of political skill in the electoral arena, which provincial business politicians completely controlled. To win the election, they needed the support of influential provincial bosses, whose behavior was condemned as "crooked and corrupt" and used as a justification for the coup. Leading up to the election, the junta coerced many leading provincial bosses to join the

³⁵ Sia Yae was one of the wealthiest and influential businessmen-turned political bosses in the central and northeast regions who owned construction, saw milling and logging. He rose to power in the mid 1980s. He assumed the Chart Thai Party's executive posts before resigning over conflict with other members. Sia Yae usually supported ten to fifteen candidates from different parties (even when affiliated with the Chart Thai party) in each election. With his vast business and political empire, he made as many enemies as friends.

³⁶ *Maitchon*, 25 July 1988: 1, 2. Even though Sia Yae survived this assassination attempt, he was murdered a year later in the same kind of grenade attack. There were reports that his business and political rivals chipped in four million baht to hire professional assassins to kill him (see a riveting account of Sia Yae's assassination in Suriyan 2001: 8-58).

Samakheetham party in exchange for acquitting them on corruption charges.³⁷ These troubled bosses had no option but to join the party, and shortly afterwards their corruption charges were cancelled and their frozen assets were released. They combined the state machinery with provincial bosses' electioneering skills, networks and finances, the Samakheetham party won the election decisively. The party head, Narong Wongwan, a powerful boss from Phrae, who was supposed to become the new prime minister, had to withdraw from the candidacy because the U.S government alleged he was involved in drug trafficking. This paved the way for the coup leader General Suchinda Kraprayun to assume the post himself. Suchinda appointed many provincial business politicians to his cabinet, including Narong (Phrae boss), Banharn (Suphanburi boss), Sanoh Thienthong (Sa Kaeo boss), Yuth Angkinan (Phetchaburi boss), Sawat Khamprakob (Nakhon Sawan), and others.³⁸ In fact, his cabinet composition was no different from Chatichai's. By this, "the Junta," Pasuk and Baker summed up poignantly "had metamorphosed from the scourge of money politics into its patron."³⁹ The bureaucratic elites and elected politicians were now power shareholders, with generals at the helm, in the business of extracting rents and privileges from the patrimonial state.

The degree of electoral violence increased from 1988, returning to the same level as the 1986 election. There were 28 violent incidents (15 assassination attempts, 9 intimidation, 3 fights, and one bomb), leaving 15 dead and 6 wounded; all 15 killed were vote canvassers (see tables 4.2 and 4.3). The coup leaders attempted to downplay the violent dimension of this contest, saying dismissively: "murder is a daily event in our country. It is nothing special... I believe this election will be the most free and fair election in history."⁴⁰ The junta and media trumpeted the anti-vote buying campaign instead of focusing on the violence and security problem. The campaign highlighted the role of influential provincial politicians in making elections costly and dirty. It was understandable that the junta underemphasized coercion: first, the use of force by private actors reflected the lack of government capacity in overseeing elections, and; second, they were involved in employing coercive force to help their party candidates. Under the

³⁷ After the coup, the junta established a commission to investigate and prosecute top provincial politicians on corruption charges. During the investigation, their assets were frozen.

³⁸ Sanoh held a grudge against the coup leaders, saying they were more hypocritical and corrupt than politicians (Wattana 1995: 47-51). See my analysis of the political endeavors of Narong in Chapter 7, Sanoh in Chapter 12, Yuth in Chapter 10, and Sawat in Chapter 8.

³⁹ Pasuk and Baker 2005: 244.

⁴⁰ *Matichon*, 24 January 1992: 2. The police also tended to dismiss the violent incidents during the election as non-political. On election eve, the police concluded all murder cases in the pre-election period had nothing to do with elections. They also stated all electoral law violations were only minor wrongdoings—posters stealing, libel, false accusation (*Matichon*, 21 March 1992: 2).

guise of anti-vote buying, a troop of soldiers in several provinces conducted a vigilant operation searching the vehicles and raiding the campaign stages of Samakheetham rival candidates.⁴¹ Their illegitimate interventions in the election campaign notwithstanding, military officers were not the main perpetrators of violence. The pattern of electoral violence remained largely unchanged: the provincial business politicians' subordinates and professional gunmen were chiefly responsible for the direct violence and intimidation of their opposition.⁴²

The military-backed Samakheetham Party experienced this personalistic violence as both perpetrators and victims. Some of the party's vote canvassers and candidates were killed and threatened. The prime case was a Chonburi vote canvasser, a village head and local businessmen, who worked for influential boss Somchai Kunpluem and was shot dead after he refused to canvass votes for other parties' candidates. Somchai's team admitted his loss weakened their electoral prospects.⁴³ It was clear that being candidates or vote canvassers for the dominant party backed up by the army did not put them at a lesser risk than their counterparts. Due to the high frequency of assassination attempts pre-election, 216 candidates requested police protection. The police department assigned two police officers per candidate to act as personal bodyguards until the election was over. As things turned out, the Samakheetham Party's candidates had asked for the most help (72 candidates), followed by those of the Chart Thai Party (35), the Democrat Party (31), and the New Aspiration Party (29).⁴⁴ Vote canvassers were vulnerable because the police said government did not have sufficient resources to protect every one of them; they sought comfort and financial protection from the private sector instead by applying for life insurance. Unfortunately, insurance companies had a strict policy of not doing business with vote canvassers. Some small companies, however, saw the market opportunity and offered insurance to precarious vote canvassers.⁴⁵ Clearly, the electoral competition in Thailand generated a wide range of related business.

⁴¹ See, for example, the famous case in Lampang, in which a group of 100 soldiers obstructed the campaign of New Aspiration Party's candidates by claiming they wanted to search for illicit weapons (*Matichon*, 19 March 1992: 1, 6).

⁴² There were no violent acts committed by insurgents in the deep south in this election.

⁴³ This murdered vote canvasser had worked for the Kitsangkhom Party but joined his boss Somchai in switching to the Samakheetham Party in this election. According to his family, two weeks before his death, several candidates from other parties approached him to work as a vote canvasser, and some of them were very angry when he turned down the offers (*Matichon*, 6 February 1992: 1, 21; *Matichon*, 8 February 1992: 2).

⁴⁴ On voting day, roughly 115,000 police officials were employed to oversee election security in all districts nationwide (*Matichon*, 21 March 1992: 2).

⁴⁵ *Matichon*, 27 January 1992: 12.

Apart from vote canvassers, poll observers and journalists were now targeted for the first time. None of them were assassination targets, but they were intimidated and harassed to stop exposing the unlawful activities of many candidates. There was a case of a journalist in the north being harassed by a candidate's followers who accused the journalist of having a bias against their boss.⁴⁶ The intimidation of election monitors and observers was more serious. During the campaign, many of them were harassed by local tough guys to stop monitoring the campaign, and they were the main targets on voting day. The staff and volunteers working for Poll Watch were threatened in some provinces in the central and northeast regions when they tried to stop vote canvassers from vote-buying and engaging in other forms of electoral malpractice.⁴⁷ The increased threat against poll observers could be attributed to the enhanced power of independent election monitoring groups, particularly the newly-created Poll Watch Organization. It was created in January 1992, and had a greater mandate, money, and manpower than its predecessors.⁴⁸ One disadvantage of Poll Watch, however, was that because they were perceived as having more power, they became a new threat and thus were harassed. In subsequent elections, however, politicians knew how to deal with them more skillfully (by using more sophisticated methods of vote-buying) and spared them from the ordeal of harassment and intimidation.

Meanwhile, the number of violent perpetrators showed no signs of decrease. Based on police records, the police chief identified 819 hired gunmen operating nationwide during this election. The police were concerned that young hit men had entered the assassin business and saw opportunities for making "huge and quick money" under the radar screen, as they were not yet on the police's black list.⁴⁹ These assassins, according to police, had connections to "influential figures" who made a large sums of money from

⁴⁶ The incident occurred in Pichit, the province plagued with electoral violence stemming from the long-standing conflict between two rival political families vying for power monopoly. The journalist was caught up in the tense environment (*Matichon*, 18 March 1992: 1, 2).

⁴⁷ A local election staff member at one polling station in Ratchaburi was pressured not to assume his duties on polling day so that he could be replaced by another commissioner closely connected to the influential candidate (*Matichon*, 11 March 1992: 10; *Matichon*, 23 March 1992: 4). Because of the intimidation, 28 poll observers from Poll Watch asked for police protection (*Matichon*, 21 March 1992: 2).

⁴⁸ PollWatch was established as an independent body on 8 January 1992 by Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun to monitor the March 1992 election. It was an ad hoc committee with no legal jurisdiction to enforce the election law, but it had wide mandate, and was financially and logistically supported by Anand administration. See detailed study of PollWatch in Callahan 2000. See also PollWatch's report (1994).

⁴⁹ *Matichon*, 28 January 1992: 1, 24.

gambling, prostitution, smuggling, and other illicit businesses. They estimated that there were over 200 of them living in different provinces.⁵⁰

The September 1992 election

This election was held in the aftermath of the military suppression of the 17-19 May 1992 demonstration. The Anand Panyarachun caretaker government called for a new election in an attempt to restore order to Thai democracy. The legislative assembly amended some clauses in the 1991 constitution, most importantly the stipulation that the prime minister must be elected. Even though civil society and political reform movements strongly condemned the army and bureaucratic elites for the violent breakdown of democracy, they equally blamed the corrupt behavior of elected politicians— vote buying, corruption, rent-seeking, electoral fraud, etc— as root causes of the low quality of parliamentary democracy. Incompetent and unscrupulous provincial business politicians were special targets of reform.⁵¹

PollWatch was more active in September 1992 than in the previous March. The organization spearheaded the anti-vote buying and civic education campaign, which the media, urban business, and the Interior Ministry also supported. The political education crusade attacked the patronage system and provincial elites, and “docile” rural voters, as sources of electoral corruption. On 21 August the cabinet ordered the Interior Ministry to establish the Committee for Prevention and Suppression of Influential Figures in an attempt to curb the role of hired gunmen, contraband arms traders and other criminals in electoral campaigns. The police believed the committee’s operations would make this election cleaner and more peaceful.⁵² But the constabulary were wrong as the death toll in this election surpassed all previous records. Also, it was clear that, outside Bangkok, the political discourse regarding the May event and the civic education campaign had little effect on the electoral results. Many ex-Samakheetham Party members were elected to the House with ease. In addition, the Chart Thai Party led by Banharn, which media and urban intellectuals portrayed as a political evil for supporting the junta during the crackdown, still performed extremely well in this election (finishing runner up with 76 seats).⁵³

⁵⁰ *Matichon*, 16 January 1992: 1, 24; *Matichon*, 19 March 1992: 21.

⁵¹ For the development of and the politics of the reform movement, see Callahan 2005; Connors 2007.

⁵² *Thai Rath*, 22 August 1992: 1, 22.

⁵³ They lost to the Democrat Party by only 4 seats. And if there had not been intra-party conflict prior to the election, the Chart Thai Party would have undoubtedly won this election.

The pattern of violence was exactly the same as in the March 1992 election: most violent incidents took place during the pre-election period and were attempted or successful assassinations. Vote canvassers were again the favorite target, and private gunmen the main perpetrators. There were 23 incidents in total (17 assassination attempts, two bombings, one polling station burning, one violent fight, and two acts of intimidation) with 24 dead and 8 wounded (see tables 4.2 and 4.3). The election day was also tumultuous (see table 4.4). Two polling stations were bombed and burned, there was a clash between soldiers and insurgents in the south, and Poll Watch staff in one province were intimidated by a candidate's followers. There were no casualties on voting day.⁵⁴

All 24 people who died in this election were key actors in the fight for votes: 20 were vote canvassers and four were gunmen. No candidates died in this election—only one was threatened at home.⁵⁵ Some vote canvassers who worked for two different parties were shot dead.⁵⁶ Many of the assassinated vote canvassers held prominent public positions, but they were familiar faces in underworld circles as well. Most notable was the murder of Banbueng city mayor Suchai Thanawan, in Chonburi province. Nicknamed “white Chai,” this local boss was brutally gunned down by assassins with heavy weapons when he was driving (details in the next section).⁵⁷

Security officers took desperate and excessive measure to suppress hit men, who, over time, seemed emboldened and multiplied in number. On 26 August 1992, the Saraburi Police executed four gunmen extra-judicially. The police alleged these four gunmen were involved in 16 murders in the central and northeastern regions, including the murder of a Chart Thai vote canvasser in the previous election. The gang leader was a former village headman from another province. The police also claimed these assassins were on a “political killing” mission in Rayong, Chonburi and Chantaburi.⁵⁸ Even using this brutal method, the police succeeded in eliminating merely 0.5 percent of active hit men, clearly inadequate in dealing with the abundant supply of gunmen hired for electoral violence.

⁵⁴ *Thai Rath*, 14 September 1992, 1, 22, 25.

⁵⁵ This happened in the northeast province of Udonthani (*Thai Rath*, 11 September 1992: 17).

⁵⁶ For example, a vote canvasser in Prachinburi who worked for both Chart Thai Party and its rival Chart Pattana Party was gunned down (*Thai Rath*, 14 September 1992, 1, 22, 25).

⁵⁷ Other notable cases took place in Nakhon Si Thammarat (see Chapter 9), Nakhon Pathom, Samutprakarn, Prachinburi, and Ratchaburi (*Thai Rath*, 10 August 1992: 1, 7; 21 August 1992: 1, 17; 30 August 1992: 1, 17; 31 August 1992: 1, 13; 14 September 1992: 1, 22, 25).

⁵⁸ *Thai Rath*, 26 August 1992: 1, 3, 17.

The July 1995 election

This election was held in the wake of corruption scandals related to public land distribution, which destroyed the legitimacy of the Chuan Leekpai government. This election was a political showdown between two major parties: the Democrats and the Chart Thai Party. Ironically, Suphanburi boss Banharn Silapa-archa, a chief target of the reform movement, promised that his Chart Thai Party would push for political reform if elected. This was an attempt to clean his party's tarnished image of backwardness, corruption and narrow-minded provincialism.⁵⁹ Chuan's acting Interior Ministry revived the Committee for Prevention and Suppression of the Influential Figures, and Chuan presided over the committee himself. The primary objective of the committee, however, was suppressing vote-buying rather than dismantling influential bosses. Other political parties and the media criticized the committee as a Democrat political tool used to weaken their opponents. The committee's operation task forces were divided into three teams, and senior police took charge of each: the first team was responsible for the southern region, the second team looked into the central, the east, and Bangkok, and the last team oversaw the northeast. Two out of three police officers appointed to lead the operation task force were known as associates of the Democrat Party.⁶⁰

The committee clearly targeted Chart Thai Party candidates, particularly in the provinces known to be Chart Thai's strongholds. Several Democrat rivals called this committee the "Gestapo of Thailand" after authorities investigated one opposition party candidate over land invasion cases in the middle of his campaign.⁶¹ In another case, the special police raided Chart Thai Party's vote canvasser's house in Buriram in the middle of the night in search of vote-buying money (the politics behind and consequences of this incident are further examined in Chapter 11). Chart Thai Party secretary Sanoh Thienthong commented that the government manipulated the raid and the situation was "worse than the dictator" and "worse than the Pao Sriyanond era of the late 1950s."⁶² As mentioned earlier, clearly this was not the first time the ruling party manipulated the state apparatus during the election competition—and it would not be the last (as will be seen in the next chapter).

⁵⁹ The Chart Thai Party won this election and Banharn established a committee for political reform, which eventually led to the new constitution (See Chapter 3).

⁶⁰ *Maitichon*, 30 June 1995: 12; *Maitichon Sudsapda*, 30 May-5 June 1995: 88-89; 20-26 June 1995: 91-92.

⁶¹ *Maitichon Sudsapda*, 30 May-5 June 1995: 88-89.

⁶² *Maitichon*, 30 June 1995: 12. See the role of Phao Sriyanong, a dictatorial police chief during the 1950s, in Chapter 2.

State intervention notwithstanding, clashes between influential bosses (and their subordinates) remained a major cause of violent death in the campaign. There were 32 violent incidents, which resulted in 7 dead and 14 wounded. The number of incidents and wounded victims were higher than in any previous elections with the exception of the 1986 poll. Though the death toll appeared lower than other past elections, if examined closely the assassination attempts were as high as in September 1992 (see comparison between each election in table 4.2 and 4.3).

There was no separatist movement involvement in the election. Thugs and gunmen coerced vote canvassers as usual. Physical intimidation of vote canvassers abounded: rival candidates threatened them to stay neutral, withdraw or switch sides; a few received death threats after embezzling their boss's campaign money; and some rivals harassed vote canvassers to not encroach certain territory.⁶³ Only two candidates were targets of violent attacks. There was one case of intimidation of a journalist in Pichit (stronghold of the Democrat Party), where tough guys coerced her to leave the province and confiscated her camera after she had taken photos of 200 special police operating secretly in the area.⁶⁴ PollWatch staff faced physical threats from the Chart Thai Party's henchmen in Buriram when they went to monitor the electoral district on the eve of the election day.⁶⁵ In addition, this election witnessed a new form of collective action—a post-election protest. In three provinces, a group of losing candidates' supporters organized public protests against the electoral results, claiming there was fraud and misconduct in vote counting. These protesters, however, gathered for only a few hours and dispersed voluntarily without causing any trouble.⁶⁶ There was no spectacular or random public violence, but some provinces, notably Prachinburi, Nakhon Sawan, and Buriram emerged as turbulent spots. In these provinces, prominent bosses fiercely competed with each other and used violent force and strong-arm tactics (see Chapter 7, 8, and 11 respectively).

⁶³ See interesting cases in Songkhla, Chainat, Singburi, Nonthaburi, Rayong in *Matichon*, 6 June 1995: 13; *Matichon*, 8 June 1995: 3; *Thai Rath*, 9 June 1995: 3; *Thai Rath*, 22 June 1995: 2, 3 (respectively).

⁶⁴ *Thai Rath*: 21 June 1995: 1, 18. The province was largely controlled by a Democrat Party's member but was constantly challenged by another political family. Journalist intimidation, which is usually rare, had happened once before in this province in the March 1992 election.

⁶⁵ *Matichon*, 3 July 1995: 11. The police rescued them from the area before any violence broke out (see Chapter 11).

⁶⁶ In Mukdaharn and Kanchanaburi, there were 100-500 protesters, while in Sukhothai the reported number was 2,000 (*Matichon*, 4 July 1995: 10; 8 July 1995: 10).

The November 1996 election

This was the last election before the promulgation of the new constitution, and it was held after Banharn, the premier, decided to dissolve the parliament instead of opting to resign. Three major political parties—the Chart Thai, the Democrat, and the New Aspiration Party (NAP) —expected to win the election. Since the Chart Thai Party of Banharn lost its largest faction to the NAP led by Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, its chance of winning dwindled.⁶⁷ Eventually, the NAP defeated the Democrats by two seats and successfully formed a coalition government. Chavalit became the third prime minister of Thailand since 1992.

This election turned out to be the most turbulent and violent of the pre-1997 era. In total, there were 59 violent incidents, causing 18 deaths and wounding 34 (see table 4.2). Those 59 incidents were: 35 assassination attempts, 4 violent fights, 17 physical threats, 2 bombings, and one case of arson of a polling station.⁶⁸ Vote canvassers took all hits from hired gunmen, rendering them “electoral war” casualties. Given the high demand for political killings, police estimated that the number of gunmen country-wide added up to 762 by the time the electoral campaign started.⁶⁹ Considering the dead alone as a measure of violence is misleading as there seemed to be fewer than in the September 1992 election. To gauge the full extent of violence, one needs to take other figures into account. The total number of violent incidents, in particular assassination attempts, was the highest for this election. The tally of wounded was also high, double the last election’s figure. Most injuries were the result of failed assassination attempts. If the gunmen had hit their targets those 13 attempts would have produced a death toll surpassing past records (see table 4.3).

The 1996 electoral contest was wrought with violence—in various forms—from beginning to end. Media and stakeholders pressured the caretaker government to prevent violence before the lives of political contestants and democracy itself were put in jeopardy. Banharn visited “election hotspots” himself and ordered the police chief to

⁶⁷ The faction was named “Wangnamyen” and was led by Sanoh Thienthong, an influential boss from Sa Kaeo province (see Chapter 12).

⁶⁸ Both PollWatch and the police department, though, admitted violence in this election contest was high but presented low figures to the public. PollWatch identified 7 dead and 10 wounded without giving the tally on incidents, while the police stated there were total 36 violent incidents involving candidates and vote canvassers (9 successful murders, 9 failed assassinations, and 8 intimidations). *Thai Rath*, 18 November 1996: 1, 17, 23.

⁶⁹ Most of them were concentrated in the central region. The information came from a Department of Police press conference (*Thai Rath*, 7 October 1996: 1, 18).

bolster local police against gunmen; he also asked the police to compile statistics of violence against vote canvassers during election campaigns.⁷⁰ Some political party leaders suggested the government register vote canvassers so authorities could monitor their activities.⁷¹

Despite these efforts the government failed to stop the violence. International media, notably the BBC and Reuters, commented that this election was “the dirtiest and most violent since 1973.” The leading national newspaper, *Thai Rath*, ran a headline one week before election day that stated, “The Dark Age of Election, Rampant Killings.” Party leaders portrayed their cohorts as victims of violent crime and blamed their opponents. Former premier and Chart Pattana Party head, Chatichai, called the election “barbaric,” and blamed the government for failing to protect party members.⁷² The NAP leader, Chavalit said: “Now the election is so bloody, full of shootings and killings. I feel hurt witnessing this, and want to beg all sides please do not use violence against each other otherwise the Thai people will lose faith in the political system.” On another occasion, he requested his own party members not use “savage methods” because election competition is not “war making.”⁷³ The situation deteriorated to the extent that electoral violence became a priority issue for the cabinet. The Interior Minister admitted that the election was “quite violent” but denied any responsibility. The premier Banharn said “I was well aware since I dissolved the House that the election competition would be more violent, as long as there is no political reform.”⁷⁴ It is difficult to know whether he genuinely believed in what he said in the meeting, but what transpired showed us that the 1997 political reform did not diminish electoral violence, at least in the short term (see next chapter).

There were many violence-ridden provinces in this election— some of them the usual hot spots, whereas others were new to these levels of conflict. Among them were Nakhon Si Thammarat (see Chapter 9), Sukhothai, Pichit, Nakhon Pathom, Chachoengsao, Phrae (see Chapter 7), Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Bangkok. Antagonism between rival candidates, who were both affluent and powerful, caused the

⁷⁰ *Wattachak*, 11 November 1996. Since, as mentioned, the Police were inclined to dismiss all violence during the election as non-political, they did not collect any official data on election-related violent incidents.

⁷¹ *Wattachak*, 13 November 1996.

⁷² *Thai Rath*, 10 November 1996: 1.

⁷³ See his comments in *Thai Rath*, 10 November 1996: 17, 22, and *Sue Thurakit*, 8 November 1996 (respectively).

⁷⁴ *Thai Rath*, 12 November 1996: 1, 17.

violence. Vote canvassers were caught in the crossfire. An example was the murder in Chachoengsao of a vote canvasser who was a prominent provincial councilor and owner of a construction business. In past elections he had canvassed votes for two powerful political bosses, who always ran for the same party, making his work smooth. In this election, unfortunately, his two bosses stood for different parties (due to their recent serious disputes), forcing him to choose sides. This eventually proved fatal, which partly explains the tumult in Chachoengsao in the 1996 election.⁷⁵

Bangkok also bears closer examination. Since 1979, electoral campaigns in Bangkok mainly involved brawling, fighting, poster vandalism, and physical intimidation. Given its large population and number of electoral districts, violence in Bangkok was relatively weak compared to other provinces.⁷⁶ Generally, Bangkok is not “dangerous” during elections; assassinations and shootings had not been common in the capital city as was the case in other parts of the country. The Metropolitan police chief told cabinet that electoral competitions in Bangkok were “not as violent as other provinces because Bangkok candidates had no culture of ‘patronizing’ gunmen.”⁷⁷ His explanation was, in fact, wrong, but what he said about the character of Bangkok candidate was right (see next section). The increase in violence in the Bangkok election in 1996 was a result of boss-type candidates’ entering into politics. A close investigation reveals that violence was concentrated in one district, in which both parties fielded candidates from the criminal syndicates. One candidate, in fact, was a famous local boss involved in a wide range of illegal business, including hiring gunmen.⁷⁸ The involvement of local bosses in politics changed the whole dynamic of electoral competitions in certain districts of Bangkok in the 1996 election.

⁷⁵ *Thai Rath*, 8 November 1996: 1, 10; *Thai Rath*, 11 November 1995: 23.

⁷⁶ In the 1996 election, Bangkok had 37 MP seats, whereas the average number of MP seats per province was 3 to 5.

⁷⁷ *Thai Rath*, 12 November 1996: 17, 23.

⁷⁸ In the end, this candidate, who ran for the Democrat Party, won the election amid public disapproval of how a “clean image” party like the Democrat could recruit someone of his ilk in the first place. A year later he was charged by the police for masterminding the murder of another Democrat MP’s mother, who had been killed on 6 September 1997. The case proceeded to court, and on 18 September 2012 the Supreme Court upheld the Appeal Court’s death sentence for this former Democrat Party MP for Bangkok and his aide (*Matichon*, 18 September 2012; “Death Penalty Upheld for Ex-MP,” *Bangkok Post*, 19 September 2012).

Electoral violence, 1979-1996: methods, perpetrators, victims and timing of electoral violence

A clear pattern of electoral violence had developed in Thailand over the period 1979-1996. In terms of *methods*, perpetrators chose assassination, amounting to more than half the total violent incidents. Assassination was followed by physical intimidation, for example, shooting into the victims' houses at night. Other modes of violence, such as fighting, attacking, bombing or burning were witnessed occasionally (see table 4.2 and chart 4.1). The random or indiscriminate use of violence in the public areas, targeting a large crowd, was absent, except for two unusual cases in 1988 and in 1996.⁷⁹ Violent acts were mainly pre-meditated and politically motivated, rather than spontaneous, opportunistic or emotionally-induced. Local thugs and hired gunmen who worked for influential politicians carried out most attacks. Thugs and mercenaries were responsible for most casualties, injuries, and threats. However, communist and separatist insurgents engaged in violence sporadically. Violence from communists appeared only in 1979 and 1983 and then disappeared, while threats from the separatists stretched over a longer period but were less salient, causing little damage and mainly confined to the three southern provinces (Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat).

Victims also fell into distinct categories. Vote canvassers were singled out as the primary target of intimidation and killings. Vote-canvasser assaults accounted for as high as 84 percent of the total victims, compared to other election-related personnel—candidates, journalists, poll workers, gunmen, and ordinary voters—who took a small share of 4-5 percent each (see table 4.3 and chart 4.2). The violence occurred at 3 distinct times: 82 percent before the election, 16 percent on election day, and only 2 percent in the post-election period (see table 4.4 and chart 4.3).⁸⁰ The pre-election period, or campaigning, is the most dangerous time in Thailand's election cycle. As to the degree of violence, data collection found no linear progression across time from low-level to higher-level of violence, or vice versa. Rather the data show an ebb and flow, in a narrow range, in the number of violent incidents and casualties. The lack of sharp

⁷⁹ Recall the 1988 election, the attempt to kill Ang Thong province's most influential boss, Sia Yae. Five gunmen open fire into the crowd, killing 2 and injuring 10. In 1996, in Bangkok, two mobsters connected to one candidate shot into a crowd in two isolated incidents, which led to a total of 8 wounded (see the 1996 election).

⁸⁰ However, the seemingly low number of violent incidents in the post-election period must be perceived with a caveat. Many post-election violent incidents did not take place within the first month after election day. If we take the post-election violence over a longer period of time, the number of incidents would be larger. However, my data is not available for this longer time frame.

fluctuation in the degree of violence is attributed to the absence of major structural and institutional alterations in the period 1979-1996, whether (patrimonial) state structure, central-local relations, or electoral and party system. When the major changes came into effect after 1997 and 2006, the country witnessed much greater fluctuation in electoral violence (as examined in Chapters 5 and 6).

In conclusion, from 1979-1996, the prototype of electoral violence in Thai national elections was an assassination perpetrated by a lone mercenary or team of gunmen, hired by provincial bosses, targeting vote canvassers during the election campaign. This type of violence is located on the border between a "purely individual violent act" and "collective violence," since it involves only a few perpetrators and involves a low level of coordination between personnel. It is not a purely individual violent act because gunmen commonly act on behalf of others, and the act requires a certain degree of planning (elaborated in the next section).⁸¹ Provincial bosses specify the victim's rank and hire the perpetrator. The pattern of electoral violence in Thailand is different from that in other countries (Zimbabwe, Iran, Kenya, Nigeria) which breaks out in mass or collective violence, notably riots, coordinated destruction, public looting, scattered attacks, and sometimes even deadly civil war (see Chapter 1). As explained in the previous chapter, to understand the distinct style of electoral violence in Thailand, one needs to focus on the local factors, mechanisms, and processes. The local conditions explain why some provinces are more prone to electoral violence than others.

⁸¹ By making this distinction, I employ Charles Tilly's working definition of "collective violence," by which he means social interaction that "inflicts physical damage on person and/or objects... [.] involves at least two perpetrators of damage; and results at least in part from coordination among persons who perform the damaging acts." This definition of "collective violence," Tilly explains, "excludes purely individual action, nonmaterial damage, accidents, and long-term or indirect effects of such damaging processes as dumping of toxic waste" (Tilly 2003: 3-4).

Table 4.2: Election-related violence in national elections, 1979-1996

Election dates	Violent incidents						Death toll	Wounded
	assassination attempts	fights, brawls, scuffles	physical intimidation	bombings	burnings	total		
22/4/1979	10	3	2	0	0	15	9	7
18/4/1983	14	0	1	1	1	17	16	10
27/7/1986	15	0	19	0	0	34	18	7
24/7/1988	7	0	9	1	1	18	7	12
22/3/1992	15	2	10	1	0	28	15	6
13/9/1992	17	0	3	2	1	23	24	8
2/7/1995	17	1	13	1	0	32	7	14
17/11/1996	35	4	17	2	1	59	18	34
Total	130	10	74	8	4	226	114	98

Chart 4.1: Methods of electoral violence in national elections, 1979-1996

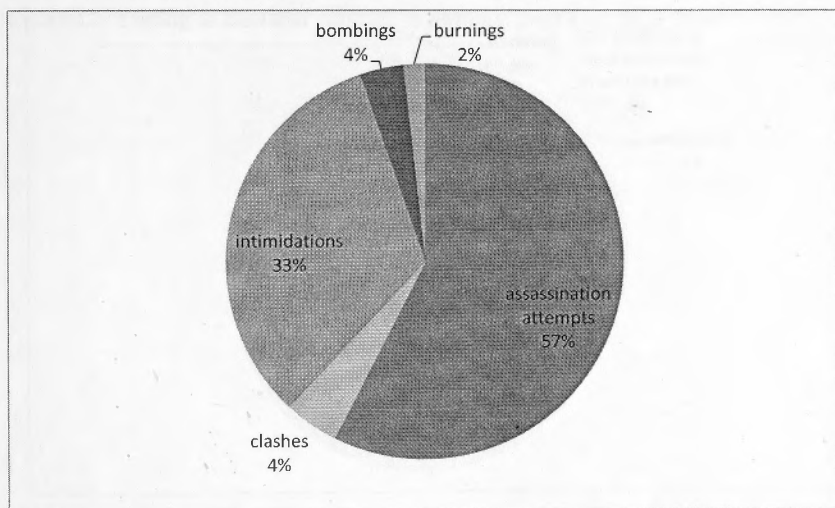


Table 4.3: Deaths related to violence in national elections, 1979-1996

Election dates	Dead victims					
	vote canvassers	candidates	journalists, poll administrators and observers	gunmen	voters	Total
22/4/1979	5	1	3	0	0	9
18/4/1983	12	2	0	0	2	16
27/7/1986	15	1	0	1	1	18
24/7/1988	5	0	0	0	2	7
22/3/1992	15	0	0	0	0	15
13/9/1992	20	0	0	4	0	24
2/7/1995	6	0	1	0	0	7
17/11/1996	18	0	0	0	0	12
Total	96	4	4	5	5	114

Chart 4.2: Dead Victims of electoral violence in national elections, 1979-1996

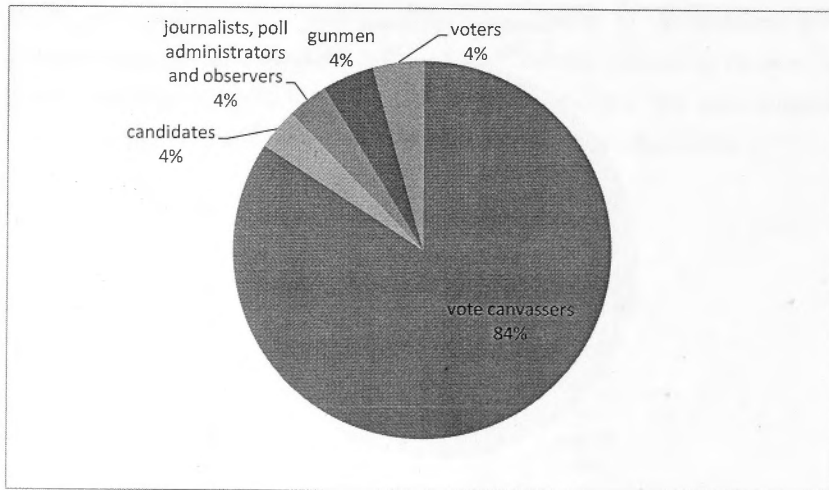
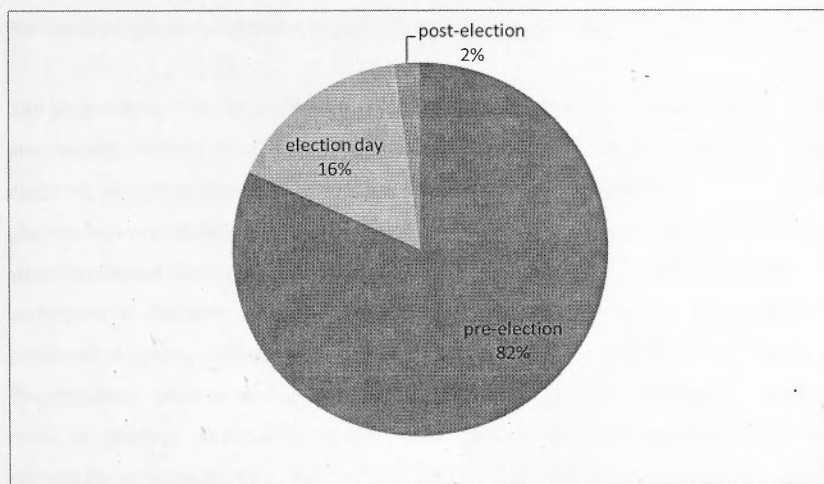


Table 4.4: Timing of election-related violent incidents in national elections, 1979-1996

Election dates	Timing of violent incidents			
	pre-election	election day	post-election (1 month after election day)	total
22/4/1979	8	7	0	15
18/4/1983	13	3	1	17
27/7/1986	31	3	0	34
24/7/1988	14	4	0	18
22/3/1992	26	2	0	28
13/9/1992	17	6	0	23
2/7/1995	26	5	1	32
17/11/1996	50	6	3	59
Total	185	36	5	226

Chart 4.3: Timing of electoral violence in national elections, 1979-1996



The next chapter examines the changing structures, rules and politico-economic landscapes at the national and local settings in the period 1997-2011, and explains how these changes affect the patterns and frequency of electoral violence.

Parameter	Source of Variation	F	df	P
pH	Time	1.2	1, 10	0.30
	Location	0.5	1, 10	0.48
Dissolved Oxygen	Time	2.1	1, 10	0.16
	Location	1.8	1, 10	0.19
Total Solids	Time	3.5	1, 10	0.07
	Location	2.2	1, 10	0.15
Total Phosphorus	Time	4.2	1, 10	0.05
	Location	3.1	1, 10	0.09
Total Nitrogen	Time	5.1	1, 10	0.03
	Location	4.3	1, 10	0.04
Ammonia Nitrogen	Time	6.2	1, 10	0.02
	Location	5.4	1, 10	0.03
Nitrate Nitrogen	Time	7.3	1, 10	0.01
	Location	6.5	1, 10	0.02

Table 2. Mean values and standard deviations of the different parameters measured in the study.

Parameter	Mean	Standard Deviation
pH	7.2	0.3
Dissolved Oxygen	8.5	0.5
Total Solids	120	15
Total Phosphorus	0.5	0.1
Total Nitrogen	1.5	0.2
Ammonia Nitrogen	0.2	0.05
Nitrate Nitrogen	0.8	0.1

The data show that the concentration of the different parameters measured in the study was significantly higher in the urban area than in the rural area. This is probably due to the fact that the urban area is more densely populated and has a higher level of industrial and domestic activities.

Chapter 5

The rise and fall of electoral violence:

Changing rules, structures, and power landscapes, 1997- 2011

This chapter examines how patterns of electoral violence were shaped by the economic crisis of 1997, the new rules of the game as embodied in the 1997 constitution, decentralization, and the rise of the *Thai Rak Thai* Party and Thaksin. It also looks at the Thaksin government's war on drugs and the elimination of "influential people," the 2006 coup and the subsequent polarization of Thai society, the changing roles and status of provincial elites, and the emergence of the Yellow Shirt and the Red Shirt movements and their effects on electoral politics. The main focus is on the combination of factors that led to increasingly widespread violence in the 2001 and 2005 elections, and the decrease in electoral violence in 2007 and 2011. The major goal is to identify the mechanisms, patterns, and consequences of violence in electoral politics and why it erupted in 2001 and 2005 and dissipated in 2007 and 2011.

National political restructuring and local power reordering

The period from 1997 to 2011 was highly transformative and turbulent for Thai politics and society. Within one decade, there were five elections (including the nullified 2006 election), six prime ministers, two constitutions, one military coup, and countless violent clashes between state security forces and color-coded mass movements which led to a large number of deaths and injuries. Parliamentary democracy and electoral institutions underwent a dramatic change. Initially, the new constitution and political reform produced a strong and stable civilian administration and political party structure. Programmatic politics and policy-based campaigning played increasingly important roles in shaping electoral outcomes, even though the particularistic elements of patronage, pork, personality, and coercive force still existed. Political party and electoral institutions were, more than ever, strengthened and meaningfully connected to a majority of the electorate. Direct elections at the local level enabled by decentralization helped created stronger linkages between the electorate and elected politicians. However, the military coup in 2006 derailed the legitimacy and development of parliamentary democracy. The traditional royal-military-bureaucratic power alliance,

which lost its power but had no willingness to participate in electoral competition, employed an old-fashioned, coercive tool (the coup) to capture state power and overthrow the popularly elected government. The 2006 coup profoundly transformed Thai politics; it polarized the country, exacerbated political divisions, and radicalized political participation. As a result, electoral competitions were infused with ideological contestation, rather than only particularistic or programmatic campaigns. The changing rules, landscape and power structure of Thai politics at the national level strongly effected local political settings—the balance of power between political groups and families, and between national parties and local bosses. And the political changes at the local level, structured by national dynamics, shaped the supply and demand of coercion and electoral violence witnessed in this period.

To understand the peaks and troughs of violence in this period, it is necessary to examine political and institutional changes at the national level and how these affect local power structures. Four national-level factors contributed to the transformation of Thai politics from 1997 to 2011: the 1997 constitution and its newly designed electoral system; the implementation of decentralization and its empowerment of local elective posts; the rise of the strong populist party and Thaksin Shinawatra; and the 2006 military coup.

The new electoral administration and system and the 1997 constitution: changing rules and unintended (violent) consequences

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the political reform movement began after the 1992 May bloodshed. The reformists defined money politics and vote buying, as well as weak coalition government, as the core problems of Thai politics. Just as importantly, they viewed the provincial businessmen-cum-politicians as the main culprits for the problems. Journalists and academics deplored rural politicians, accusing them of using “dirty” money to buy votes from rural poor, uneducated voters. They were accused of plundering public resources to win elections and to gain personal benefits. Immediately after the economic crisis of July 1997, the push for political reform galvanized vital support from the urban middle class, civil society, and business elites as they blamed the crisis on incompetent government run by rural politicians. Three months later, in October 1997, the legislative assembly passed a new constitution. The primary goals of the new constitution were twofold— to create a capable and stable government and

eradicate vote buying and money politics.¹ The unspoken goal, however, was to prevent provincial politicians (*nakkanmueang bannok*) from assuming power, as had occurred earlier in the 1990s.

To curb the power of provincial and money politics, the constitutional drafters redesigned the electoral system, election administration and rules over party organization.² The new constitution replaced the Ministry of the Interior with an independent body, the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT), tasked with administering and overseeing electoral processes. The ECT was mandated to investigate violations of electoral law and misconduct, and it had the power to counter electoral fraud by disqualifying candidates before or after voting day.³ These sweeping powers effectively made the ECT one of the key players shaping electoral results—and effectively a gatekeeper to the House. Especially in the first election held under the new constitution, in 2001, the ECT's lack of experience and capacity, combined with unclear rules and mismanagement, became sources of conflict (see next section).

Apart from creating the ECT, the 1997 constitution adopted several new organizations, mechanisms, and rules. For the first time in history, it set forth that senators be elected directly rather than being appointed. Voting was compulsory for all eligible voters and party switching, a popular practice among Thai politicians, was restricted. However, the most far-reaching reform was a major overhaul of the electoral system. As part of an attempt to facilitate coherent political party and party-oriented politics, it replaced the block-vote system (used under the 1978 and 1992 constitutions) with a mixed-member or two-tiered system.⁴ Out of five hundred House seats, four hundred seats were elected from single-seat districts on a plurality basis (or first past the post, FPTP), and another one hundred seats were elected from a single nationwide district on a proportional basis. All political parties had to submit a list of candidates for voters to consider and those on

¹ For detail on the political reform movement and the 1997 constitution, see Callahan 2005; Connors 1999; Sombat 2002; McCargo 1998; Chaiwat 2000; Kuhonta 2008.

² See Hicken 2007: 145-159: the Database for Thailand's Constitution Drafting Assembly Records 1999; Chaiwat 2000.

³ This was known as “giving the yellow or red cards” to the candidates. The yellow cards would be given in a case in which the ECT found evidence of candidate's electoral misconduct but not a direct link. The red card would be delivered when the ECT had evidence directly linking the candidate to electoral violations. After issuing yellow or red cards to the candidates, a new round of elections must be held in districts in which winning candidates were disqualified. A candidate with a yellow card could run again for election, while candidates with red cards could not. Some districts even had to hold multiple rounds of elections if when misconduct repeatedly occurred (see Organic Law on the Election of Member of the House of Representatives and Senators 1998 in Thiraphon et al. 1998).

⁴ Hicken 2007: 154.

the party list were ranked in order. Each candidate had to decide whether they ran for a constituency or a party list seat, and each voter cast one vote for their district representative and another for a party list. The constituency and party list votes were calculated separately and had no effect on each other. The introduction of a party-list system aimed to provide an opportunity for technocrats, businessmen, professionals or basically non-provincial boss-type candidates to enter politics without electioneering. It also aimed to strengthen party building and party identity.

The drafters believed that changing to the FPTP system would reduce vote buying; because districts were smaller, they reasoned, candidates would be able to cultivate close relationships with their constituents without dispensing particularistic material benefits, or cash. The goal was also to allow non-affluent but quality candidates to compete with influential bosses. Another advantage of the FPTP system, claimed by the drafters, was its lack of intraparty competition (which typically occurred in the block vote's multiple-seat districts).⁵ Despite the advantages of the FPTP system on party building and vote buying reduction, it created negative unintended consequences. It intensified electoral conflict in many provinces.

In general, there were no direct causal links between the FPTP system and the frequency of electoral violence; no study demonstrates or proves that the adoption of this straightforward electoral system leads to more electoral violent conflict.⁶ Nevertheless, the sequence and context of the introduction of FPTP voting in Thailand encouraged greater levels of violence. It is critical to emphasize that the FPTP was taken up after Thailand's long standing use of the block-vote system. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the block-vote system helped diminish the intensity of electoral competitions by allowing strong candidates to avoid head-on confrontation with each other as it was unnecessary to win the most votes to get elected. For example, in a two-seat district with two rivals standing, both of them could collect just enough votes to win the first and second position to get elected. In the FPTP system, the competition becomes a zero-sum-game

⁵ See constitutional drafters' arguments and debates in Thawinwadi et al. 1999. However, evidence from other countries shows that smaller districts might in fact facilitate vote-buying as the number of votes needed to win is fewer. Also a single-seat district is still basically a candidate-centered electoral system, generating strong incentives to cultivate personal support networks (Hicken 2007: 47-60). The elections of 2001 and 2005 demonstrated that these caveats had a certain merit.

⁶ The FPTP is widely considered the "simplest form of plurality/majority system... in which the winning candidate is simply the person who wins most votes" (Reynolds, Reilly and Ellis 2005: 35). See general discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of FPTP system in Birch 2005: 281-301; Colomer 2004; Farrell 2001. On discussion of electoral system choice and conflict, see Reilly 2001; Sisk 1996; Lijphart 2004; Horowitz 1993.

as there is only one winner per district— only the strongest boss could go to the House. Theoretically, the best way for the boss to escape defeat is to avoid running in the same district as their main rival, but this is not an option for everyone. After competing under the same electoral system for decades, each political boss or family had successfully established their own political stronghold, usually their hometown or business headquarters. Running in new districts means rebuilding vote bases and cultivating new personal support networks—tasks that normally take years to accomplish. Therefore the implementation of the new electoral system aggravated existing local conflicts among influential bosses and made elections more prone to violence, precisely in districts in which redrawn electoral boundaries pit two rival bosses against each other. Since the political reformists were primarily focused on vote-buying, they overlooked the violent consequences of the newly-adopted system and prepared no plan to mitigate conflict.⁷

While the new electoral system was implemented nationwide, not every district faced violent competition. The FPTP intensified political cleavages but was not a direct cause of electoral violence. The real causes resided in local settings—existing local political arrangements and the ways in which each political boss responded to the changing institutional rules.

Decentralization: diffusion of power and new conflict terrain

If democratization in the 1980s provided opportunities for leading provincial businessmen to gain access to public resources, rents and political power through election to the national parliament, decentralization and direct local elections of the late 1990s opened up the same opportunities for petty bosses and local strongmen at the local level.

Proposals to decentralize Thailand's state administration gained political momentum and became a top reform priority after the bloody May 1992 crackdown on protesters. Although a proposal for decentralization met strong resistance from the Ministry of Interior and some conservative politicians, political demands from academics, NGOs, grassroots movements, local civil society and middle class groups channeled through the

⁷ In the 2001, 2005, and 2007 elections, the ECT focused entirely on vote buying and electoral fraud, and turned electoral security over to police. It was not until the 2011 election, after electoral violence had become a major concern and taken seriously by the ECT, that the ECT office cooperated closely with the police toward the goal of making elections safe. Interview, two senior ETC officers, Bangkok, 8 June 2011; interview, senior police officer overseeing election security, 9 June 2011 and 25 July 2011.

public media had an impact on policy makers and political parties. During the September 1992 election, all major parties, including the Democrats who later won the election, included decentralization in their election campaigns. The coalition government led by Chuan Leekpai, the Democrat party leader, however, compromised with the bureaucracy, and failed to push for the progressive plan on decentralization.⁸ With the enactment of the Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO) Act in 1994, however, the process of local government reform and decentralization was starting to begin in any case. Tambon councils and TAOs gained autonomous status by this law, even though the executive head of the TAOs was not directly elected. Despite a number of shortcomings, this law was a catalyst for the modest measures of decentralization put in place at this time.⁹ Modest though they may have been, they had long been blocked by the establishment in the Bangkok-based bureaucracy.¹⁰

A significant turning point for local government and decentralization reforms took place in 1997, with the promulgation of the new constitution stipulating decentralization as a national policy. According to the constitution, the state shall give autonomy to localities in accordance with the principle of self-government and the will of the people. Local government organizations shall have autonomy in laying down policies for their governance, personnel and finance administration and shall have their own powers.¹¹ As a result of the new constitution, several acts related to local administration empowerment were modified and enacted. Since 1994 a new stratum of local government had been created at three levels: sub-district (*tambon*), municipality

⁸ This included the nationwide direct election of provincial governors. Democrat Party members viewed this as a radical form of decentralization, and strongly opposed those from civil society and the academia who advocated for it (Thanet 2002; Praphat 1998).

⁹ Some scholars have traced decentralization efforts back to the 1933 Municipal Act (the *Thesaban* Act), and the 1955 and 1956 Acts that effectively established provincial council and *tambon* council as local government offices. These acts, however gave very limited power and mandate to the established local offices. The number of offices created by the act was also staggeringly low. Until 1994, the local government units largely remained under the control of the Interior Ministry and officials appointed by the central government. In a nutshell, it was a devolution of central government power, not decentralization. The direct election of Bangkok governor, first held in 1978, was an exception as, until 2011, it was the only province that elected its own governor. For historical background of decentralization, see Thanet 2002; Achakorn and Chandra 2011: 54-75; Nagai, Funatsu, and Kagoya 2008; Arghiros 2001; Viengrat 2008. For insightful comparative historical analysis of how decentralization processes in Thailand and the Philippines had different causes and consequences in connection to state structure, see Hutchcroft 2004, 2007.

¹⁰ Looked at from a broader perspective, the decentralization program implemented in Thailand in the late 1990s was rather cautious and timid. As Hutchcroft (2004: 315-316) notes, "Bangkok bureaucrats have had considerable success in fending off the demands of those who want to increase the autonomy of local governmental units." "So strong," he adds "is the impulse toward central rule that proposals for the direct election of governors (a practice found in the Philippines for nearly a century) have been denounced as attempts to rip the country asunder."

¹¹ See articles 282 to 290 of the 1997 Constitution; Nagai, Funatsu, and Kagoya 2008: 1-5.

(*thesaban*), and province (*changwat*). The executives of these local administrative offices then were elected by their legislative councils, and the ex officio posts for government officials (provincial governor, district chief, *kamnan*) were abolished. For example, the 1997 Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) Act created a serious impact on the role of provincial governor. The Act stated that the PAO was composed of legislative and executive bodies: the provincial council consisted of between 24 and 48 directly elected members depending on population numbers, and the executive body consisted of a chairman who was elected by council members. The governor was no longer the chairman of the PAO. At the sub-district level, similarly, the *kamnan* was also no longer the chairman of the TAO. A further significant step occurred in 2003 when the laws relating to the PAO, the municipality, and the TAO were amended, stating that the executive heads of all of these local government organizations were to be directly elected by local people. Direct elections strengthened the power of local executive positions and enhanced the legitimacy of the organizations across the board.¹² By 2011, the number of local government organizations rose to 7,853, divided into 76 PAOs, 2,266 municipalities, and 5,509 TAOs, and two special administrative units (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and City of Pattaya).¹³ The number of local elective posts has multiplied since then.

Decentralization increased the mandate, duties, personnel and budget of local administrative organizations. According to the 1999 Decentralization Act, local government organizations had the authority to collect revenues from several kinds of local taxes. In addition, this act set the fiscal decentralization target of increasing the percentage of local government organization expenditure to at least 20 percent of total national expenditure by 2001, and to at least 35 percent by 2006.¹⁴ To give but one example of fiscal reform, the share of national public revenue allocated to local government organizations increased from 7.13 percent in 1996 to 23.50 percent in 2005,

¹² At the same time they diminished the power of the local-level government officials, notably *kamnan* and provincial governor. See Arghiros (2002) and Bowie (2008) on the changing relationships between the representational and administrative structures in Thai provinces after decentralization.

¹³ Both the municipality and TAO were sub-district-level administrative units; their differences were based on levels of collectible revenue. Any TAO collecting revenue more than the minimum standard is upgraded to municipality. Over time, the number of TAOs diminished in relation to the municipality. The municipality was divided into three levels—city, town and sub-district—decided by location, revenue and population. The higher the level, the more budget support they received from government. By 2012, there were 29 city municipalities, 167 town municipalities, and 2,070 sub-district municipalities. See the Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior website at <http://www.dla.go.th/work/abt/index.jsp> (accessed on 22 December 2012).

¹⁴ The government at that time, however, failed to meet this requirement.

and the total revenue raised by the PAOs, TAOs, and municipalities increased from 40 billion baht in 1998 to 130 billion baht in 2005, an average annual increase of 19 percent.¹⁵ Local government organizations controlled a large budget, thus giving more power to those who held positions within them.

The administrative control over government largesse had contradictory effects on local development. On the one hand, it provided greater resources for local infrastructure and welfare. On the other hand, it provided a larger pool of rents for corrupt local politicians. The constitution and laws relating to decentralization were concerned with empowering local governments relative to the national government, but they failed to establish a capable “rational-legal” state apparatus to underpin the fledging local democracy. With the lack of careful and well-crafted capacity-building programs, patrimonial features arguably were exhibited more strongly at the local levels due to poorly established local state infrastructure and weak monitoring mechanisms. Under these conditions, the bosses who were able to capture local government power had almost complete control over the allocation of rents and patronage (local government licenses, contracts, concession).

The rent-seeking activities of locally elected politicians were all-pervasive. The most common was the local construction contractor-turned-local politician who used his/her position to deliver contracts or licenses to their families, business allies, or any entrepreneurs willing to pay a bribe. In addition, many elected politicians coerced local officials and/or recalcitrant businessmen to comply with their unlawful politico-business transactions. Accounts of local bosses enriching themselves through dishonest methods were abundant (see all case studies). In no time, media were calling local administrative offices “the contractor assembly” (*sapha phurapmao*) or “the hoodlum assembly” (*sapha nakleng*).¹⁶ The prime example of the local administrative organization’s patrimonial feature manifested in a tambon of Buriram province, that shall remain unnamed. After winning the TAO chairman position, the local boss (whose brother was a prominent MP) approved a budget to build a new TAO office located right next to his

¹⁵ Achakorn 2007: 55.

¹⁶ In only the first round of local elections under decentralization Acts, reports of violence and corruption in local offices overshadowed the excitement of new local democracy. With an increasing number of scandals, Office of the National Anti-Corruption Commission and Office of the Auditor General of Thailand monitored local spending closely because there were no equivalent local bodies. By the mid 2000s, the local government’s (lack of) good governance and transparency became national concerns. See, Orathai 2003; Kovit 2010; and see lengthy report regarding the public lament on “the contractor or hoodlum assembly” in *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 1:5 (16 July – 16 August 2001): 40-84.

house. He spent most of his time running office from home; meetings were also often conducted at home. Since he was TAO chairman for a long time (from 1995 to 2012), all officials adjusted to his style of resident-governing and the private came to overwhelm the public, both literally and figuratively. It was no coincidence that, over time, his house grew larger and was beautifully decorated, while the TAO office was left in an abject condition.¹⁷ The situation observed in this TAO is an exemplar of Max Weber's description of patrimonial office as a "ruler's household."¹⁸

Decentralization, thus, created new sources of wealth and power at local levels. It equipped local politicians with greater power, status, and significance in the political system compared to the past. Decentralization opened up a new political market and created a new terrain of local competition. No single political group or individual had control over the newly-created local political posts, which drew forth various kinds of new entrants. Local businessmen, teachers, lawyers, NGO activists, journalists, retired officials (especially *kamnan* and village headmen), policemen, bank managers, and gangsters were keen to run for office. Nevertheless, regardless of their original careers, most of them turned to rent-seeking businesses (mainly construction business) after they were in office. The national pattern of wealth and power accumulation prevalent from the 1980s onward was reproduced locally at the turn of the new century. In no time, however, provincial elites realized it was crucial to strengthen their networks by linking local and national spheres. They thus involved themselves more directly in the local elections and devoted more attention to their downward relationships with local politicians. The changing power landscape similarly compelled all major political parties and heads of factions to invest more resources in building local power bases to buttress their national political standing. As a result, parties, political factions and families sought to place their allies, family members or supporters in local governments. Local elections formed a new front of political competition and the stakes were high. They

¹⁷ Personal observation and interview, TAO senior official, Buriram, 21 October 2010. This TAO was medium sized with an annual budget of 19 million baht. The TAO lacked basic facilities found in other Thai offices; staff needed to wash dishes in a water pond nearby. The chairman's house was gigantic and well maintained like an upper-middle class residence usually found in Bangkok. The chairman told his followers that he planned to run for one or two more times and then "give" the office to one of his children (see more details on Buriram's politics in Chapter 11). It is interesting to note that during the absolute monarchy (Rama V– Rama VII, 1868-1932), many senior civil servants administrated their departments from their residences. This practice continued in the early years of the People's Party regime after 1932 (Nakharin 1992).

¹⁸ As Weber (1978, vol. 2: 1013) noted, "Originally patrimonial administration was adapted to the satisfaction of purely personal, primarily private household needs of the master."

brought national and local politicians together working for mutual benefit. The linkages between local and national politics were stronger than ever before.

Decentralization produced few mitigating effects on electoral violence. Some MPs switched, and decided to run for local offices with large budgets and manpower. Their decision to not run in national elections helped lessen conflict in some MP's electoral districts.¹⁹ Furthermore, for some dominant political dynasties, decentralization helped alleviate intra-clan conflicts as it provided more seats in which clan patriarchs could place their members. Certain powerful clans, for example in Phetchaburi (Chapter 10) and Sa Kaeo (Chapter 12) divided the political territory—House of Representative, PAO, municipality, TAO—among clan members to avoid family feuds or unnecessary confrontation. Power-sharing was, at any rate, difficult to sustain; it was the exception rather than the rule, working successfully only in provinces dominated by one clan.

Overall, decentralization exacerbated rather than mitigated provincial electoral conflict. It disrupted local political order and made power structures more fragmented, complicating the political bosses' attempt to monopolize provincial power in three crucial ways. First, after 1997, the established provincial elites had to compete with both old rivals and new local players for provincial control. Many new actors did not have close ties with established bosses nor were they connected to influential political networks or dynasties. Many of them came from humble backgrounds. Without decentralization, their political mobility would have never been possible. Their political entry disturbed existing clientelistic relationships and opened up possibilities for new, independent power centers. Savvy political upstarts challenged old bosses and political families who gradually lost their grip on power.²⁰ After the 2000s, new political families appeared in several provinces. The conflict between old and new elites was fiercest when the newcomer attempted to topple the existing bosses and monopolize territory. The end results of this power struggle were violent electoral wars.²¹

¹⁹ For example, the case of Phetchaburi boss and several times MP, Yuth Angkinan, who had been a longstanding city mayor of Phetchaburi since the late 1960s. In the early 1980s, when the national parliament was revived, he ran for MP and took on ministerial posts in the 1990s. After decentralization, he ran for city mayor again as he sought to control the municipality's growing budget and avoid confrontation with his nephew who was standing for MP election (see more details in Chapter 10). For a list of MPs who switched to local election after decentralization, see *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 31 (September 2003): 58-60.

²⁰ It should be emphasized though that the "old bosses" were not really old, as their power dated back to only the mid-1970s (see Chapter 3).

²¹ Nakhon Sawan (Chapter 8) is the archetypal case of this political dynamic.

Second, decentralization shook up the relationship between patrons and key vote canvassers. Many vote canvassers turned against their bosses because their superiors did not support their running in local elections. In general, Thai politicians preferred their own family members to aides when it came to political succession. Even though many key vote canvassers were more qualified and experienced than relatives, bosses did not nominate them for candidacy. Even in cases in which bosses supported their vote canvassers in local politics, problems still occurred over the number of seats available and too many canvasser candidates; this led to conflicts among aides within the same personal network. As a result, there were numbers of ambitious vote canvassers who failed to secure political support from their bosses. These disgruntled brokers severed ties with their patrons and decided to build their own political fortunes elsewhere. Their chances of winning elections were high as they had such strong influence over the vote base of their former bosses. The post-1997 elections witnessed an increase in political betrayal, defection, and realignments in local personal networks. And, as explained in Chapter 3, when disloyalty arose, the bosses had no hesitation employing violence to reconsolidate their empires. Electoral battles between political bosses and their former vote canvassers were thus hostile and prone to violence.²²

Third, decentralization and direct local elections created intra-party conflict. In each province, influential MPs sought to field their trusted people in local offices to assure their national election victory, even though they often had to compete with other MPs from the same party. Moreover, every national politician acknowledged that control over local posts led to greater political leverage within party politics. Before 1997, prominent MPs strove to be heads of large factions so that they could negotiate for cabinet seats. With decentralization, they faced an even more challenging task. Controlling only MPs was no longer sufficient. To ensure hegemonic power within the party (which would lead to a ministerial post), they first had to control their province (which by then was splintered into several electoral territories). This explained why MPs from the same party pitted their candidates against each other in local elections. Intra-party competition was as aggressive as inter-party fighting. The intra-party political struggles were particularly fierce in provinces in which the party brand carried significant value. For instance, in the southern region, a Democrat stronghold, Democrats competed against

²² This phenomenon was also found prior to 1997 in several provinces. See Chapter 7 (Phrae), Chapter 8 (Nakhon Sawan), and Chapter 11 (Buriram) for accounts of clients-turned-patrons and violent struggles between leading vote canvassers and their bosses.

one another fiercely in the PAO, mayor, and TAO elections. Intra-party electoral violence broke out in several campaigns.²³ Internal competition happened within Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party too after it became highly popular. Since 2001, TRT candidates have stood against each other in local elections, particularly in the north and northeast. In 2004, when TRT was at its peak, cut-throat competition between TRT party members occurred in 31 provinces (out of 47 provinces that their backed candidates won) for the PAO chairman elections.²⁴

After decentralization, elections at the local level in several provinces started to involve violence. As the national and local elections became more connected, violence from one sphere easily affected and contaminated the other. These patterns are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

The rise of the populist party: New political actors and the goal of political monopolization

The economic crisis and the new constitution created strong incentives as well as opportunities for national-level capitalists to form political parties and capture state power. The emergence of the Thai Rak Thai Party and its participation in national elections after 2001 dramatically changed the landscape of Thai electoral politics. The TRT introduced party-based and relatively more policy-oriented politics, a new style of electoral campaigning, and the ambitious goal of creating a single-party government. Electoral competition thus changed along with the relationship between the political parties and provincial bosses. The political changes brought about by the TRT placed provincial elites in a new socio-political environment, forcing them to adjust their strategies accordingly.

Thaksin Shinawatra (1950-), a telecommunication business tycoon-turned politician, founded the Thai Rak Thai Party in 1998. Thaksin was born in Chiang Mai of a prominent business family, some of whose members had successful political careers. He

²³ See, for example, the violent competition between the Democrats in Nakhon Si Thammarat in the 2008 and 2010 PAO chairman elections (Chapter 9).

²⁴ During the campaign, the antagonism between competing factions was severe as every team claimed they had Thaksin's and the TRT's support. The party committee, including Thaksin, decided to intervene by announcing that the party did not officially endorse any local candidates. All contenders need to run independently. After the election, the party senior advisor Sanoh Thienthong, Sa Kaeo boss, lamented that direct local elections "have weakened every political party because every leading MP wants to field their own people" (*Naew Na*, 14 March 2004). For more details regarding intra-party conflicts in local elections in *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 2: 15 (16 May- 15 June 2002): 51-53; 3: 26 (April 2003): 110-113; 3: 33 (November 2003): 24-79; 3: 35 (January 2004): 55-62; 3: 36 (February 2004): 14-87.

was a police officer until 1987, after which he was a full time businessman making a considerable fortune after obtaining government concessions over mobile phone and satellite networks. Similar to other leading businessmen, his connections with top officials in the military and the bureaucracy as well as leading politicians helped his business and gave him protection. By the mid 1990s, he became a rising star businessman and an advocate for economic and political reforms. He launched his political career after the Bloody May 1992 event by accepting an invitation to join Chamlong Srimuang's Phalang Tham Party, eventually becoming Phalang Tham Party's head. His political experience with the party did not go well; the party split into factions and presented no chance of winning the elections. The party's clean, professional image affected few voters and its popularity did not go beyond Bangkok. Thaksin deserted the party after the 1996 election.²⁵

After the 1997 economic crisis and the promulgation of the new constitution, Thaksin launched the Thai Rak Thai Party, aiming to be the first prime minister elected in the post-reform era. The 1997 crisis, as explained by scholars, created strong incentives for prominent capitalists, including Thaksin, to directly capture state power. "Business was shocked by the severity of economic slump, and by the refusal of the Democrat Party government (1997-2001) to assume any responsibility for defending domestic capital against its impact," Thani and Pasuk explain. "The growing role of the stock market as a generator of wealth and the increased globalization of business raised the potential returns from holding the office of prime minister."²⁶ Thaksin led a group of national-level capitalists, who were not severely damaged by the crisis, in pursuing a high-risk high-return path of direct ownership over their own party, rather than building clientelistic relations with leading bureaucrats and politicians or sponsoring other people's parties.²⁷ The new electoral and party system, as explained above, was designed to promote strong executive power and large political parties. This, in turn, facilitated their political ambitions.

²⁵ The Phalang Tham Party was founded in 1988. Its major vote base was the urban middle classes in the capital. At its peak in the March 1992 elections, the party won 41 seats nationwide (32 of which were in Bangkok). But it managed to obtain only 1 seat in the 1996 election, and Thaksin resigned as party head when the voting was over. On the origin and development of the Phalang Tham Party, see Sombat 1989; Suthin 1996.

²⁶ Thani and Pasuk 2008: 255, 256.

²⁷ Thani and Pasuk 2008: 257, 258, Ockey 2003. By comparison, the provincial-level businessmen had pursued a more risky path. As discussed in Chapter 3, a large number of provincial business entrepreneurs had had active involvement in electoral politics since the late 1970s, and, by the 1990s, some of them had direct control over political party (Banham Silpa-archa was the best example).

The TRT was highly successful in both the 2011 and 2005 elections. A number of studies have explained Thaksin's political success.²⁸ I will focus specifically on the impact of Thaksin and his party on local power structures and provincial bosses' political strategies as they affected the changing demand and supply of electoral violence. Thaksin's political project and the TRT reshaped local political settings in three significant ways: changing the balance of power among political bosses and families in each province; intensifying extant conflicts among them; and making provincial bosses' social and political standings more vulnerable.

Thaksin had a different strategy from other political oligarchs of the pre-1997 period. Rather than trying to win a plurality of votes and sharing power with other leaders in a multi-party coalition, he sought to win an absolute majority of votes and form a single-party government. In other words, he and his party strove for monopolistic control instead of the more conventional mode of sharing power. To achieve this goal, he reached out to establish political alliances with prominent provincial bosses in all regions. Phalangtham Party's failure in the early 1990s had taught him that elections were won outside Bangkok. TRT recruited, as core members responsible for formulating party strategies and policies, technocrats, bankers, academics, businessmen, retired civil servants, judges, activists, and former student leaders. But when the election approached, Thaksin called upon a different type of person—the provincial political lord. The most important were bosses from Phrae and Sa Kaeo, Narong Wongwan and Sanoh Thienthong. Both were old-fashioned, anti-reformists who controlled two of the largest factions in the country.²⁹ The public decried the inclusion of these two (and also other upcountry godfathers), saying they tainted the party image. Thaksin disregarded the criticism.

As a practical businessman-turned-politician, Thaksin persistently fielded top bosses in constituency seats on the understanding that the FPTP electoral system was, by and large, a candidate-centered system. The TRT party ran a complementary two-pronged campaign strategy—a party-list centered campaign for the party-list seats and a

²⁸ On studies of Thaksin's and the Thai Rak Thai party's political successes and pitfalls, see Pasuk and Baker 2008, 2010; McCargo and Ukrist 2005; McCargo 2002; Stripan 2005; Ockey 2003, 2004, 2005; Hicken 2006, 2007; Nelson 2002, 2007; Tamada 2008; Kasian 2006; Thongchai 2008; Somchai 2008; Matichon Editorial Team 2006.

²⁹ Narong controlled large numbers of MPs in the North, while Sanoh controlled the central and northeast. Both factions combined had more than one hundred MPs. For political background on Narong, see Chapter 7; on Sanoh, see Chapter 12.

candidate-centered campaign for constituency seats. Electoral results from many districts demonstrated that the popularity of the party's policies boosted the candidates' standing and assisted their win.³⁰ It was clear, however, that the personalistic strategies did not entirely disappear in post-1997 politics. TRT candidates who belonged to eminent political clans relied on both the party brand and their family networks. What was new was Thaksin and TRT's direct intervention in altering the balance of power among provincial politicians. Their large financial and political support bases helped bosses allied with the TRT to gain the upper hand over rival bosses. The political struggle for monopoly was less daunting for the TRT-supported bosses. Those provincial bosses who refused to cooperate with the TRT, on the other hand, faced difficulty. Some of them, indeed, struggled for their political survival. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the political dynamic of fighting for monopoly and survival between bosses usually produced violent outcomes. Only in provinces in which all powerful bosses agreed to unite under TRT that the elections were peaceful. Otherwise, the intervention of the TRT and Thaksin created violence. For example, peaceful scenarios occurred in Nakhon Sawan and Buriram in the 2005 election when all bosses worked together under the TRT. Both provinces, however, had violent elections in 2001. Phrae and Nakhon Si Thammarat faced electoral violence in both the 2001 and 2005 elections because the TRT failed to gain local bosses' unanimous support.

Thaksin and his party also disrupted existing local political markets. TRT's massive war chest and popular policies attracted many politicians and vote canvassers. There was large-scale migration to the TRT during the run-up to the 2001 election.³¹ The TRT's forceful entry into the unstable, volatile local political market intensified political divisions and weakened the extant patron-client relationships. Vote canvassers were quick to notice the changing political surrounding and voters' mood. As a result, most of them wanted to support the TRT. Things went smoothly in cases when their bosses agreed to run under the TRT, but conflict arose when bosses refused Thaksin's offer. Many vote canvassers defected. The fragile clientelistic relationships broke down, and violence erupted. TRT's efforts to build a strong political machine in a short period of time aggravated political divisions. The volatile situation continued and intensified in the

³⁰ In the 2001 and 2005 elections, several of TRT's less influential candidates were able to defeat powerful bosses because of the party-policy package. The 2001 election in Buriram is a good example (Chapter 11).

³¹ Also, the constitution stipulated that the 2001 election was the last in which politicians were allowed to be a party member for less than 90 days before the election. A large number of politicians took advantage of this regulation. After this election, the 90-day party membership rule would be enforced, greatly benefiting Thaksin's party.

lead up to the 2005 election, when the TRT brand was at its peak and Thaksin announced his party's ambition to win 75-80 percent of parliamentary seats (instead of nearly 50 percent as in 2001) and form a single-party government.³² The number of politicians intending to run under the TRT banner exceeded the number of available seats in each province. Therefore many people were denied party support, including several former TRT candidates. The TRT replaced several old candidates with new ones more likely to win. Some newly-recruited candidates were, in fact, formerly enemies of the party in the 2001 election. Because of a high turnover of party nominated candidates, the political market in each province remained highly unstable and fluctuating. In sum, the 2005 electoral competition was fraught with defections, betrayals, and intra-personal network conflicts that led to a large number of violent incidents.

Lastly, the rise of Thaksin and the populist Thai Rak Thai weakened the political standing of provincial godfathers. After winning in a landslide in 2001 and becoming a highly popular leader, Thaksin pursued a bold strategy to domesticate the power of leading provincial political bosses both within and outside his party. Within TRT, Thaksin sidelined factional leaders since he did not want any bosses to have too much control over party members. Thaksin played the classic game of divide and rule by pitting factions within his party against each other so that no single boss posed a threat to government stability or his supremacy. Prominent cabinet members mainly came from his inner circle, were family-connected allies, or technocrats and professionals, and Thaksin frequently rotated or reshuffled his cabinet members. With less access to ministerial posts and thus rent allocations, the position of provincial bosses significantly declined under the Thaksin administration. Certain disgruntled bosses expressed their grievances and mounted an-intra party campaign against Thaksin's strong rule, but they gained insufficient support from public and party members. People discredited their acts as old-style, self-serving politics.³³

Furthermore, Thaksin capitalized on the popularity and success of the "war on drugs"

³² In the 2001 election, the TRT won 248 out of 500 seats (48 party-list and 200 constituency seats) so Thaksin needed to invite other parties to form coalition government. In the 2005 election, he aimed to win an absolute majority, eventually succeeding as the TRT won 377 out of 500 seats (75 percent). They thus became being the first party in Thai history to establish single-party government. Data based on Election Commission 2001 and 2005.

³³ See the conflict between Thaksin and prominent factional leader Sanoh Thienthong in Chapter 12.

policy to implement the “war on influential people.”³⁴ The government launched this policy on 20 May 2003, seeking the suppression of influential figures who were accused of obstructing his campaign to combat drugs, poverty and corruption. In his policy-launching speech, Thaksin explained the urgency and necessity of this policy,³⁵

We need to go back to John Locke’s social contract theory, postulating that the foundation of democracy is the people coming to live together under the state, which has representative government, and bureaucracy, enacting rules and regulation to guarantee that people can live peacefully and preventing the strong from oppressing the weak. What we are aiming to do is establishing true democracy... which is democracy without brokers. Influence must be eradicated. I want to use this opportunity to destroy [the influence] system so the political party can truly belong to the people.

He proceeded to explain what he meant by the term influential people (*phu mi itthiphon*): “my definition is simple, influential figures are the ones who use gunmen or officials or political power to harass and oppress people for their own illegal interests.” Whereas, “in the past influential figures were subordinates to officials but then they got stronger and became officials’ bosses.”³⁶ Then Thaksin identified hired gunmen, illegal gamblers, smugglers, drugs and human trafficking, illicit loggers, and illegal construction bidders as the policy’s primary targets. He then asked all influential figures to stop enriching themselves from the illegal and/or underground economy, otherwise the government was going to employ strong-arm tactics to stop them: “government cannot give license to people to do bad things... I can assure you that I will be just. My party members also have to be under the rules of equal protection under the same law... I had no necessity to do this for political gain.” On another occasion, in his weekly “meet the prime minister” television program on 13 December 2003, he asked government officials to undertake tough action against national and local mafia-cum-politicians, “You have to adhere strictly to the law. If someone claims they are friends of

³⁴ Between February and May 2003, the Thaksin government launched a countrywide campaign against drug dealers. Within four months, 2,598 alleged drug offenders were shot dead in apparent extrajudicial killings; many of those killed were on “blacklists” prepared by police and local government agencies, who used these lists to settle personal disputes and score political points (Human Rights Watch 2007: 329-334).

³⁵ Thaksin delivered this speech on 20 May 2003 at the Royal Police Club, Bangkok, to a group of provincial governors, police chief, and high-ranking officials. See the full speech in Department of Provincial Administration 2003: 3-8.

³⁶ Department of Provincial Administration 2003: 4, 7.

the government party or powerful figure, you do not have to listen to them. Just ignore them".³⁷

Like the war on drugs, the war on influential figures had massive support from the Thai public as they thought it tackled a social problem that gravely affected their livelihoods and safety.³⁸ Immediately after Thaksin's speech, the government set up the national commission for the suppression of influential people (presided over by deputy prime minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh), fully mobilizing all important state agencies to support this policy: the Interior Ministry, Ministry of Justice, police and military forces, Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), Special Branch police, National Security Council, National Intelligence Agency, and Office of the Narcotics Control Board. The center further identified fifteen subcategories of "influential people" consisting of drug traffickers, illegal construction bidders (using force to intimidate other bidders); protection/extortion gangs (involved in hired motorcycles, shop and factories, highways and public service); illicit goods smugglers; gambling den owners; sex trading mafias; human traffickers; natural resources plunderers; hired gunmen; debt collecting gangs; contraband arms traders, and fraudsters (targeting foreign tourists and domestic workers). The authority divided the influential people into three levels— village, provincial, and national. The national- level mafia was considered the most dangerous, beyond the capacity of the provincial bureaucratic apparatus, and thus required the employment of the national-operated task forces.³⁹

Provincial governors and police chiefs implemented this policy. They were responsible for making lists of provincial influential people and submitting it to the national center. The process of list making was full of confusion, lobbying and political maneuvering. In almost every province, the provincial governor and police chief applied different criteria and attempted to outperform one another. Hence each unit came up with their own list and reported it separately to the national commission. In some provinces, bosses lobbied and/or coerced the authorities to remove their name from the list in exchange for benefits. Some corrupt officials also deleted the names of provincial godfathers, who

³⁷ Quotation came from Department of Provincial Administration 2003: 4, 6; and *Daily News*, 14 December 2003: 1, 2 (respectively).

³⁸ According to the survey conducted by the National Statistics Office in 2003 and 2005, More than 86.5% of respondents were satisfied with the government's campaign to suppress influential figures (National Statistics Office 2005: 15).

³⁹ See more details in "guidelines for the suppression of influential people" Department of Provincial Administration 2003: 27-28, 31.

were their friends, and put their enemies' names on the list instead.⁴⁰

The first lists compiled by provincial offices, released on 9 June 2003, indicated that there was a total of 813 influential people nationwide, 61 of whom were government officials). The suggestion that 32 provinces were without influential bosses, was widely criticized. Political observers said number of people listed was too low, and it was inconceivable that bosses did not exist in 32 provinces, notably notorious Chonburi, Phrae, Ratchaburi, and Ang Thong.⁴¹ The public also commented that no "mafia police" or "mafia soldiers" were on the list.⁴² Thaksin was furious with the original list, saying the number was too low and some obvious names did not appear on it. "It reflected that provincial governors were either afraid or under patronage of big mafias," he commented. He asked for a new list and threatened to demote local officials who failed to implement this policy effectively; moreover, he promised to command the operation in those provinces himself.⁴³ With strong political will from the prime minister, government officials carried out this policy forcefully. Two weeks later, the national commission came out with an updated list, increasing the total number of influential people to 2,700.⁴⁴

Even though this was national policy covering the vast scope of criminality in Thailand, in practice it was a selective provincial-based operation, with the ultimate aim of eliminating or weakening the political networks of provincial strongmen. This political agenda became obvious when the commission developed specific strategies to suppress the "dark influence" and actual targets. The commission explained it would suppress those "who acted above and against the law and operated as a network," rather than targeting petty criminals. According to the commission, influential networks comprised

⁴⁰ Journalists reported powerful bosses in some provinces paid 10 million baht to high-ranking officials. The Interior Ministry did not confirm but neither denied the possibility of the bribe as well (*Krungthep Thurakit*, 12 June 2003: 9, 16; *Daily News*, 13 June 2003: 1, 14). See also other reports concerning the politics of list-making in *Manager*, 12 June 2003: 14-15; *Thai Rath*, 6 July 2003: 9, 18; *Thai Rath*, 7 July 2003: 1, 9; *Matichon*, 9 July 2003: 1, 15; *Thai Rath*, 10 July 2003: 1, 16, 19.

⁴¹ Provinces with the highest number of influential people were Kancharaburi, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Mukdahan, Trang, and Chiang Rai (respectively). Out of 813 figures, most of them were connected to illegal gambling, drugs trafficking, hired guns, and natural resource exploitation. See the complete list in *Matichon*, 10 June 2003: 1, 12.

⁴² *Matichon*, 3 July 2003: 1, 16. On mafia police and soldiers, see Chapter 3.

⁴³ Eventually, his government demoted and transferred some provincial governors and police chiefs out of their areas. In Phang Nga province, a Democrat Party stronghold, both the governor and the police chief were transferred as they came up with only two names of provincial bosses (*Thai Rath*, 10 July 2003: 1, 16, 19).

⁴⁴ The number of influential people increased in every province. For example, in Phrae, it rose from zero to 50, and in Buriram it rose from 14 to 45 (*Matichon*, 24 June 2003: 1, 15).

of three components: gang leaders/bosses; “troops” or “tools” (hired gunmen, hoodlums); and supporters (corrupt government officials).⁴⁵

In a nutshell, the “war on influential people” was Thaksin’s political attempt to demolish the political and coercive infrastructure of provincial bosses. It targeted both the local demand for and supply of electoral violence. Moreover, it aimed to destroy the economic base of provincial bosses by suppressing the illegal economy, and in the process enhance the popularity, legitimacy, and revenue of the government. For example, while suppressing illegal casinos and underground lotteries, the Thaksin government increased government lotteries and legalized the online lottery. As a result, government collected more revenue and used the money for charity and poor student scholarships, boosting Thaksin’s populism.⁴⁶ On 3 November 2003, Thaksin presided over the student scholarship-giving ceremony, and he was crying while giving an emotional speech,

My heart has two sides. For bad people, I am will to do anything to eliminate them— an eye for an eye. I shed no tears when hundred drug dealers died. But for the poor and destitute, I am ready to help them wholeheartedly so they can stand up and live their lives... We have let mafia and bad people exploit our society for so long. Today we [government] have to bring all sinful deeds to the surface and then we will return all money from these activities back to poor people.⁴⁷

The real intent of the policy was to weaken political brokers and/or intermediaries so that Thaksin’s TRT party could relate directly to voters. If the policy succeeded, Thaksin could gain control over provincial MPs both within and outside his party. It was a political strategy to undermine his political enemies, force opposition members to join the TRT, and tame recalcitrant TRT factional leaders. By bypassing local brokers, Thaksin could rely on party policies, branding, and the party machine to win votes, instead of local personal networks. Undoubtedly, the populist tycoon changed the system to serve his ambitious, personal goals. In the process, however, this policy campaign helped bring forth a political transformation from provincial-boss dominated, factional

⁴⁵ I translated “troops” from Thai word “*kongkamlang*” and “tool” from “*khruangmue*.” Both words were used emphatically in the commission’s document. See the commission’s strategies in Department of Provincial Administration 2003: 24-25.

⁴⁶ See Chitti et al. (2007) and Phirom (2007).

⁴⁷ *Daily Manager*, 4 November 2003: 14-15.

politics to party-dominated, policy-oriented politics led by a populist leader.

Therefore it is only partly correct to understand the war on influential people as Thaksin's attack on his political opponents.⁴⁸ This policy was more ambitious—it was part of his larger political project of reorganizing power structures and monopolizing the political market. Thaksin's policy targeted powerful figures, notably political bosses and their key vote canvassers from all political parties, including TRT. The areas targeted were provinces dominated by opposition parties and the provinces controlled by TRT MPs who appeared to be too independent. Police were active in many southern provinces, notably Nakhon Si Thammarat, Trang, Suratthani, Satun, Phang Nga, Phuket, Democrat Party strongholds.⁴⁹ Suphanburi, the stronghold of Banharn Silapa-archa Chart Thai Party's head, was also targeted. A task force of 200 policemen raided 15 houses, seized weapons and arrested three people on charges of possessing firearms. All those arrested were Chart Thai Party's vote canvassers. In Samutprakarn, police arrested a number of local politicians and seized heavy weapons; most of those arrested were connected to the Atsawahem family, a powerful political dynasty who had dominated the province for decades.⁵⁰ But the two provinces which were the commission's main focus were Phrae and Kanchanaburi, the two polarized provinces that the TRT had struggled to monopolize. In the 2001 elections, the Democrat Party fiercely contested the TRT's attempt to grab all seats in these two provinces but neither gained monopoly control.⁵¹

Thaksin chose Kanchanaburi as the pilot province for his campaign, saying it contained the highest number of mafia, hired guns, illegal arms traders, natural exploiters, and protection racketeers. "We are going to wipe out all of them [influential people]," said the Defense Minister, "in Kanchanaburi, mafia are connected and backed up by MPs. We

⁴⁸ This conventional wisdom was widely shared among political pundits, journalists, NGO activists, public intellectuals and academics. See *Nation Sudsapda* (2-8 June 2003): 16; *Matichon Sudsapda* (27 June- 3 July 2003): 14; *Matichon Sudsapda* (11- 17 July 2003): 9.

⁴⁹ In Phang Nga, the leading Democrat's brother was named an "influential" figure. The Democrats said there were political motives behind the list to discredit their party member. They also claimed the TRT contacted many politicians in Phang Nga to run for the TRT in exchange for their names being removed from the blacklist. The government also demoted some senior officials in Phang Nga, saying they failed to implement the policy (*Matichon*, 9 July 2003: 1, 15; *Thai Rath*, 10 July 2003: 1, 16, 19).

⁵⁰ Banharn and other Chart Thai's Suphanburi MPs were furious at the attack. One Chart Thai MP said he agreed with government policy but disapproved of the way the government used this campaign to destroy its political opponents. While he admitted that some Suphanburi provincial councilors were involved in drug trafficking, he claimed that all the arrested Chart Thai's vote canvassers had clean criminal records (*Khom Chat luek*, 8 July 2003: 1, 16; *Thai Rath*, 1 October 2003, 1, 19).

⁵¹ In Phrae, the Democrats gained one seat, while the TRT won two. In Kanchanaburi, the Democrats won three seats, left two seats for the TRT (ECT 2001).

will beat them up. Believe me, the locals will not vote for them in the next election.”⁵² In early July 2003, police conducted house raids on two leading Democrat MPs, Pracha Pothhiphit and Paiboon Pimphisitthawon, accusing them of being involved in the murder of TRT’s key vote canvassers. Both were former *kamnan*-turned-businessmen who had risen to power by enriching themselves from business enterprises. They were respected and feared among the tough guys and underworld community in Kanchanaburi. After the 2001 election, many vote canvassers were murdered in the province over conflict between these two *kamnans* and the TRT members.⁵³ Knowing they were dealing with influential bosses, the government also used certain legal tools (prosecutions for money laundering, tax evasion, etc.) to supplement the use of tough force. In early October, the police issued arrest warrants for Pracha and his wife on charges of using coercive force against other contractors in construction bidding and also accused them of being mafia leaders. Fearing he was next in line, Paiboon sent a signal to Thaksin that he wanted to make a political deal. A few months later, Paiboon went to greet Thaksin and other ministers when the cabinet had a special meeting in Kanchanaburi. In front of journalists, Thaksin told Paiboon, “Do not worry. You will be an opposition member for just a little while.”⁵⁴ In the 2005 election, Paiboon abandoned his teammate Pracha, switching to TRT and helped them defeat the Democrat Party. Meanwhile, Pracha and his wife were convicted and given 5-year sentences for manipulating bidding, and their assets were seized by the authorities.⁵⁵

The campaign targeted many other boss-style politicians or those affiliated with political bosses. At the campaign’s peak from May to December 2003, many prominent godfathers found themselves embattled. Some of them were put under investigation, arrested and/or convicted, some mysteriously disappeared or went into exile, and a few of them were shot dead by unknown assassins. The media called 2003 “the year of the godfathers’ obliteration.”⁵⁶ In the end, most of the embattled bosses decided to move to TRT.⁵⁷ A Democrat female godmother and Phrae MP, Siriwan Pratsachaksattru, put up a

⁵² *Daily Manager*, 3 July 2003: 15.

⁵³ From 2001 to 2003 (before the war on influential people), at least six local politicians were shot dead in Kanchanaburi (*Dokbia Thurakit*, 4 July 2003: 1, 11).

⁵⁴ *Khao Sod*, 29 January 2004.

⁵⁵ *Khao Sod*, 21 October 2005. Later in 2007, however, he and his wife were acquitted by the Appeal Court (*Manager*, 25 September 2007). See further details of Pracha’s political life in Sanyalak 2003.

⁵⁶ *Khao Sod*, 29 December 2003. There was wide speculation that the murders of the two most powerful bosses in Saraburi and Samutsongkram stemmed from an “official” order as two of them were on the government blacklist. The rumors of the blacklist made many provincial bosses keep a low-profile.

⁵⁷ Two remarkable cases were *kamnan* Poh and Newin Chidchob of the Chart Thai Party. *Kamnan* Poh, or Somchai Khunpluem, perhaps then the most famous godfather of Thailand, had allegedly been involved in

strong fight against Thaksin and his campaign. She was a major obstacle to TRT's effort to achieve a power monopoly in Phrae, and the TRT made use of the war on influential people policy (among other political tools) to weaken her power base. Political warfare between them turned highly violent (see Chapter 7). When the Democrats came out to defend Siriwan and Pracha, Thaksin retorted,

The Democrat party should not protect the wrongdoers. If a party sponsors godfathers, the party faces a problem. The TRT party is no exception. If any members acted like godfathers and did not stop, they would be punished. I would not keep them in the party.⁵⁸

To the surprise of many, Thaksin largely kept his promise. In many TRT strongholds, police searched TRT vote canvassers' houses and arrested local politicians who were political aides of TRT's MPs.⁵⁹ By the end of 2003, Thaksin had succeeded in asserting absolute control over all leading bosses in his party. He became the boss of bosses. His aggressive policy tools, though controversial, were effective. His government continued to suppress influential people in 2004, but in a less spectacular fashion. Police revitalized the operation a few weeks before the February 2005 general election, focusing on suppressing local bosses and gunmen (especially in the south), justifying it as an attempt to make the election free, fair, and peaceful.⁶⁰ When campaigning started, all opposition parties and bosses were already demoralized as they struggled to protect their fragile political territory. Thaksin and his party machine, by contrast, entered the 2005 election with confidence and emerged resounding winners. The 2005 election was far from peaceful. The national political struggle shaped local political dynamics by turning competition in many districts into electoral warfare pitting those seeking to assert a monopoly against those seeking to protect their turf.

many murder cases in Chonburi but had never been prosecuted. Various political parties and candidates had sought his political support, including the TRT, but he chose to support the Chart Thai Party after the 1995 election and swept all seats in Chonburi for Chart Thai in almost every election, including in 2001 when his team won 6 seats and left only 1 seat for the TRT. During the war on influential people, police charged him with masterminding the murder of a local businessman, and for corruption in the purchase of public land. These charges clearly prompted *kamnan* Poh and his family to move to the TRT and helped TRT grab all seven seats in the 2005 election (*Khom Chat Luek*, 4 January 2004: 1, 2; "Rocking *kamnan* Poh, shaking Chonburi political base," *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 26 (April 2003): 18-20, 26-28, 40-44, 58-59; 110-113, 124; "Court seizes *kamnan* Poh's B15m bail," *Bangkok Post*, 29 November 2011. For Newin, see Chapter 11.

⁵⁸ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 8 July 2003: 13-16; *Matichon*, 8 July 2003: 15.

⁵⁹ Nakhon Pathom and Chiang Rai were two primary cases (*Matichon*, 10 July 2003: 1, 15).

⁶⁰ The policy campaign also continued after the 2005 election, but its focus had shifted to urban mafias, notably in Bangkok, rather than rural godfathers (*Siam Thurakit*, 6 April 2005: 10; *Post Today*, 6 April 2005: A5; "Mafia businesses on street," *Thai Rath*, 18 April 2005: 1, 5).

The Thaksin administration was the first in modern Thai history to attempt to domesticate and eliminate local bosses who had, for many decades, acted as political intermediaries in the Thai political system. Past governments, both dictatorial and democratic regimes, either had no political will, legitimacy or capacity to pursue this goal. As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, the military-led governments (1947-1973, 1991-1992) lacked determination to suppress the local strongmen. The army leaders never perceived provincial bosses as political threats, as all provincial bosses were relatively weak in comparison to the army. Also, they needed provincial bosses to assume the role of political broker for the military-supported parties. Semi-democratic and civilian administrations in the 1980s and 1990s led by Prem Tinsulanond, Chatchai Choonhavan, Chuan Leekpai, Banharn Silpa-archa, and Chavalit Yongchaiyudh would have never dreamt of using such a strategy as it would have destroyed their fundamental powerbases. For Thaksin, by contrast, provincial bosses posed a threat to his populist party-building and he knew that his electoral success would be more sustainable without reliance on local godfathers. The implementation of this policy reflected the emergence of a new type of politics and a new relationship between Thaksin, who was a national businessman-cum-populist party leader, and provincial businessmen-cum-politicians,

Ironically, precisely by the time Thaksin had achieved his monopolistic control over electoral politics, he had rendered himself vulnerable to another sort of threat. His royal-military-bureaucratic opponents understood that the only way to unseat Thaksin was by non-electoral, extra-parliamentary means. The monopolistic political market created the realization among his enemies that it was impossible to defeat him in electoral games. All major opposition parties boycotted the 2006 general election. In September 2006, the royal-military alliance staged a coup to topple Thaksin. This historic coup transformed Thai politics into a new era, and once again changed the political landscape at both the national and local levels.

The 2006 coup aftermath: the militarization and ideological struggle of Thai politics

While the landslide 2005 election victory and single-party government brought self-confidence and political aggrandizement to Thaksin, it generated fear and perturbation among his opponents. Since 2001, Thaksin and his party had succeeded in undermining rival political parties' power bases and provincial politicians' territorial power. But Thaksin had not been able to subvert extra-parliamentary forces, in particular the royalist

networks and the military—an alliance constituting the most formidable sources of traditional power in the Thai polity.

Soon after the 2005 election, those opposing Thaksin (business rivals and personal foes, NGO activists, journalists, academics and professionals, human right defenders, bureaucrats, and the urban middle class) joined forces against his government. By early 2006, Thaksin's legitimacy was eroded by his controversial business dealings, and the anti-government movement led by media mogul Sondhi Limthongkul and Maj. Gen. Chamlong Srimuang gained crucial momentum.⁶¹ In an attempt to revitalize his legitimacy, the embattled prime minister dissolved parliament and called for a snap election in April 2006. All main opposition parties (the Democrat Party, the Chart Thai Party and the Mahachon Party) decided to boycott the election, leaving the TRT party running unopposed. Political party leaders claimed that Thaksin no longer had legitimacy and the snap election was only Thaksin's attempt to divert public attention from his business scandal. The sudden dissolution, they argued, also left opposition parties no time to prepare for an election campaign.⁶² After the release of the election results, showing that the Thai Rak Thai Party won 460 of the 500 seats, anti-Thaksin leaders declared that they did not accept the results and "would go on rallying until Thaksin resigns and Thailand gets a royally-appointed prime minister."⁶³ The political situation reached an impasse.

Unexpectedly, on 25 April 2006, the king gave speeches to groups of senior judges from the Administrative and Supreme Courts, questioning the democratic nature of the April general election. He commented that dissolving parliament and calling a snap election (within thirty days) might have not been correct in the first place. At the end of his speeches, the king called on the judges and those from the Constitutional Court to work together to resolve the current political crisis.⁶⁴ Certainly, the king's speeches constituted royal intervention in the midst of the crisis. Two weeks later, the

⁶¹ In January 2006 Thaksin's family sold its shares in Shin Corporation, a big telecommunication company, to Temasek Holdings of Singapore for US\$1.88 billion. His family gained an enormous profit from this deal and paid no tax, which is legal under Thai law. The "tax evasion" issue, however, sparked a series of angry demonstrations in Bangkok.

⁶² However, the real reason for the boycott was opposition parties' belief that they were going to lose to the TRT again. "Opposition to boycott election," *Bangkok Post*, 26 February 2006.

⁶³ <http://nationmultimedia.com/breakingnews/read.php?newsid=30000759>

⁶⁴ See the king's full speeches in *Matichon*, 26 April 2006; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 26 April 2006.

Constitutional Courts nullified the April 2006 election, and ordered a new election.⁶⁵ The Thaksin cabinet decided to hold it on 15 October 2006. This scheduled election never took place.

On 19 September 2006, a group of army leaders staged a coup, the first in fifteen years. The timing of the coup was significant; it occurred a month before the proposed election. The coup makers clearly wanted to halt the electoral process. In this sense, the 2006 coup fits the definition of electoral violence as “an act or threat of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process, of which violence may be employed to influence the *process* of elections – such as efforts to delay, disrupt, or derail a poll.”⁶⁶ It was the first time in Thai history that the coup was carried out with the intention of directly interfering in the electoral process.⁶⁷ The post-1997 style of electoral politics had become a major threat to the royal-military alliance’s standing. The alliance could not beat Thaksin and his political machine at an election. Thai elites, thereby changing the mode of the game, staged a coup to eliminate Thaksin. The consequences of the coup were drastic. From 2006-2011, political contestation moved from the electoral arenas to the street. This changed the mode of conflict and the pattern of political violence, as state and street violence took the place of electoral violence.

Many pundits and coup-supporters praised the 2006 coup for its bloodless nature. As political events unfolded, however, it was clear that this coup was the most violent in Thai history, in terms of its subsequent implications. The coup led to a large number of deaths and injuries as it exacerbated conflict, deepened political polarization, and created widespread confrontation between security forces and demonstrators and among opposing groups of protesters. Looking at the political phenomena Thai society has witnessed since the coup, one can see the emergence of many different forms of violence: the growth of militant social movements (both the Yellow and the Red Shirts); the use of gangs and thugs in political confrontation; the presence and involvement of paramilitary forces (either affiliated with the movement or acting independently) in protests; violent clashes between protesters affiliated with different movements; the resurgence of the politicized army and its violent suppression of citizens; the selective

⁶⁵ The Constitutional Court based its ruling on a technical problem with the voting process, saying that the position of vote booths violated voter’s privacy (*Matichon*, 8 May 2006).

⁶⁶ The definition is drawn from Sisk 2008, 5-6, emphasis added; see also Fischer 2002.

⁶⁷ Previous coups were either conducted to settle conflict among rival factions within the army or to unseat the government from the administration. None of them directly interfered with the electoral process (see Chapter 2 and 3).

use of force by security groups in dealing with protesters; the use of snipers by the army to kill protesters; the assassinations of mass movement leaders in broad daylight under the emergency decree; the assassination of rogue soldiers; assassination attempts and intimidation of privy council members, prime ministers, judges, and election commissioners; bombings in the capital targeting government buildings and the protest sites; the wide use of war weapons on all sides of conflict (M16, AK-47 and M79); and conflict within the army and between the army and the police.

The April-May 2010 military crackdown, when the government ordered the army to suppress the Red Shirt demonstration led by the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) who occupied some areas of central Bangkok between March and May 2010, marked the culmination of political violence. The confrontation between the military and the Red Shirts around the perimeter of the protest site ended up in the violent crackdown on 19 May 2010, killing 94 people and wounding thousands.⁶⁸

The locations, methods, perpetrators and victims of violent incidents in the post-coup era indicate a new pattern of violence in Thailand. The army has returned to the political theater as the main actor, committing the most violent acts and being responsible for a high proportion of the death toll. The April-May 2010 crackdown represented the most violent political suppression in modern Thai history, with an official death toll exceeding those of the three previous political crises: the student-led uprising in 1973, the massacre in 1976 and the pro-democracy demonstrations in 1992.⁶⁹ The resurgence of state violence since the 2006 coup is detrimental to the progress of parliamentary democracy as it works directly against electoral institutions. In the past (as discussed in Chapter 2), state violence had been prevalent during the military dictatorial regimes from the 1950s to 1970s, in which state agents illegitimately acted against political dissidents and enemies. During the mid 1980s, however, the practice of state violence had been gradually taken over by private killings among politicians and local bosses competing for control over the socio-economic resources within a given territory, and for the MP positions. Candidates' use of violence was aimed at winning elections, not disrupting or

⁶⁸ For accounts of violent confrontation, clashes, and crackdowns occurring post-coup, see International Crisis Group 2010; Wassana 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Nostitz 2009; Sopranzetti 2012.

⁶⁹ Based on official records, there were 77 people killed in 1973, 43 in 1976 and 44 in 1992. The actual death tolls of these incidents are, however, believed to be much higher. For the protest from 12 March to 19 May 2010, official figures put the death toll at 89 people and about 1,800 others injured. However, the death toll collected by the independent group of academics and NGOs, People's Information Center, is 94 people. See People's Information Center 2012.

destroying the electoral process (see Chapter 3). It was violence in the realm of electoral competition, and respectful to electoral democracy.

When state violence was revitalized after the 2006 coup, it was not directed against individuals as was the case in the past; rather, it was targeted against political forces and institutions that underpin electoral democracy. If from 1979 to 2005 electoral violence stemmed from the vulnerability of political bosses, the post 2006 coup violence stemmed from the vulnerability of traditional elites and the erosion of their power. Unelected elites resorted to violence to reconsolidate their power and undermine their opposition. First of all, the 2006 coup overthrew the popularly elected government and prevented an election. Second, the military-backed Abhisit government (2009-2011) used violence to suppress the electorate's political demands and to derail the electoral process.

Before resorting to violence, Thaksin's opponents had tried legal avenues to undermine Thaksin's political networks. On 30 May 2007, the Constitution Court delivered a ruling dissolving the Thai Rak Thai Party and banning 111 executive party members from any involvement in political affairs for five years. The judges found some TRT party executives guilty of violating the electoral laws in the April 2006 election.⁷⁰ The TRT members created a new party called Palang Prachachon (People's Power Party-PPP) led by veteran politician Samak Sundaravej to stand in the 2007 election. Running on a populist policy platform and Thaksin's popularity, the PPP was victorious and formed a coalition government. However, on 9 September 2008, the Constitutional Court delivered a controversial decision disqualifying Samak from the premiership.⁷¹ The majority of the PPP and the coalition parties then voted for Somchai Wongsawat, Deputy Prime Minister and the brother-in-law of Thaksin to be the new premier. Somchai stayed in power for only three months and was forced to step down in the middle of the Yellow Shirt's airport occupation, after the Constitutional Court passed a

⁷⁰ The court ruled that TRT's leading members hired certain small parties to run in the April 2006 election to make the election appear competitive and legitimate (*Thai Rath*, 31 May 2007: 1).

⁷¹ According to the court ruling, Samak, by performing in a TV cooking show while he was prime minister, acted in breach of Section 267 of the 2007 constitution "prohibiting the Prime Minister and Ministers from having any position in a partnership, a company or an organization carrying out business with a view to sharing profits or incomes or being an employee of any person" (see the 2007 constitution). The court ruling led to public debate and wide criticism (*Matichon*, 9 September 2008: 1).

ruling dissolving the PPP on charges of electoral misconduct.⁷² Immediately after Somchai stepped down, military leaders forced some of Thaksin's allies to switch sides and vote for Abhisit.⁷³

In the end, these various legal measures failed to undermine Thaksin and his network of support, as the Red Shirt movement emerged to support Thaksin's allied parties and oppose the junta-backed government. The Red Shirts were a cross-class political movement of elements of the electorate, frustrated at how their elected government had been toppled, their choice of political party dissolved, and their electoral rights deprived. In 2009 and 2010, hundreds of thousands came to Bangkok to ask for the dissolution of the House and a new election from Abhisit, whose rise to power they deemed illegitimate. The protesters wanted to go to the ballot to exercise their basic political rights; they were not pursuing armed struggle or calling for the overhaul of the political system. Viewed this way, Abhisit's deployment of tanks and troops (with the tacit support of traditional elites) to suppress the demonstrators had two implications: to silence the voice of urban and rural mass electorates and to delay the re-establishment of electoral democracy. Collusion between the civilian administration of Abhisit and the traditional elites departed from previous patterns of repression. The civilian government authorized and carried out the crackdown and the government was able to maintain their power even after committing mass murders.⁷⁴ In the post-2006 coup era, the traditional elites and the Democrat Party had become indispensable political partners.⁷⁵

Post-coup killings were more spectacular and public, in stark contrast to the secretive (but simple) nature of electoral violence among politicians.⁷⁶ The new mode of violence included the use of heavy weapons; the deployment of snipers; drive-by shootings; the use of car bombs and rocket-propelled grenades. Electoral killings normally happened in

⁷² Like its predecessor the TRT, all 109 executive members of the PPP were banned from politics for five years. Besides the PPP, the Constitutional Court also dissolved the two other parties, including the Chart Thai Party of Banham Silpa-archa (*Thai Rath*, 2 December 2007: 1, 16).

⁷³ See details in Wassana 2010: 58-62, 142-148, 449-454.

⁷⁴ In 1973 and 1992, the crackdowns were carried out by the military-dominated government. Military prime ministers in both events had to step down from power after the bloodshed. The 1976 massacre was undertaken by an army faction (with the support of right-wing forces) and constituted a pretext for the army to topple the then civilian government.

⁷⁵ As mentioned above, the establishment of the Abhisit government was itself made possible by the intervention and manipulation of the royal-military-bureaucratic alliance.

⁷⁶ As explained, Thailand's electoral murders are usually perpetrated by a two gunmen hit team. The Thai situation is simple compared to methods of targeted killings found in other countries. These include booby traps, drive-by shootings, improvised explosive devices, lone gunman, kidnappings, masked attackers, motorcycle hit teams, poisoning, ruse/disguise, snipers, edged weapons, suicide bombers, and three-to-five-gunmen hit teams. See McGovern 2010.

the provincial or remote areas (even if the ultimate aim was seizing a slice of political power at the national level). The new type of killings happened in the capital city, not rural areas. As Bangkok was repeatedly the stage for violent clashes between the demonstrators and the state apparatus. While electoral violence is decentralized, state and street violence is centralized.

What made the latest episode of political violence more complex and worrying was the use of coercive force by social movements. Both the Yellow and Red Shirts rhetorically vowed their commitment to non-violent struggle, but some of their actual practices violated the principles of non-violence. One of the (notorious) novelties of both the movements was the use of hired thugs and gangsters to take care of security. Many were retired or active uniformed men who had military training. These paramilitary units were also employed as security guards for the movements and their top leaders. The mobilization style of both movements was provocative and confrontational. It was true that most of the Yellow and Red Shirt protesters were unarmed and committed to non-violent practices, but the presence of armed elements weakened the legitimacy of the movements and made them prone to militarism and violent clashes. The intensified extra-parliamentary conflict in the forms of violent interactions between the opposing movements and the state overwhelmed the country's political life and weakened parliamentary democratic processes.⁷⁷

The actors of political violence over the past few years have been mostly protesters, demonstrators, and government officials, not politicians. In fact, no single politician was a direct result of the recent chaos. This reflects the minor or diminishing roles of political parties, political parties and parliament in the current crisis. They have been largely absent from the scene, most of the time merely bystanders. Some politicians were directly involved in the conflict, but as members of the movement, not as MPs.⁷⁸ The political parties had an uncomfortable relationship with the mass movements (both the Yellow Shirts and Red Shirts). There was some evidence of political parties tacitly supporting the movements by giving them resources for mobilization, but most politicians tried to distance themselves from extra-parliamentary politics. There were

⁷⁷ The tumultuous period of the Thai democratic experiment from 1973 to 1976 show us that the Thai political system is a weak and ineffective semi-democratic state, a violently polarized and confrontational system that is prone to destabilize or even undermine parliamentary democracy. See the argument in Prajak Kiataramkul, *Democracy in Thailand* (Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2006).

⁷⁸ The political parties were Somkiat Pongpaiboon of the Democrat Party, leader of the Yellow Shirts, and Pheu Thai Party, the Red Shirt leader.

also internal debates within the Pheu Thai and Democrat Party on how to establish an appropriate relationship with the movements.⁷⁹ After 2006, the Pheu Thai and the Democrat Party realized that the Red Shirt and the Yellow Shirt movements' political supports were key to their respective electoral victory, but they did not want the social movement to dominate the party's direction and decision making. Tension between parliamentarians and political movement leaders thus existed throughout this period. However, the tension manifested in varying degrees from one province to another, therefore having different effects on the provincial electoral competitions. In strong Yellow Shirt provinces, one could observe a strong alliance between the Yellow Shirts and the Democrats. The Red Shirt movement was strong in the north and northeast, therefore most Pheu Thai MPs attempted to establish a good relationship with them. Only a few provincial bosses, notably those who had established monopoly power in their territories, did not need the movement's support; still, even these bosses had to avoid a hostile relationship with activists who transformed themselves into political brokers. Any bosses who pitted themselves against the color-coded movement dominant in their respective bailiwicks faced a challenging task and risked being defeated at the election.⁸⁰

From 2006-2011, the two most formidable forces in Thai politics were the colored mass political movements and the army. Politicians and political parties, as explained above, had been marginalized in this era of street politics. The establishment had weakened the parliament and electoral democracy through army interference, judicial activism, and reactionary social movements. An unelected elite minority had asserted extra-constitutional power over the political system. With the frequent dissolution of political parties, the truncation of political space and the deprivation of voting rights, frustrated elements of the electorate had no other option but to engage in mass mobilization. Fundamentally, the eruption of street violence was a by-product of the royal-army alliance's interference in electoral politics. The violent clashes between social movements and the military forces were non-electoral violence that had led Thai society to an impasse and a continued cycle of violence. Nearly everyone felt unsafe in this

⁷⁹ Interview, Pheu Thai MPs and the Democrat Party's MPs, Bangkok, July and September 2010.

⁸⁰ See Chapter 12 (Sa Kaeo) as an example of how the local provincial boss kept his distance from mass movements. And see Chapter 11 (Buriram) for power contestation between a powerful political boss and mass movements in the 2011 election.

political environment.⁸¹ To paraphrase Benedict Anderson, it was “violence without progress.”

The struggle between the establishment and those aligned with ousted Prime Minister Thaksin has deeply transformed Thai politics. Overall, it has made political struggle more ideological. Electoral competition is no longer dominated by particularistic campaigns, but is instead infused with ideological and programmatic debate. Voters have different political stances and ideas regarding democratic values. They consider issues of the rule of law, the constitution, judicial activism, court decisions and they question the legitimacy of the coup and royal-army political interference, military suppression, and the nature of Thaksin’s rule. These differing values and ideas affect voting. Color-coded politics and ideological conflict at the national level overrides personal conflicts among political bosses/families at the local level. With this changing mode of conflict, the demand for assassinations during election campaigns has decreased (though not entirely disappeared) as killing one individual candidate or vote canvasser could not substantially alter election results.⁸² This is the background to the 2007 and 2011 elections, which, as noted above, involved less electoral violence.

To sum up, from 1997-2006, three major national-level factors—the 1997 constitution and its newly designed electoral system, the decentralization process, and the rise of a strong populist party and Thaksin—transformed local political structures and power balances. They unsettled the existing local political order. Consequently, the demand for and supply of electoral violence increased, as witnessed in the 2001 and 2005 elections. After 2006, because of the coup, political settings at the national and local levels underwent another major change. The royal-military intervention in the electoral process combined with growing ideological politics to decrease the demand for violence and bring the decline of electoral violence in the 2007 and 2011 elections. The next chapter looks back over the patterns of electoral violence observed in the four general elections held in 2001, 2005, 2007, and 2011.

⁸¹ A retired general, who was a classmate of Gen Anupong Paochinda, a coup leader and former commander in chief (2007-2010), told me that powerful figures, including Prime Minister Abhisit, Deputy Prime Minister Suthet, Newin Chidchob (the de facto head of Bhumjaithai Party), and Gen. Anupong, Gen. Sonthi Boonyaratglin (a former coup leader), had been very careful with their schedule and travel plan as they had been afraid of assassination attempts. Interview, former army general, Bangkok, 12 February 2011.

⁸² See, in particular, Chapters 10, 11, and 12 for the mitigating effect of ideological struggle on electoral violence.

Chapter 6

Violence in Thai elections, 1997-2011

This chapter analyzes the changing trends and characteristics of electoral violence in Thailand from the national election of January 2001 to that of July 2011. It provides statistical data on and analysis of the ebbs and flows of violence in national election. Data show that the 2001 and 2005 elections were the two most violent elections in modern Thai history by all measures: the number of incidents, death toll and injuries. Meanwhile, the intensity of electoral violence significantly dropped in the 2007 and 2011 elections.

General patterns of electoral violence, 1997- 2011

The January 2001 election

The 2001 election, organized after Democrat Party leader Chuan Leekpai dissolved parliament on 9 November 2000, was the first held under the 1997 constitution. In accordance with the new system, political parties now competed for 500 seats in the House of Representatives, divided into 400 seats from single-member constituencies and 100 members from the nation-wide party list on a proportional basis. The newly founded TRT party led by Thaksin campaigned on a populist platform, and won in a landslide victory both on the constituency (200 seats) and party list votes (40.6%, 48 seats), and thus had a clear mandate to form a coalition government. The Democrat Party, the runner up, gained only 97 constituency seats and 26.6 percent of party list votes (31 seats).

With the new constitution, scholars and political analysts expected electoral misconduct would diminish due to the new rules of the game. But, as explained in Chapter 3, the reformers' obsession with reducing the prevalence of vote buying made the competition more confrontational and violent. Also, the optimistic view of those scholars discounted other important factors, notably decentralization and the emergence of political ambition for the creation of a single-party system, in raising the stakes at election time. All these factors combined led to a high degree of violence in the 2001 election, surpassing every past election. In total, there were 81 violent incidents, killing 26 and wounding 84.

Those 81 incidents were: 39 assassination attempts; 7 violent fights and attacks; 26 instances of physical intimidation; 7 bombings, and 2 polling station burnings. Vote canvassers were the primary victims of violence.

Assassination remained the most popular way candidates eliminated political threats. Before the start of the 2001 campaign, there were already signs that there would be many assassinations: In December 1999, the Democrat MP for Buriram, Panawat Liangphongphan, was shot at close range by gunmen. He survived but was seriously injured. Severe conflict with political rivals over an overlapping vote base prompted the attempt on his life (see Chapter 11 for more details). The shooting escalated fear among candidates and their supporters. Many of them bought bullet-proof jackets and hired more personal bodyguards. Nevertheless, several of them insisted that they would not step up their security because it made them look “weak and helpless” in the eyes of voters, and some complained that the government failed to protect them: “how could politicians give protection to those who voted for them if they themselves are afraid to die”, and “if every politician was under fear they would be killed, how can Thai politics move forward.”¹ Regardless of the complaint, the general fear among politicians led to an instant boom of security-provision businesses— bullet-proof automobile and attire, life insurance, and personal bodyguards and hired guns.² Candidates were not just being paranoid, as the single-member district and changing electoral districts’ boundaries gave rise to direct confrontation between rival bosses in many provinces, leading to the violent deaths of several vote canvassers.³ The entry of TRT and electoral boundary remapping contributed to widespread party-switching among candidates and vote canvassers. Many vote canvassers became assassination and intimidation targets after they defected.⁴ Moreover, violent conflicts over direct local elections (resulting from decentralization) spread into the national level. Many major local elections were held nationwide in 2000: 2,493 TAO elections in January and June; 26 municipality elections on 29 January; 74 PAO elections on 5 February; and the Pattaya city election on 12

¹ *Manager Daily*, 4 January 2000: 14-15.

² Four major companies that produced bullet-proof jackets said that the order significantly increased after the Panawat’s shooting. Most customers, they noted, were candidates in provincial areas, members of the three major parties (the New Aspiration Party, Thai Rak Thai and Democrat). The price of the bullet-proof jackets ranged from 15,000-70,000 baht (500-2,330 USD) (*Krungthep Thurakit*, 24 January 2000: 17; *Thai Rath*, 21 December 2000: 1, 5).

³ For example, in Phayao, Lopburi, Kanchanaburi (*Krungthep Thurakit*, 16 November 2000: 21-22; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 2 January 2001: 17-18). Phrae was one of the most violent provinces because two prominent bosses competed in the same district (see Chapter 7).

⁴ See cases in Nakhon Ratchasima and Ratchaburi (*Matichon*, 23 November 2000: 29; *Thai Rath*, 9 December 2000: 1, 19).

February. Many vote canvassers ran for local posts and had vicious fights with their opponents. In national election campaigns, some vote canvassers and their rivals went on to support different MPs, escalating old hostilities. Chief examples were the murder of the New Aspiration Party's vote canvasser and the TAO head in Phetchabun; the assassination of a TAO councilor in Chumphon and killing of a failed candidate for TAO council in Nakhon Ratchasima.⁵ It is difficult or, in fact, pointless to find a clear-cut distinction whether the murder of any vote canvasser was motivated by local or national electoral conflicts. After decentralization, as argued in Chapter 3, national and local politics were closely intertwined.

Electoral violence also took new forms in the 2001 competition. Vote canvassers and losing candidates in several constituencies led mass violent protests after the elections to disrupt vote counting and reject the results. Only 33 (out of 77) provinces escaped unruly protests. The two most violent took place in Songkhla and Satun in the south. In Songkhla, violent clashes between police and protestors led to nine injuries (four policemen and five protestors) and four arrests; the governor also declared a curfew. In Satun, 500 police officers clashed with 7,000 protestors, and angry protestors threw stones at the police, burned cars and motorcycles, and attacked polling stations, resulting in a large number of injuries. In response, the police used tear gas to disperse the crowd and arrested 10 protest leaders.⁶ The interim government had to deploy military force to control the situation. Post-election protests lasted for two weeks—initially in the provinces, and later in Bangkok in front of the National Election Commission of Thailand (ECT) office. Many grievances drove these protests. Candidates and their supporters believed that local election officials were biased. Local election commissioners in some provinces were incompetent and made mistakes, thus exacerbating the situation. In some cases, protests erupted because voters did not have a clear understanding of the new electoral procedures. As discussed in the previous section, the introduction of both a completely new electoral administration and a completely new electoral system confused many people. The ECT's power to disqualify candidates was most controversial. Nevertheless, several protests took place simply because losing candidates did not accept the electoral results, especially in districts in which the margins were small. Moreover, there were reports of vote canvassers acting as

⁵ *Matichon*, 12 October 2000: 21; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 20 November 2000: 13, 17; *Daily News*, 22 November 2000: 1, 20.

⁶ See details in *Matichon*, 8 January 2001: 1, 14, 29; 10 January 2001: 1, 2, 20; 11 January 2001: 1-2; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 16 January 2001: 17-18.

provocateurs. Some vote canvassers, who failed to deliver votes to their candidates, tried to make up for their failure by organizing protests to subvert the results.⁷

The 2001 election was the most unruly in Thai history, up to that point, containing familiar patterns of violence as well as some new trends. Hired gunmen were still the main perpetrators, and vote canvassers were the primary victims. The most common form was pre-election targeted killings. However, new actors and new types of violence emerged. Political supporter groups' collective violence appeared alongside the old pattern of discreet assassination. Post-election violence increased, accounting for 20 percent of the total. Overall, the higher degree and changing pattern of electoral violence demonstrated the greater significance of electoral democracy and elective posts for electoral stakeholders and general voters. Mass violence also reflected the evolving relationship between the party, the candidate, and the masses. Political parties sought mass support and organized mass mobilization in order to protect and strengthen the party's political interests.

The 2005 election

The 2005 election was held after the Thaksin government finished serving its first full term. There were only 4 major parties contesting in this election, the TRT led by Thaksin, the Democrats led by Banyat Banthathan, the Chart Thai Party of Banham Silpa-archa, and the newly created Mahachon party led by academic-turned-politician Anek Laothammatas. Indicative of the consolidation of the party system at this time, many other medium and small parties who had run in the previous election had dissolved and merged into the TRT.

Violent acts against vote canvassers occurred relatively early in the election campaign as the election date had been announced a few months in advance. The degree of violence in this election was nearly as high as the previous one, although there was a decrease in the number of injuries. In total, there were 77 violent incidents, causing 30 deaths and injuries to 16 people. Those 77 incidents were: 44 assassination attempts; 3 violent fights and attacks; 25 instances of physical intimidation; 3 bombings; and 2 polling station

⁷ See these reports in *Thai Rath*, 20 January 2001: 1, 5; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 20 January 2001: 9-12. Although journalists had no solid evidence to prove this assumption, we can not rule out the possibility. After all, vote canvassers were political entrepreneurs who made use of all available methods to bring advantages to the people for whom they worked.

burnings. Given the number of deaths, the 2005 campaign was the most deadly election in Thai history.

As in the 2001 election, assassination and physical intimidation topped the list of violent tactics. Unlike the 2001 election, however, there were no post-election protests in 2005 and thus bombings and burnings (of buildings or properties) were rare. There were many reasons for the peaceful situation after the voting. First of all, the election commissioners were more discreet in exercising their authority, especially in disqualifying candidates. In addition, the ETC put in place a more effective and clearer set of regulations, guidelines, and mechanisms regarding vote counting and election dispute resolution and complaints adjudication. Voters and vote canvassers also learned how to resort to (and manipulate) legal channels to rectify their situation.⁸ Ever since 2001, political bosses had become adept at adjusting to the electoral administration and rules, and some were powerful enough to bend them to serve their political interests.⁹ The absence of public protests explained the sharp decline in the numbers of injured. However, election commissioners were targets of intimidation in some cut-throat districts.¹⁰

Vote canvassers, as usual, were the chief victims of assassination and intimidation. It is striking that almost all murdered or assaulted vote canvassers were local administration (TAO, municipality, PAO) officials. This reflects the fact that, by 2005, vote canvassers had transformed themselves into formally elected politicians, positions that came with greater wealth and power but higher risks. As mentioned, Thaksin's war on influential people since 2003 had backed local vote canvassers into a corner. During the 2005 election campaign, police stepped up "the war" by searching several vote canvassers' houses, seizing their weapons, and issuing arrest warrants. Confrontation between security officers and vote canvassers was a feature of this election. Nevertheless, in provinces in which all prominent bosses united under the TRT, the situation was calm; competing bosses temporarily held back their old grievances and worked together to avoid being considered "influential people." The situation was turbulent in provinces in which the TRT confronted insubordinate bosses, notably Phrae, Nakhon Si Thammarat,

⁸ The ECT 2008; Panya 2007.

⁹ The provincial bosses who had established monopolies were able to influence the electoral process by placing their trusted people in the local election commission as well as in the polling station committee (See Chapters 10 and 12).

¹⁰ On 23 January 2005, gunmen shot a local ECT staff in Yala, and some offenders threw beer bottles into the ECT chairman's house in Kanchanaburi on 30 November 2004 (*Khom Chat Luek*, 24 January 2005: 5; *Matichon*, 1 December 2004: 10).

Ayutthaya, Nakhon Ratchasima, Phichit, Saraburi, Nakhon Pathom, Narathiwat, and Yala. Both TRT's bosses and their rivals employed violence against each other in the election campaign. In Phrae (Chapter 7), for example, the TRT attempted to crush the Democrat's godmother and establish their own monopoly, while the godmother struggled to save her last stronghold. In Nakhon Si Thammarat (Chapter 9), the Democrat's political capital, the TRT attempted to invade their rival's fortress. A number of vote canvassers from both sides lost their lives in these electoral wars. Apart from Phrae and Nakhon Si Thammarat, Ayutthaya became a voting hot zone after four TRT vote canvassers were murdered (in separate incidents). The most high-profile case took place on 11 January 2005 when a top PAO councilor and businessman who canvassed votes for the TRT candidate was shot dead while driving home. The assassinations brought an outburst from Thaksin as they undermined his candidate's power and challenged his national campaign on mafia and gunmen. Thaksin commented,

Ayutthaya is very close to Bangkok, but barbaric people still exist. Those barbaric men must not stay alive.... after the election I will definitely liquidate all influential mafias and gunmen. I promise I am going to do it. I cannot allow these people to reproduce themselves. Everyone must be under the law.¹¹

Soon after Thaksin's speech, the police arrested two suspected gunmen—both were teenagers who claimed one TAO councilor paid them 50,000 baht to do the job.¹² The police sped up the investigation and one week before voting day they issued an arrest warrant for the Mahachon Party's MP candidate for Ayutthaya, Surachet Chaikoson, on the charge of masterminding the murder. Surachet denied the allegation. Mahachon's leading members also came out to guarantee his innocence, and believed that the police investigation was politically motivated. The whole incident, however, crippled the candidate's campaign as well as Mahachon's credentials.¹³ It was unprecedented that the police were able to apprehend and/or charge the suspected gunmen, let alone the candidate, during an election campaign. Thaksin's reaction and the police action on the murder case of TRT's Ayutthaya vote canvasser were criticized by other parties' leaders.

¹¹ *Khom Chat luek*, 12 January 2005; *Khao Hun*, 12 January 2005.

¹² Several young, new hired guns were reportedly active in this election, indicating that the war on influential people and gunmen had wiped out some established hired guns and left room for rookies.

¹³ In the end, Surachet lost to the TRT contender. In 2007, he abandoned Mahachon and ran under Thaksin's allied party banner and won the election. The officers eventually dropped the charges against him. For details of the case, see *Khao Sod*, 15 January 2005: 1, 11; 21 January 2005: 1, 15; 29 January 2005: 1, 14; 30 January 2005: 1, 15; 31 January 2005: 1, 18; *Matichon Sudsapda*, 4-10 February 2005: 97.

The Democrat leader Banyat commented that Thaksin had double standards because the government did not give the same level of attention to the deaths of other parties' vote canvassers: "He [Thaksin] only cares when his own people are killed... but when people of other parties die he does not give a damn. By doing this, people will condemn rather than praise [the government]."¹⁴ In a similar vein, Anek, the leader of Mahachon remarked,

I do not understand. When candidates or vote canvassers of other parties are shot dead, the police have never been able to catch the culprits. But in Ayutthaya, only a few days after TRT's vote canvasser was shot, the police arrested [the gunmen].... The [caretaker] government helps the TRT's candidates gain most advantage and benefits.... If the TRT won 400 seats, I think Thai people shall not go cast their votes in the next election. Let them be the permanent government.¹⁵

In contrast to the turbulent pre-election campaign, the 2005 election day was relatively peaceful. The officials recorded few incidents of intimidation and vandalism. The election result was accepted without disruption. Nobody was shot or wounded. Thaksin and his TRT party won decisively with 377 seats, but there were clear hints that Thai politics was headed toward a tumultuous and more ideological struggle.¹⁶ One small indication of this is the incident that occurred in Khon Kaen, in which officials found many leaflets distributed to the locals on the eve of election day, accusing Thaksin of "having ambitions to be the president."¹⁷ In Thai cultural politics, accusing someone of aspiring to be a president contains a deep political meaning of characterizing that person as anti-monarchist. It was a serious political charge.

The December 2007 election

The 2007 election was the first electoral contest after the September 2006 coup, and it was held under the new constitution. Thaksin's allies formed a new party called the Palang Prachachon Party (PPP) to compete with existing parties (the Democrat and

¹⁴ *Khao Sod*, 13 January 2005: 10.

¹⁵ *Daily News*, 31 January 2005: 1, 18. This was a striking remark as if Anek could foresee the political future. His party, including all other major parties, boycotted the 2006 election and left the TRT to run unopposed.

¹⁶ The Democrats won only 96 seats (52 from the south), the Chart Thai won 26, and the Mahachon grabbed only one seat.

¹⁷ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 7 February 2005: 6.

Chart Thai) as well as several new parties led by former TRT faction leaders who had left Thaksin after the 2006 coup. This election took place under the interim government whose prime minister, Surayud Chulanont, was appointed by the coup leaders. Martial law had been declared immediately after the coup, and as of election time it remained in effect in 26 (out of the 77) provinces. Most provinces under martial law were located in the north and northeast, Thaksin's political strongholds.¹⁸ This election was thus clearly more than the usual competition among rival political parties and provincial bosses; rather, it was a showdown between the anti-Thaksin movement of the junta and military-installed government and the Thaksin-supported political networks led by PPP.

Despite the competition's high stakes, the degree and frequency of electoral violence in the 2007 election were down sharply compared to 2001 and 2005. In fact, the 2007 election stood out as one of the most peaceful electoral competitions in Thai history. In total, there were only 23 violent incidents, causing 10 deaths and 4 woundings. The 23 incidents were: 14 assassination attempts, 1 violent fight, 7 instances of physical intimidation, and 1 burning of a polling station. There were no bombing during the 2007 election. More than 80 percent of incidents occurred in the pre-election period in the form of assassination targeting vote canvassers. In this sense, the 2007 violence pattern was not different from the previous two elections; instead, it was the low intensity of the use of violence that set it apart and called for explanation. The 2007 election's total numbers of violent incidents set the lowest record since 1988 (and was only slightly higher than the 1979 and 1983 elections). Its number of casualties was the lowest since 1976. The geographical area of violence was another feature that made this election distinctive. Nearly half the assassination attempts (6 out of 14) and casualties (4 from 10) were situated in the three southern border provinces, while other notorious hot spots were peaceful.¹⁹ The level of violence witnessed in the three southernmost provinces in this election was in keeping with past patterns there, but the sudden absence of violence in other regions made the Deep South look more violent than usual.

The low intensity of violence was not caused by the provincial bosses' lack of motivation to defeat their enemies. Political ambition still existed, as well as threats,

¹⁸ Except three provinces in the troubled Deep South (Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat), and three other upper-south provinces (Ranong, Satun, and Songkhla). See the list in ANFREL 2007: 73.

¹⁹ On 6 November 2007, gunmen shot dead two Yala Democrat MP. On 21 November 2007, in Narathiwat, hit men used heavy weapons to kill Pheu Pandin's vote canvasser. Three days later, three gunmen shot Pheu Thai's key vote canvasser in Yala (*Naew Na*, 6 November 2007; *Matichon*, 21 November 2007; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 24 November 2007).

disloyalty, and animosity. Conflicts among local bosses and factions still ran deep. The difference, however, came from the fact that rival bosses just did not have the same opportunity to exercise their muscle. The underlying causes of the relatively peaceful atmosphere of this election were the severe restrictions on campaigning imposed under martial law and the heavy interference of the military in the conduct of the election. Security officials used martial law to disperse rallies, search candidates and their vote canvassers' houses, stop vehicles and detain party supporters. A report by the Asian Network for the Free Election (ANFREL), an international election-monitoring body, concluded that the existence of martial law "undoubtedly created a climate of fear where freedom of expression and assembly was curtailed."²⁰

The interference of the army in this election was abundantly clear. General Sonthi Boonyaratklin, a coup leader and deputy prime minister (in charge of security), made several public comments against Thaksin and his allied party, the PPP. The widely shared public perception of the army's interference in the election was made clear when the media revealed the plan approved by the Council for National Security (CNS) chaired by General Sonthi, to prevent Thaksin and the PPP from winning the election.²¹ General Sonthi himself was criticized for his role as chair of a government panel set up to tackle vote buying. Given his position as a coup leader, his new position had an obvious conflict of interest. Moreover, the independent monitoring body found evidence of military interference in the electoral process in many districts.²² For example, in Chiang Rai, army personnel were told by their commanders to vote for the main rival of PPP. Also, in the same province, the police searched 50-100 houses of the PPP's vote canvassers while leaving other parties' supporters alone. Human Rights Watch documented a case in Lamphun where police arrested three individuals suspected of carrying arms and patrolling a candidate's house. Later the police officers found out that those suspects were soldiers from the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) who were sent by their chiefs to monitor movement of that PPP candidate.²³ Several northern and northeastern regions vote canvassers said the army interfered in electoral competition, undermining the PPP's campaign: the military instructed voters to vote for

²⁰ ANFREL 2007: 31.

²¹ See details of the plan in ANFREL 2007: 29-30.

²² The information I collected from my field research in six provinces (in different regions) identified the same phenomenon. See, especially, the analysis on Phrae (Chapter 7) and Buriram (Chapter 11), where army interference was strongest.

²³ Human Rights Watch, "Thailand: Military Interference Undermines Upcoming Elections," 20 December 2007; ANFREL 2007: 74.

certain candidates, threatened and blocked the PPP's vote canvassers, and allowed other party's vote canvassers to carry on regardless.²⁴ After the election, many PPP opponents—surprised at winning—attributed their victory to army support.²⁵

The peaceful December 2007 elections can be attributed to the military-installed government and coup leaders controlling and dictating election processes. Unlike the provincial bosses who continued to carry out assassinations by professional hired guns, state security forces did not eliminate candidates or vote canvassers. Rather, they suppressed and terminated their political activities. State coercion effectively stopped or at least inhibited the market for electoral violence. This explains why the southern border provinces were the most dangerous in this election. In other elections, in which the market of violence functioned normally, violence occurred in every region brought about by existing conflicts among bosses. In this election, while the demand for violence in other regions stopped unnaturally, conflict in the south continued as usual because the army could not assert its control there. Also, under martial law, aggrieved voters did not dare protest the junta-installed ECT decisions.²⁶ Nevertheless, the lack of violence (or angry protest) was an unintended consequence of army interference. The army's central aim was to preventing Thaksin's allied party from returning to power.

The decline in the number of violent incidents in the 2007 elections cannot be used as an indicator of the positive development of parliamentary democracy in Thailand. On the contrary, fewer incidents represented a legitimacy crisis of democracy and electoral politics. More importantly, the lack of intense violence during the 2007 election indicated something else entirely, namely that electoral politics was not the forefront of political struggle. Even though members of the royal-military alliance interfered in the electoral process, this longstanding unelected traditional power failed to recoup power lost since 2001. Thaksin and his political machine stayed strong and popular, gaining votes in their strongholds and winning a clear majority in the House. The anti-Thaksin coalition resorted to non-electoral violence to unseat him. What Thai society witnessed after the 2007 election were among the most violent and chaotic scenes of modern Thai

²⁴ Interviews, several vote canvassers, Phrae and Buriram, January and September 2010. See full details in Chapters 7 and 11.

²⁵ See, in particular, the cases of Democrat candidates in Nakhon Sawan (Chapter 8).

²⁶ All three PPP's winning candidates in Buriram's constituency 1, stronghold of the PPP, were given red cards (disqualification) by the provincial ECT. One provincial ECT member said to me that the decision was supported by the coup makers and it was part of a deliberate strategy to weaken Thaksin's political network (see Chapter 11).

history (as explained in the previous chapter). In essence, the violence had shifted from the electoral arena to the non-electoral sphere; from the ballot box to the street.

The July 2011 election

As discussed in the previous chapter, Thai national politics was in upheaval after 2007. Violent street clashes, mob confrontations, occupations of government and business buildings, and military crackdowns dominated political life. In the wake of the April-May 2010 crackdown, political commentators and media expressed concern over the deep polarization and hostility between the pro- and anti-Thaksin forces, even suggesting this might lead to civil war.²⁷

A significant development took place on 11 March 2011, when Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva announced that he was going to dissolve parliament and hold a general election. According to reports, Abhisit seemingly believed that going to the polls early would be more advantageous to his party and coalition partners as they had recently passed the annual budget and still controlled the state apparatus. The Democrat leader also wanted to avoid further confrontation with Red Shirt protesters, whose anger and frustration over his role in the April-May 2010 brutal crackdown remained. This was the context in which the 3 July 2011 election took place, with wounds from the crackdown still fresh and society deeply divided by political turmoil. Although several civilian governments had taken office since the 2006 coup, the military still dominated the country's political system. Mass protests on both sides of the political divide disrupted economic activity and made it difficult for governments to implement important reforms. Against this background of continuing crisis, many observers questioned the election's potential to bring peace and stability to Thailand. Some thought it would exacerbate the conflict and lead to even more violence. Tellingly, members of the Election Commission asked the caretaker government to declare a state of emergency to cover the election campaign, as they expected violence of a kind that would be impossible to manage within the regular legal framework.

Yet the 2011 election was held without violent disruption or derailment. The frequency and degree of electoral violence were higher than those of the 2007 poll but lower than in the 2001 and 2005 elections. The number of assassination attempts and casualties was also lower than in many past elections. In total, there were 56 violent incidents, causing

²⁷ *Matichon*, 27 February 2011; "Elections show signs of violence," *Naew Na*, 1 March 2011: 3.

14 deaths and 16 woundings. The 56 incidents were: 20 assassination attempts, 12 violent fights and attacks, 16 instances of physical intimidation, 8 bombings, and 0 burning of polling station.

With the lifting of martial law and the absence of heavy army interference, the demand for and supply of electoral violence rebounded.²⁸ After the temporary suppression of conflict among provincial notables in the 2007 election, provincial bosses were free again to hire guns to eliminate their local political opponents. The 2011 election saw the reactivation of tensions and they came earlier than usual in the electoral cycle—not waiting for the dissolution of the House in May, but emerging as soon as Abhisit called elections in March. Patterns of violence fell back to normal—hit men assassinating vote canvassers during the election campaign. All targets of assassinations (except one), including 14 murdered victims, were key vote canvassers working for influential candidates.²⁹ The most prominent was the murder of Lopburi PAO chairman Suban Chiraphanwanit. On 16 June 2011, in broad daylight in central Bangkok, gunmen shot Suban dead and wounded his wife and secretary. Suban was an influential political boss, patriarch of one of the most powerful Lopburi political dynasties and brother of the Bhumjaitai Party's MP candidate. Suban's political ambitions earned him many local political enemies, many keen to eliminate him before he could monopolize power.³⁰ The police were able to arrest the suspected gunmen, who confessed they had been hired by Suban's political enemies for an estimated 1 million baht. Professional gunmen were perpetrators in most cases, and it was strictly business as usual. Even as Thai politics became more ideological, hired gunmen maintained their non-partisan trademark, killing victims regardless of political or party identification.³¹

Even though the absence of heavy army interference reactivated the electoral murder market, the degree of violence in 2011 was as not high as that of the 2001 and 2005 elections. First of all, there were no violent mass protests before or after voting. Both the

²⁸ Army leaders were more cautious in interfering in this election, as the media had exposed their unscrupulous practices of intimidating vote canvassers and voters in 2007. They could only comment publicly, persuading voters not to vote for Thaksin's allied party. An implicit order that subordinates vote for the Democrat Party was also disobeyed (Wassana 2012: 23-68).

²⁹ The exception was the attempted murder of Pracha Prasopdi, Pheu Thai' MP candidate for Samutprakarn, on 10 May 2011. He survived but was seriously injured (*Thai Rath*, 11 May 2011: 1).

³⁰ Interview, protection racket owner, Bangkok, 6 April 2012.

³¹ This is evidenced by the fact that the same team of gunmen who killed Suban of the Bhumjaitai Party was also responsible for the murder attempt on Pracha Prasopdi a leading member of the Pheu Thai Party. Although the two parties were rivals, their leaders were victims of the same group of assassins (*Thai Post*, 26 June 2011; *Thai Rath*, 1 July 2011).

Yellow Shirt and Red Shirt movements, for different reasons, refrained from violence during the election campaign: the Yellow Shirts conducted a “vote-no” campaign, persuading voters not to cast ballots for any party nor be involved in electoral processes at all, while the Red Shirts were aware that the army could use any violent troubles as justification for the intervention.³² Therefore street violence, which had dominated Thai politics for several years, did not spill over into the electoral arena. There were reports of only a few minor scuffles and brawls between parties’ supporters. Furthermore, Pheu Thai and Democrat candidates were able to campaign in their opponents’ territories safely without opposition supporters interrupting them.³³

More importantly, political polarization and the ideological nature of politics produced positive effects on voting behavior and polling conduct. Ideology overshadowed personal conflict or family feuds between rival provincial bosses. Party stance, policy packages and political ideology shaped voting behavior. The ideological contest between anti- and pro-Thaksin movements dominated the 2011 general election. Especially in the provinces in which the Yellow Shirts or Red Shirts were strong, their members readily volunteered to assist campaigns, in the process replacing the old money-driven, entrepreneurial vote canvassers. With conflict battle lines drawn on ideological lines, hired gunmen were in less demand. For these reasons, the election in many (formerly volatile) provinces went undisturbed.³⁴ This partly explains the geography of electoral violence. In 2011, violent incidents and casualties were concentrated in the central region (notably, Ang Thong, Lopburi, Pichit, Saraburi, Ratchaburi). These provinces did not harbor any strong mass political movement (either Red or Yellow),³⁵ and thus remained dominated by personalistic, candidate-centered campaigns. Powerful bosses in these provinces still relied on private killings to maintain political control over their adversaries. In contrast, electoral competition in the north and northeast (the center of the Red Shirt strength), and the southern region (the bastion of the Yellow Shirts) were

³² Interview, Red Shirt leader, Bangkok, 26 June 2011. On the “vote-no” campaign, see the interview with Yellow Shirt leader Pipob Thongchai in *ASTVManager*, 3 June 2011.

³³ The most “violent” acts directed towards Yingluck and Abhisit were: an egg throw at Yingluck in Bangkok on 28 May 2011, and negative banners condemning Abhisit for his role in the April-May 2010 crackdown (*Khao Sod*, 29 May 2011 and 19 June 2011).

³⁴ It was in Buriram where ideological politics brought the most dramatic peaceful transition (see Chapter 11).

³⁵ On the emergence and development of the Red and Yellow Shirt movements and their main locations, see Apichart et al. 2012; Keyes 2012; Nariemon and McCargo 2012.

relatively peaceful.³⁶ Thai electoral politics and its pattern of violence was now in a state of transition. New elements had emerged, but they did not entirely replace old ones. The use of privatized murder by the boss was a remnant of the past political order, but this phenomenon will not cease until personalistic politics—fighting over the spoils of governance and illegal economic activities—are completely eradicated.

Electoral violence, 2001-2011: actors, patterns, and the market

The pattern of electoral violence witnessed in Thailand over the period 2001-2011 was not dramatically different from that of the period 1979-1996. In terms of methods, perpetrators still prefer assassination, amounting to half the total incidents. Physical intimidation was the second most popular violent method. However, clashes and bombings increased. Violent protests of the 2001 election and brawls between party supporters in 2011 explains the increase in these two modes of violence (see table 6.1 and chart 6.1), reflecting a higher involvement of the masses in electoral violence.

As for victims, vote canvassers were still the primary target of intimidation and killings. Vote-canvassers accounted for as many as 97 percent of those killed in the period 2001-2011, more than the corresponding figure (83 percent) for the period 1979-1997. Other personnel took a small share (1 percent each), except candidates who were completely safe (see table 6.2 and chart 6.2). Several voters, officials, and poll administrators were injured as a result of threats or fighting, but they were not murder targets. We can conclude that, over time, vote canvassing has become the most dangerous election occupation. Eighty-six percent of violence still occurred before elections, but the post-election period was more violent than election day. This is in contrast to the period of 1979-1997, when election day was more turbulent than the post-election period (see table 6.3 and chart 6.3). With no threats from communists or southern separatists, voting days were relatively peaceful. Vote counting chaos in 2001 increased post-election violence. As to the degree of violence, data shows a progression from a high-level in the 2001 and 2005 elections to a low-level in 2007 and 2011. Compared to constant levels of violence from 1979 to 1997, there was sharp fluctuation in this period. Major structural and institutional changes that came into effect after 1997 (constitution, electoral and

³⁶ Except the three southernmost provinces who had only a few violent incidents. Perpetrators shot dead one vote canvasser in Yala, one in Pattani, and wounded one vote canvasser and two officials in Narathiwat (*Thai Rath*, 28 June 2011; *Post Today*, 3 July 2011).

party system, decentralization, civil-military relations, and political party-social movement linkages) caused these ups and downs.

In conclusion, from 2001 to 2011, electoral violence in Thailand's national elections took the form of provincial bosses hiring gunmen to assassinate vote canvassers in the period prior to the election. However, sweeping political changes in 1997 and 2006 affected the electoral violence market. From 2001 to 2005, demand for violence increased because bosses' provincial power monopolies were at stake. National factors, particularly the entry of Thaksin and his populist party, sharpened existing political conflicts and changed the power balance between rival bosses. Thaksin's ambitious goal of monopolizing the political market raised the stakes of electoral competition, forcing bosses to employ fierce tactics to defeat their competitors. The situation changed after Thaksin was toppled. From 2006 to 2011, the demand for violence decreased as military intervention and ideological politics stifled and marginalized provincial bosses.

As a result of demand fluctuating, the supply of violence changed accordingly. In exclusive interviews, gunmen agreed that 1998 to 2006 was the golden age of the hired gun business.³⁷ Hired guns' agents were extremely busy, recruiting new hit men to meet soaring demand. The "war on influential people" did not reduce market demand; on the contrary, the war stimulated demand. Like other illegal trades, as long as there is upsurge in demand, entrepreneurs ensure no shortage in supply. The Thaksin government's policy of gunmen suppression eradicated many experienced gunmen (through arrests or extrajudicial killings), but, overall, it did not decrease the supply of violence. Before Thaksin's policy, there were 800-900 hired gunmen working nationwide. There were 151 hired-gun dens scattered in every region, concentrated in Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Suphanburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Samut Songkhram, Samut Sakhon, Prachinburi, and Trat. After suppression, gunmen dens' locations changed; assassins moved to new areas to escape police suppression, notably Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Tak, Buriram, Lopburi, Bangkok, Nakhon Sawan, Samut Prakarn, Chonburi, Sa Kaeo, Chumporn, Nakhon Si Thammarat,

³⁷ Information based on a range of anonymous interviews: gunman, Chonburi, 14 August 2012; protection racket owner, Bangkok, 6 April 2012; local bosses and gunmen, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 21 and 30 January 2010; local boss and gunmen's agent, Nakhon Sawan, 4 and 5 September 2010; senior police in the Crime Suppression Division, Bangkok, 11 April 2012; two local police officers, Phetchaburi, 17 April 2012. In addition, see Chaiwat 2011; Research and Development Division of the Royal Thai Police Department 2004, 2005 (unpublished).

Phatthalung, and Trang.³⁸ The gunmen's migration reflects the high mobility of the hired gun business (as discussed in Chapter 3). The authorities clearly failed to stifle mercenaries as the total number rose to over 1,000. In fact, the government's suppression escalated the price of assassination and thus provided incentives for people to enter the mercenary business. During the Thaksin administration, the market price for gunmen to kill a TAO head was 300,000-400,000 baht; provincial councilor 500,000-600,000 baht; PAO head 1 million baht; and MP 1 to 5 million baht (depending on degree of the MPs political influence).³⁹ Consequently, the price encouraged young hoodlums, the unemployed, and moonlighting officers to step into the business to replace hit men who had been slain. The number of independent gunmen rose. Some *muepuen daorung* (rookie gunmen) formed small dens comprised of three to four members, offering a cut-price service. Many bosses preferred to use rookies because they were not on the police "watch list." In the south, after some prominent gunmen were arrested, high-ranking police officers stepped in and ran hired-gunmen dens, competing with gangsters. Cut throat business led to intra-den bloodshed as some mercenaries wanted to eliminate their business competitors. The violence market in the 2000s became more competitive, fragmented, and disorderly.⁴⁰

As mentioned above, the demand for electoral violence slumped after the 2006 coup. Hired gunmen and their agents sought new jobs; some became full time drug dealers, business enforcers, debt collectors, private security guards, or extortionists. After the coup though, ideological struggles and street violence created new work for mercenaries—they became security guards for the Yellow Shirt and/or Red Shirt movements or provided protection to protest leaders. Some of them were paid to instigate violence in public to destabilize governments.⁴¹ Violence entrepreneurs and

³⁸ Interview, senior police in the Crime Suppression Division, Bangkok, 11 April 2012. For data on the number of gunmen before the "war on influential people", see the Research and Development Division of the Royal Thai Police Department 2004, 2005 (unpublished).

³⁹ A gunman who used to work with an influential boss in the east told me that he received 3 million baht for assassinating a prominent MP. It was the highest-paid job he had ever done. Normally, he would be paid 300,000-800,000 baht for each murder. Another gunman working in the south gave me similar figures. Interview, gunman, Chonburi, 14 August 2012; interview, gunman, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 30 January 2010.

⁴⁰ Some experienced hired gunmen and hired gun's agents lamented the entry of the rookie gunmen into the business, saying the young gunmen were amateur, reckless, disrespectful of other people's turfs, and a destabilizing force in the market. For example, young gunmen cut the price of TAO murder from 300,000-400,000 to only 50,000-60,000 baht. Interview, gunman, Chonburi, 14 August 2012; interview, protection racket owner, Bangkok, 6 April 2012.

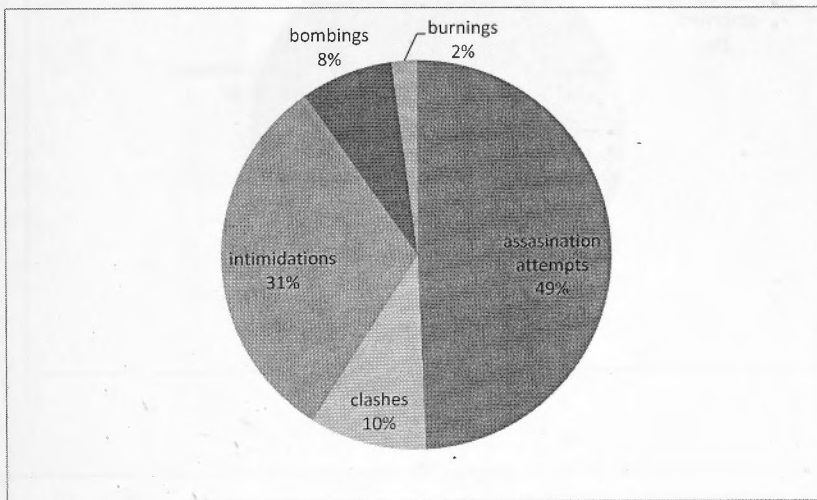
⁴¹ A Bangkok-based protection racketeer provided security to Red-shirt demonstrations, and a former gunman from Nakhon Si Thammarat acted as body guard for Yellow Shirt leaders. Interview, protection

violence specialists found new business opportunities and new clients in the era of crisis.

Table 6.1: Election-related violence in national polls, 2001-2011

Election dates	Violent incidents						Death toll	Woun
	assassination attempts	fight, clashes, brawls, scuffles	physical intimidation	Bombings	burnings	total	total	total
6/1/2001	39	7	26	7	2	81	26	84
6/2/2005	44	3	25	3	2	77	30	16
23/12/2007	14	1	7	0	1	23	10	4
3/7/2011	20	12	16	8	0	56	14	16
Total	117	23	74	18	5	237	80	120

Chart 6.1: Methods of electoral violence in national elections, 2001-2011



racket owner, Bangkok, 6 April 2012; interview, gunmen, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 23 and 30 January 2010.

Table 6.2: Deaths related to electoral violence in national elections, 2001-2011

Election dates	Dead victims					
	vote canvassers	candidates	journalists, poll administrators and observers	gunmen	voters	Total
6/1/2001	25	0	0	1	0	26
6/2/2005	28	0	1	0	1	30
23/12/2007	10	0	0	0	0	10
3/7/2011	14	0	0	0	0	14
Total	77	0	1	1	1	80

Chart 6.2: Death related to electoral violence in national elections, 2001-2011

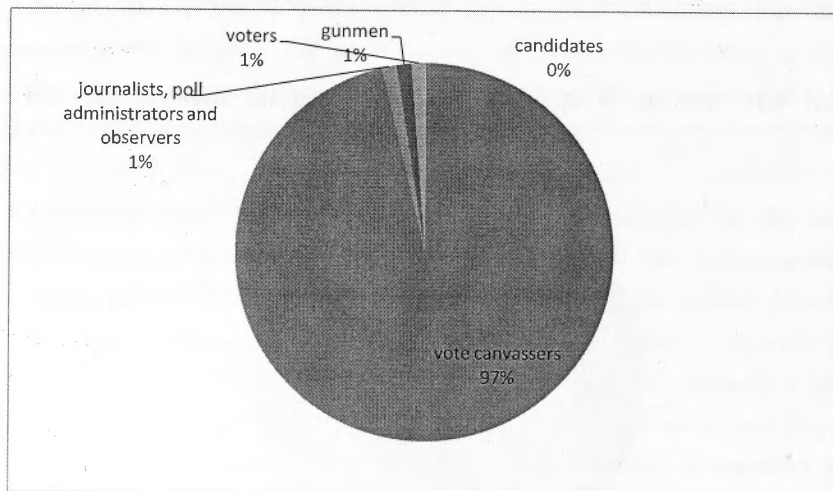


Table 6.3: Timing of election-related violence in national polls, 1979-1996

Election dates	Timing of violent incidents			
	pre-election (from House dissolution to election day)	election day	post-election (1 month after election day)	Total
6/1/2001	65	0	16	81
6/2/2005	74	2	1	77
23/12/2007	19	1	3	23
3/7/2011	46	2	8	56
Total	204	5	28	237

Chart 6.3: Timing electoral violence in national elections, 2001-2011

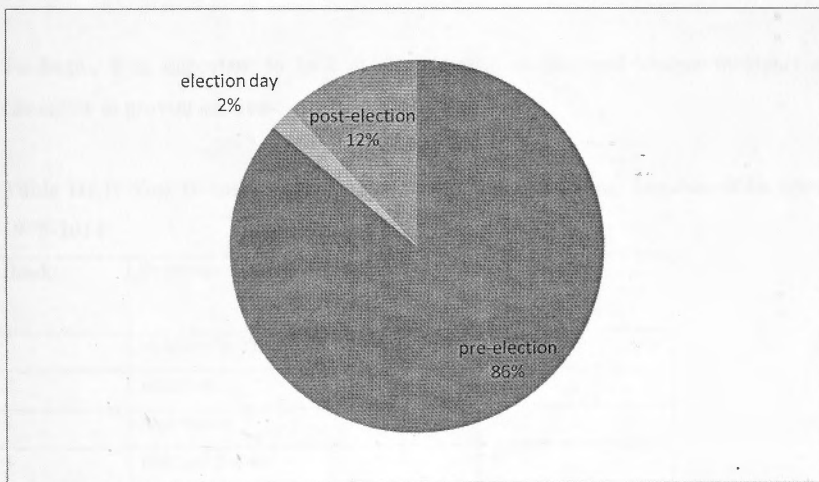


Table 1. Summary of the results of the analysis of variance for the effect of the treatment on the response of the different parameters.

Parameter	Treatment		F	P
	Control	Experimental		
Survival (%)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Number of fish	100	100	0.001	0.96
Weight (g)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Length (cm)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Condition factor	100	100	0.001	0.96
Survival (%)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Number of fish	100	100	0.001	0.96
Weight (g)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Length (cm)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Condition factor	100	100	0.001	0.96
Survival (%)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Number of fish	100	100	0.001	0.96
Weight (g)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Length (cm)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Condition factor	100	100	0.001	0.96
Survival (%)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Number of fish	100	100	0.001	0.96
Weight (g)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Length (cm)	100	100	0.001	0.96
Condition factor	100	100	0.001	0.96

**Part III: The Geography of Electoral Violence, 1975-2011:
Case Studies of Three Violent and Three Peaceful Provinces**

Nationally determined factors, such as state structures, electoral and party systems, and the impact of decentralization, help to explain the changes in the degree and modes of violence but are not sufficient to explain the geography of violence. As mentioned, electoral violence in Thailand is not evenly distributed across the country. A good explanation needs to be able to identify the local factors that make some provinces especially prone to violence. Rather than merely looking at the macro-political picture at the national level, my research now turns to an exploration of micro-sociological conditions and micro-political processes at the provincial level. Building on the analysis of the general pattern of electoral violence from the late 1970s to the late 1990s (in Chapter 4) and from 2001 to 2011 (in Chapter 6), Part III provides a broad picture of the geography of electoral violence in Thailand from the election of 1975 to that of 2011.

To begin, it is important to look at the statistics on electoral violent incidents and casualties in provincial areas.

Table III.1: Top 16 most violent provinces in Thai elections: number of incidents, 1975-2011

Rank	Province	Number of incidents
1	Nakhon Si Thammarat	26
2	Bangkok	24
3	Narathiwat	20
4	Nakhon Sawan	19
5	Phrae	18
6	Nakhon Ratchasima	17
7	Lopburi	15
8	Pichit	15
9	Chiang Rai	14
10	Kanchanaburi	13
11	Chonburi	13

12	Nakhon Pathom	13
13	Samutprakarn	12
14	Yala	12
15	Ayutthaya	11
16	Chiang Mai	11

Source: author's data

Table III.2: Top 15 most violent provinces in Thai elections: number of casualties, 1975-2011

Rank	Province	Number of casualties (deaths/injuries)
1	Satun	51 (1/50)
2	Nakhon Si Thammarat	25 (22/3)
3	Bangkok	20 (5/15)
4	Chainat	18 (8/10)
5	Pichit	18 (6/12)
6	Nakhon Sawan	16 (8/8)
7	Yala	15 (13/5)
8	Lopburi	15 (10/5)
9	Songkhla	15 (5/10)
10	Ang Thong	15 (3/12)
11	Narathiwat	14 (7/7)
12	Chiang Rai	13 (8/5)
13	Prachinburi	12 (12/0)
14	Saraburi	12 (8/4)
15	Kanchanaburi	12 (6/6)
16	Phrae	10 (8/2)

Source: author's data

Table III.1 shows the 16 most violence-prone provinces measured by number of incidents. These provinces are located in all regions (three from the north, two from the lower-north, seven from the central, three in the south, and one in the northeast). However, the national data indicates some high-frequency provinces do not hold high casualties; for example, Samut Prakarn records only 2 deaths and 3 injuries; Nakhon Pathom 4 deaths and 1 injury; and Bangkok which witnessed 24 incidents (the country's

second-highest) but only 5 deaths.¹ In contrast, some low-frequency provinces harbor large numbers of dead and wounded. When violence was measured in terms of casualties, the provinces rank differently as shown in Table III.2. There are six additional provinces on the list: Satun, Chainat, Songkhla, Ang Thong, Prachinburi, and Saraburi. The number of injuries in Satun is well above average because of one particular incident in the 2001 election, in which protestors clashed with the police (see discussion of the 2001 election). Not counting this incident, Satun is relatively peaceful. Chainat is another peaceful province whose results have been skewed by one violent incident in the April 1976 election, in which a heavy bomb caused eight deaths and ten woundings (see Chapter 2).

If we compare the two tables, only ten provinces appear in both categories (as highlighted in table III.2): Nakhon Si Thammarat, Bangkok, Pichit, Nakhon Sawan, Yala, Lopburi, Narathiwat, Chiang Rai, Kanchanaburi, and Phrae. These provinces are, by all measures, the top ten most violent locations when it comes to Thailand's electoral competition. These hot spots vary in a) population (and thus the number of MPs); b) level of economic development and per capita income; c) homicide rate; and d) prevalence of hired gunmen.

Based on *population*, Bangkok, the country's most populous province, had 33 seats as of 2011, and Nakhon Si Thammarat, the most populous province in the south, had 9 MPs. Phrae, Yala, and Pichit, fairly small provinces, had only 3 seats up for grabs. Therefore, the general belief that a large province creates greater violence does not hold.² In terms of *economic development* (measured by gross provincial products-GPP), and *income* (measured by GPP per capita), data show no relationship between these economic factors and degree of violence.³ The list of violence-prone provinces ranges widely from the richest to the poorest. The capital Bangkok has the largest GPP and GPP per capita. Nakhon Sawan's GPP ranked the second in the northern and upper-central regions. Phrae, at the other end, was the second-poorest province in the north and one of the

¹ Most violent incidents in Bangkok were minor brawls, fighting, and intimidating acts between opposing vote canvassers, rather than assassinations.

² This belief is common among police and election commissioners. Interview, police officer at criminal suppression division, Bangkok, 11 April 2012; police officers overseeing election security, Bangkok, 9 June 2011 and 25 July 2011; Nakhon Ratchasima election commissioner, Nakhon Ratchasima, 3 December 2010; national election commissioner, Bangkok, 8 June 2011. See also Nipon and Suwan 1990; Worawan et al 2000; Chaiwat 2011. On the number of MP seats, see Election Commission of Thailand 2012.

³ I already discussed in Chapter 1 about the argument made by some scholars linking political violence to the level of economic development.

country's least-developed provinces (GPP ranks 68th and GPP per capita 65th). Other provinces rank in the middle.⁴

The notion that provinces most prone to electoral violence are the ones normally plagued by ordinary crime is also incorrect.⁵ According to national data on *homicide*, the top provinces for murder are: Songkhla, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Chonburi, Surat Thani, Chiang Mai, Nakhon Pathom, Nakhon Ratchasima, Trang, Suphanburi, and Khon Kaen (by ranking).⁶ Only two provinces (Songkhla and Nakhon Si Thammarat) appear to have both high homicide rates and high numbers of election-related murder. Many provinces notorious for criminal murder witness peaceful elections, and vice versa. Ordinary crime and political crime do not overlap. Political crime has a different logic and *modus operandi* (see further discussion in Chapter 10).⁷

Also, concentrations of *hired gunmen* do not match the locations of electoral violence. Several electoral-violence provinces are not hubs for hired-gunmen. On the other hand, some provinces known as mercenary "capitals" do not experience high levels of electoral murder. Phetchaburi, Thailand's gunmen capital, is a prime example of a province with large supplies of violence but low levels of electoral violence; Sa Kaeo manifests a similar pattern (see Chapter 10 and 12). As discussed earlier, electoral violence occurs according to the demand, rather than the supply side of violence.

In regard to the list of peaceful provinces, data identify the ten most peaceful areas: Mae Hong Son, Maha Sarakham, Nong Bua Lamphu, Sakhon Nakhon, Trat, Sa Kaeo, Ranong, Samut Songkhram, Phuket, and Phang Nga. One is located in the north, three in the northeast, three centrally, and three in the south. Like their violent counterparts, these untroubled provinces vary in population size, level of development, murder rates, and prevalence of hired gunmen. On *population*, for example, Mae Hong Son and

⁴ The GPP and GPP per capita figures are based on the 2010 national data collected by National Economic and Social Development Board (2012).

⁵ This notion is widespread among the police and criminologists. See, for example, the Research and Development Division of the Royal Thai Police Department 2004, 2005 (unpublished); Nipon and Suwan 1990; Worawan et al 2000; Nattawit 2000.

⁶ Data based on police records from 1988-2003, the Research and Development Division of the Royal Thai Police Department 2005: 2.

⁷ On this point, Yala and Narathiwat provide challenges. These two provinces located on the southern borders have long suffered from separatist conflicts. Separatist violence occasionally spilled over to electoral conducts on voting day. But, beyond voting day, it is difficult to conclude whether violence is motivated by separatist struggle or rivalry between local bosses because the *modus operandi* is the same as what is found in other provinces (i.e. assassination by gunmen targeting vote canvassers).

Ranong have only 234,000 and 190,000 residents (respectively) and 1 MP seat, while Maha Sarakham and Sakhon Nakhon have 1,028,000 and 1,155,000 residents and 5 and 7 MP seats (respectively). The list of peaceful provinces also ranges widely from the richest to the poorest. As a world-famous tourist destination, Phuket is one of Thailand's richest provinces, as their residents' income is the highest in the south and among the country's top ten. Nong Bua Lamphu, at the other end, was the second-poorest province in the northeast and one of the country's least-developed provinces (GPP ranks 73th and GPP per capita 76th).⁸ On coercive resources, several provinces, including Trat, Sa Kaeo, and Samut Songkram, have been known as hubs for hired-gunmen but, clearly, they do not experience electoral murder.⁹

Table III.3: Top 10 most peaceful provinces in Thai elections, 1975-2011

Rank	Province	Degree of violence (incidents/deaths/injuries)
1	Mae Hong Son	0/0/0
2	Maha Sarakham	0/0/0
3	Nong Bua Lamphu	0/0/0
4	Sakhon Nakhon	0/0/0
5	Trat	1/0/0
6	Sa Kaeo	1/0/1
7	Ranong	1/0/1
8	Samut Songkhram	1/1/0
9	Phuket	1/1/0
10	Phang Nga	1/1/0

Source: author's data

In conclusion, population size, provincial economic development level, gunmen prevalence, and homicide rates do not determine the frequency and location of electoral violence. The following six chapters present sub-national comparisons of six provinces (three violent and three peaceful) to demonstrate the factors, political processes, and mechanisms leading to the geographical variation of electoral violence in Thailand. Based on extensive micro-level research, they show how the geography of electoral violence is shaped by local power structures and political economies of elite

⁸ National Economic and Social Development Board 2012.

⁹ Interview, crime reporter, Bangkok, 11 April 2012; police officer at criminal suppression division, Bangkok, 11 April 2012.

competition. A boss or political-family power monopoly creates conditions for orderly elections. Monopolies are difficult to establish and maintain, but are highly rewarding when attained. Monopolies can be achieved in both large and small provinces, depending on several factors. To be sure, it is easier for political bosses to monopolize a tiny territory. This partly explains the lack of violence in five small provinces— Trat, Phang Nga, Mae Hong Son, Ranong, and Samut Songkhram— with only one seat contested. But it is not the size per se that explains peaceful elections; provinces with the same number of seats do not necessarily have the same consequences. For example, both Phrae and Sa Kaeo have three seats at stake, but electoral competitions in Phrae are highly turbulent while elections in Sa Kaeo are peaceful. The factor that makes these two provinces different is the absence (or presence) of a monopoly. Another example is Nakhon Si Thammarat and Buriram, two populous provinces with nine seats for election. As data show, Nakhon Si Thammarat is one of the most dangerous voting places in the country; Buriram was troubled with violence for a brief period but managed to hold peaceful elections after one political clan monopolized the province.

Lack of monopoly (polarized and/or fragmented power structures) therefore facilitates conditions for violent power struggles. To be precise, personalistic fighting between rival bosses, when a power monopoly is at stake, generated the most violent situations. In contrast, when boss-type candidates compete with non-boss politicians, violent tactics are less likely to occur as bosses are not threatened and can win by other means (see Chapter 3). And, as discussed in Chapter 5, ideological or programmatic political struggles also help mitigate the use of violence in election campaigns. This occurred when political bosses were pitted against the state security and political party machine instead of their business-political enemies.

Geographical variation (I): violent provinces

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 examine three provinces that have endured chronic violent elections: Phrae, Nakhon Sawan, and Nakhon Si Thammarat. I analyze these provinces in-depth because, though the macro-level study explains the broad impacts of state structure, electoral system, democratization, and decentralization on the degree of electoral violence, it cannot tease out the specific causal mechanisms by which violence occurs. In-depth case studies provide us with more richly textured understanding of how electoral violence is organized and what motivates it, as well as who perpetrates violence

under what circumstances, against whom, and in what sequence. Each province represents different set of economic opportunities and political environment in which political actors operate. My subnational comparative study explores Thai provincial economic and political structures, and demonstrates how national and local powers interact. It is important to acknowledge the presence of violence in Thai politics, without exaggerating its temporal or geographical scope. What I attempt to do is to understand why and how political actors use violence to win political contestation in some cases but not in others.

Provincial bosses and their families deploy violence as a strategic tool to consolidate power, bringing them wealth, social prestige and political protection to varying degrees. The paths to power take different directions according to social, economic, and political structures. New groups eliminate and weaken local elites who fail to adjust to new environments. Fundamentally, the balance of power in Thai provincial politics can take three forms: *monopoly*, *polarization*, and *fragmentation*. Monopoly, under which one individual or clan controls the province, is rare; only a few provinces have been monopolized, including Suphanburi and Sa Kaeo. Polarized provinces, in which two rival groups compete, and fragmented provinces, in which multiple factions strive against one another, are more common. Polarized and fragmented power landscapes are prone to confrontational, fierce electoral conflict.

Phrae, Nakhon Sawan, and Nakhon Si Thammarat all have different socio-economic characters and represent differing types of political cleavages. Located in the north, Phrae is a small province both in population and area, and has a fairly low-level of economic development. Most people work in agriculture, handicraft, or small-scale manufacturing. Since the 1990s, the province has been divided between two camps of business elites, each enriching themselves from the same type of economic activities (natural resource extraction and illegal businesses) and vying for the same constituents. Long-standing fierce political struggles between the two have made electoral competition cut-throat and violent. Phrae is an archetypical inter-clan battle.

Located in central Thailand, a hub of trade between central and northern regions, Nakhon Sawan is a medium-sized and well-developed province. It has a large, affluent urban sector, vibrant entrepreneurial culture and a particular substantial Sino-Thai business community. On the other hand, rent-seeking activities and underground

businesses have thrived in Nakhon Sawan and are integrally connected to political bosses who use public offices to protect themselves and their allies. But no one group has ever been able to establish their political dominance in Nakhon Sawan, making the province one of the most politically-divided in the country, a “rainbow” territory. The fragmented power structure overrides the province’s positive features, making Nakhon Sawan an election hot spot.

The last case, Nakhon Si Thammarat, is a very large and populous coastal province that has, since ancient times been a center of Buddhist culture in the southern peninsula. Like Phrae, most residents make their living from agriculture. But the province is notorious for illegal smuggling, drug trafficking, and protection racketeering. Local bosses who control these unlawful businesses have been actively involved in election campaigning as vote canvassers and/or candidates. Nakhon Si Thammarat is a highly fragmented political territory, witnessing both inter- and intra-party conflict, mostly ending in violence.

In summary, these three provinces are varied in locations, areas, population sizes (which determines MP seats), and levels of economic development and income (see table III.4). But they all have the common attribute that make them prone to electoral violence: a lack of monopolized power structure in combination with the struggle for domination between rival bosses.

In each chapter, I examine the root causes of electoral conflict and violence by looking at provincial political-economic attributions; tracing historical political development, and the formation of provincial elites, factions, networks, and dynasties; analyzing patterns of political contestation and monopolization, changes of power balances, shifting allegiances, electoral campaign strategies, and the timing and location of electoral violence.

Table III.4: Comparison of three violent provinces (Phrae, Nakhon Sawan, and Nakhon Si Thammarat)

Province	Region	Area	Population (2010 census)	MP seats (2011)	GPP* 2010 (Millions of Baht)	GPP Per Capita 2010 (Baht)
Phrae	North (inland)	6,538 km ²	517,000	3	19,840	38,375
Nakhon Sawan	Central (river basin)	9,598 km ²	1,154,000	6	80,836	70,035
Nakhon Si Thammarat	South (coastal)	9,942 km ²	1,731,000	9	155,862	90,033

Source: The National Statistics Office of Thailand (2010); National Economic and Social Development Board (2010)

* GPP= Gross Provincial Product

Geographical variation (II): peaceful provinces

As explained in Chapter 1, to explain electoral violence, one cannot examine only violence-prone provinces because factors that appear to account for violent cases might also appear in the peaceful ones. Therefore I compare violent with peaceful provinces to identify factors that exist in all violent cases but are absent in peaceful ones. I investigate three relatively peaceful provinces—Phetchaburi, Buriram, and Nakhon Si Thammarat. These provinces are chosen because they illustrate contrasting historical trajectories in their degree of electoral violence. Sa Kaeo has been absolutely peaceful at both national and local elections throughout history. The other two provinces, Phetchaburi and Buriram, experience different trajectories: Phetchaburi was violent in the early 1980s but has been peaceful since; Buriram has been relatively peaceful most of the time except from 1995-2001. Sub-national comparative studies, taking into account historical variation, provide dynamic pictures of Thai provincial politics.

These three peaceful provinces have different locations, areas, population sizes, levels of economic development and income (see table III.5). Chapter 10 discusses why the coastal province of Phetchaburi, a notorious hub for gunmen, *jao pho*, and illegal

activities in the central region, has been able to hold peaceful elections over the past three decades. The province has a roughly equivalent population size and the same number of MPs as Phrae. Phetchaburi's hit men are the best, and scholars and media alike portray their political bosses as ruthless and vicious. As was the case in Phrae, Phetchaburi's bosses invested heavily in illegal and rent-seeking businesses. A crucial difference is the existence of a power monopoly in Phetchaburi. Since the mid 1980s, the province has been controlled by one clan. Power is shared and divided among clan members; when intra-clan competition erupted, family members compromised and negotiated. Intra-clan compromise led to peaceful elections in Phetchaburi.

Chapter 11 deals with Buriram, a northeastern province, which changed from violence-prone to peaceful in less than a decade. The province is as populous as Nakhon Si Thammarat and shares similar levels of people's income as Phrae. Before 1995, Buriram elections ran relatively smoothly as bosses competed with non-boss candidates and no one sought absolute power. Buriram's elections became violent from 1995 to 2001 when one political family sought complete control, using force to eliminate rivals. During this period, Buriram became an electoral hot-spot like Nakhon Sawan, in which multiple factions fought for control but none succeeded. The province then became peaceful once again after one family eventually monopolized power. Even though the clan power was challenged by other groups in 2007 and 2011, elections were still peaceful. I argue that Buriram's ideological political struggle post-2006 inhibited violence.

In Chapter 12, the investigation turns to Sa Kaeo, Buriram's neighbor and border eastern province. Sa Kaeo is one of the most peaceful provinces in the country despite having poor economic development, low per capita income, and old-fashioned godfathers and being a frontier economy. The province has never had violent election competition; Sa Kaeo bosses have dominated the province for longer than their counterparts in Phetchaburi and Buriram. Sa Kaeo is an archetypical case of a power monopoly inhibiting electoral violence.

In each chapter, I examine what causes peaceful elections by looking at political and economic structures, and analyzing political developments, and the formation of provincial elites, factions, networks, and clans. Moreover, I investigate the path to elite-faction monopolies; the ways elites devise electoral campaign strategies, create networks, deal with allies and opponents, and adapt and maintain domination.

Examining the peaceful provinces leads to an understanding of different patterns of power and wealth accumulation in provincial Thailand. Analysis shows that different political and economic structures require politicians to have various methods of establishing and maintaining their domination. Politicians use violence to achieve their goals only under specific circumstances. A province is peaceful not because politicians in that province are less brutal than their counterparts, but because political-economic settings do not require the use of force.

Table III.5: Comparison of three peaceful provinces (Phetchaburi, Buriram, and Sa Kaeo)

Province	Region	Area	Population (2010 census)	MP seats (2011)	GPP* 2010 (Millions of Baht)	GPP Per Capita 2010 (Baht)
Phetchaburi	Central (coastal)	6,225 km ²	462,000	3	50,443	109,227
Buriram	Northeast (inland)	10,323 km ²	1,652,000	9	60,090	36,384
Sa Kaeo	East (border)	7,195 km ²	550,000	3	26,506	48,206

Source: The National Statistics Office of Thailand (2010); National Economic and Social Development Board (2010)

* GPP= Gross Provincial Product

Phrae: Fatal family feuding

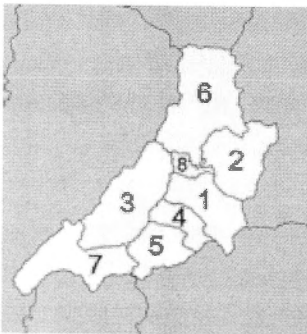


In late 2007, Phrae made big headlines with a high-profile murder case. On the morning of October 22, Charnchai Silpa-uaychai, the Phrae PAO (provincial administrative organization) president, was shot dead by an unidentified gunman while he was jogging in the provincial sports stadium. His death shocked the local people. He was acclaimed as a rising star in Thai politics—one of the best local politicians in the country who received many awards—and was highly popular among local residents. He was one of the local politicians who was actively involved in improving the conditions and efficiency of the decentralization program. His popularity made him an ‘asset’ that every political party wanted to possess. Before he died, he was asked by political parties, both the Democrat Party and the People’s Power Party of Thaksin, to lend support to their candidates in the coming elections in December 2007. He was also asked to run as a candidate himself if he so chose.

The gunman was arrested not long after the murder. He confessed and told the police that he was hired by a local businessman, a cousin of a prominent politician in Phrae, to kill Charnchai for the price of 50,000 baht (\$1667). The accused politician strongly denied any involvement. Charnchai was not the first, and will not of course be the last, victim of political conflict in Phrae. For many decades, the province has been politically

polarized. Violent incidents have frequently occurred during both national and local election campaigns. The murder of Charnchai merely highlighted the violent nature of the power struggle in the province; when a deeper investigation was pursued, additional stories of bloodletting were found.

Phrae is a northern province near the border with Laos. The neighboring provinces are Phayao, Nan, Uttaradit, Sukhothai and Lampang. The province is subdivided into 8 districts (*amphoe*). These are further subdivided into 78 sub-districts (*tambon*) and 645 villages (*muban*). It is a small province with relatively low population density, and is famous for its serene environment, rich traditional culture, customs, and lifestyle. Up until the present, a large number of households make their living by crafting wood furniture and producing a range of textiles designed by local designers. But it is the rich natural resources that are most important for the province's economy, as Phrae is one of the areas in the country most suitable for growing the highest quality golden teak and tobacco. A variety of minerals have also been found in some areas of the province.¹ The province is thus famous for its tobacco and logging businesses, tracing back to a century ago. These lines of business have become a source of wealth for some local business families who subsequently established themselves as the economic elites of the province. Nevertheless, as explained in Chapter 3, natural resource extraction and rent-seeking activities require government protection to ward off competition, leading to the active involvement of businessmen in elections. The inter-familial conflicts among provincial elites, who have overlapping business interests and similar political ambition, have rendered political contestation in Phrae volatile and bloody.



¹ Worakan 2001; *Prachakhom Thongthin* 5 (54) (August 2005), pp. 27-29.

1. Mueang Phrae
2. Rong Kwang
3. Long
4. Sung Men
5. Den Chai
6. Song
7. Wang Chin
8. Nong Muang Khai

Wongwan family

The best-known patriarch in this province is Narong Wongwan. The story of colorful political struggle could not be completely told without mentioning his name. He was the dominant figure and center of provincial political life for almost four decades. When he was still politically active (up until the early 2000s), there were no instances of political intrigue, betrayal, or revenge in this northern province that did not involve him.

Narong is a longstanding MP (1979-95) of the province. He was born on 25 December 1925, and his family line can be traced back to the governor of the Phrae region under the absolute monarchy in the nineteenth century. His family conveniently used this position to obtain a teak concession from the East Asiatic Company. Narong's father, Saen Wongwan, subsequently obtained a logging concession from the Thai government which covered many provinces in the north beyond Phrae. During World War Two, his family also ventured into rice trading and owned a saw mill. As an old aristocratic family of the province, all of the Wongwan family business activities were well-supported by local government officials and the governor. The Wongwans also strengthened their control of the local economy by engaging in joint-ventures with the prominent Pathong family, to whom they were closely related.² These lucrative business investments were later passed on to and further expanded by Narong, the third generation of the family. Unlike many local notables of his generation, Narong received a good education abroad, a bachelor degree in economics from the University of Kentucky in the United States. He worked for the East Asiatic Company for a short while before running his family business. It was he who made the Wongwan family much more prosperous and powerful, particularly when he expanded the family business from logging into the new businesses of tobacco-growing, mining, hotel ownership and management, cattle farms, and trades in several provinces in the north in the late 1950s

² Tirayoot 2008; Wanchart 2012: 71-76, 108-116.

to 1970s.³ The family flagship company, Thepwong, which manages the tobacco trade and import/export business, is the biggest tobacco enterprise in the country with the largest share of the market. There are more than a hundred thousand people in the upper north, including Phrae, Lampang, Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Phayao, and Nan province, working in his family business empire.⁴ Besides Thepwong, the family owns many other companies as shown in the table below.

Table 7.1: Wongwan family businesses

Name of the Company	Founding Year	Type of Business
1. Thepwong	1949	Saw milling, tobacco
2. Mueangrae Sakun Thong	1969	Mining
3. Bai Yasup Thai Industry	1970	Tobacco
4. Chiang Mai Kan Mueangrae	1974	Mining
5. Yasup Sakon	1974	Tobacco
6. Sayam Watchara	1977	Machine trade
7. Bai Ya Virginia Don Mun	1959	Tobacco
8. Siamese Export Coffee	1979	Coffee
9. Kasettakam Sombunbaep	unknown	Ranch
10. Siamese Nakkhao Thurakit	unknown	Newspaper
11. Phalittaphan Thammachat	unknown	Agricultural business
12. Chiang Mai Chatura Mit	unknown	Construction
13. A and P	unknown	Hotel
14. tobacco-curing factory (more than 140 factories in the north)	unknown	Tobacco

Source: *Manager Daily* (northern edition), 3 August 1992, p. 5⁵

Like several other successful local businessmen, Narong turned to politics to protect and enhance his fortune. The more stable parliamentary system after 1980 was an open opportunity for many tycoons like Narong. He was elected to parliament for the first time in 1979 with a very impressive 89,822 votes, the highest in the province. After that, he always won a landslide victory in elections in Phrae. Moreover, with the strong political machine he had created, he was constantly in the position of being among the top ten vote winners of the country from 1979 to 1992, with his peak in the 1986 and the

³ Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994: 80-81; Chainarong 2000; *Prachachat Thurakit*, 3 June 1996: 33.

⁴ *Maitichon*, 13 June 1998: 4.

⁵ Quoted in Anothai 2005: 54.

1992 polls when he gained the most votes of any candidate in the country.⁶ Given the fact that he financially supported several candidates in his faction in other provinces, he was able to negotiate for significant ministerial posts almost regularly. In 1980, he was elevated to the post of deputy minister of interior. Then he was deputy minister of agriculture in 1981 and a minister of the same office in 1983. He again obtained the position of minister of agriculture in the Chatichai Choonhavan government in 1990.⁷

It was no accident or luck that he was appointed so many times to oversee the Ministry of Agriculture. As a businessman turned politician whose family had vast interests in the agricultural sector, it was highly beneficial and critical to have power over the budget allocation and policy-making of the relevant ministry. This enabled him to support other MPs in his faction through jobs and budget allocation. By doing this, he gained loyalty and maintained his grip on power over them. Narong knew that he needed to build a large political faction in order to gain leverage over other provincial bosses in competition for ministerial posts. Moreover, this position helped him strengthen his patronage network in Phrae by manipulating budget decisions and diverting state resources to develop his own province and financially support his local followers. This was a common practice that was done by almost every politician in Thailand.⁸

It is important to note that Narong's ministerial post and his vast local business empire had secured his electoral base for a long time. The tobacco business boomed throughout the northern region beginning in the 1970s with increasing export demand, earning him and the people in his circle a vast fortune. His relatives and key canvassers who, with his help, managed to be owners of tobacco curing plants secured a large profit because of the rising price of tobacco during this period. The villagers who grew tobacco also benefited handsomely from this profitable business as they sold the crop to the curing owners at a high price. The relationship between the tobacco plant owners and growers were developed and tightened both economically and personally.⁹ This relationship subsequently proved to be highly rewarding during election times. Most of the tobacco-

⁶ *Maticchon*, 13 June 1998: 4; *Bangkok Post*, 3 July 1995:3.

⁷ After deserting the Kitsangkhom Party in the late 1970s, Narong formed his own party, Ruam Thai, which later merged with the Ekkaphap (Solidarity) Party. After the coup in 1991, he was the head of the military-backed party, Samakkhitham. As explained in Chapter 3, this party won a majority in the 1992 election but Narong failed to be elevated to the prime minister position because of the 'drug' incident. In the 1995 election, he moved a large faction under his command, Terd Thai, to join the Chart Thai Party of Banham. In the 2001 election, he and his faction switched to work with the TRT party of Thaksin.

⁸ The most-well known and perhaps most skillful politician practicing the politics of pork-barreling is Banham Silpa-archa from Suphanburi. See Nishizaki 2011.

⁹ Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994: 80-81.

processing plant owners worked with Narong not only as business partners but also as key vote canvassers for his election campaign. Similarly, farmers who were tobacco growers became strong political supporters of Narong's family.¹⁰ His high position and influence among local people earned him the title "pho-liang," an unofficial title used in the North to address a respectable well-to-do man. With a strong network of vote canvassers and a solid economic base, Narong won the elections consecutively since 1979. In the March 1992 election, Narong was the head of the newly-created Samakheetham Party backed up by the Junta who staged a coup in 1991. His party won the election, with 79 seats, and he would have become the 19th prime minister of Thailand had the U.S. government not revealed reports that they had denied him an entry visa because of suspected links to narcotic trafficking (see Chapter 3 and 4). Narong has persistently denied the allegation.¹¹ Though he failed to obtain that highest position, he is no doubt one of the most powerful and successful politicians in his generation who built up his political career from being a local businessman—who had managed to have a nearly monopolistic control over economic and political power in his hometown—to a top position in the capital. From 1979-1995, politics in Phrae were orderly and peaceful as Narong commanded respect and power over every local politician and faction.¹²

Narong has eight sons, two of whom, Anusorn and Anuvat (1953-), have been highly successful in their business and political careers and become their father's successors.¹³ The Wongwan family's predominance, however, was challenged by its own political subordinates in the mid-1990s. This is examined in the next section.

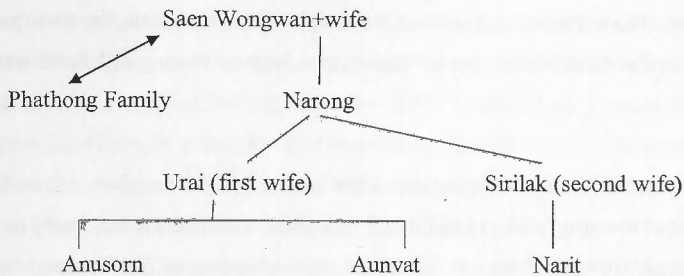
¹⁰ Interview, PAO councilor, Phrae, 7 January 2010.

¹¹ *Prachachat Thurakit*, 3 June 1996: 33.

¹² Interview, Anuvat Wongwan, Phrae, 8 January 2010; interview, former candidate for Phrae MP in the 1980s, Phrae, 13 December 2009.

¹³ *Manager Daily*, 21 June 2003.

Chart 7.1: The Wongwan Family (a selected genealogy)



Supasiri family

The political situation in Phrae changed in 1995, as the Wongwan family's political power was critically challenged and shaken from within his inner circle. In the 1995 general election, Narong was defeated by a young female candidate, Siriwan Pratsachaksattru (1956-), who was then a totally new face in national politics.¹⁴ She, however, was not a stranger to Phrae voters as she came from a locally prominent family and was, significantly, the daughter of Sanit Supasiri, a long time key vote canvasser of Narong. Sanit and Narong were old friends and business partners. Sanit came from a relatively less wealthy family than Narong, but he and Narong worked closely for a long period of time in the logging and tobacco businesses. The Supasiri family also managed to have their own tobacco-processing plants and gravel quarry. Sanit was highly trusted by Narong as he was assigned to work as his political representative in the province. Because Narong was a high-profile MP who always held a ministerial post in a coalition government, he had to spend most of his time in meetings in Bangkok rather than in Phrae.¹⁵ It was Sanit who helped Narong run his business and also secured his electoral base among the local constituencies. Sanit was Narong's right-hand man who coordinated with public officials and local business associates, solved local conflicts, and offered various sorts of help to villagers on a daily basis. He was also known as one of the most influential local strongmen, respected and feared by local people, and controlled a group of local tough guys and gunmen who were notorious for deploying violence against insubordinate villagers and opponents.¹⁶ People came to see Sanit as

¹⁴ Prassachaksattru is her husband family name.

¹⁵ Narong is not exceptional. Most of Thai provincial MPs, once they get elected, have a second house in Bangkok and spend time in their own home province only during weekend or electoral season.

¹⁶ Interview, local journalist, Phrae, 12 January 2010; interview, local official, Phrae, 9 January 2010.

they had no access to Narong directly. A client like Sanit turned himself into a new patron, or an agent who became a principal.¹⁷ Under these circumstances, Sanit was the one who had direct contact and control over vote canvassers and the vote base in Narong's constituencies. There was no problem as long as Narong and Sanit were on good terms.

The conflict started in the 1995 election. After having several members of his family elected to the Phrae provincial council, Sanit thought it was time for his family to enter national politics. He begged his old friend and patron Narong to file his daughter as a candidate of the Chart Thai party team. Narong denied the request, saying that Siriwan was not yet ready to be an MP. He suggested that she build and gain more political experience at the local level. Sanit was very disappointed with this decision after devoting his time and energy for Narong for a long time. Besides, given the fact that Phrae can have three MPs, putting Siriwan as a candidate would not affect Narong's power.¹⁸ From his perspective, his family deserved the MP position. Sanit and Narong fell out after this incident.¹⁹ Sanit knew that he had a chance to win as he controlled most of the vote canvassers in the constituencies, and also because Narong was recently cast in a negative spotlight with the "drug trafficking" allegation incident. He pulled all of his vote canvassers out of Narong's campaign, and joined the Democrat Party. Siriwan ran as a candidate under the Democrat Party, and she managed to defeat Narong with a big margin. The result made the headlines in all major newspapers, with the sensational phrase "Elephant [Narong] falls."²⁰

Siriwan's victory over Narong, six-time MP and former prime minister candidate, surely was a big surprise to national political observers, but it was not something unanticipated by Phrae people. One local political analyst said "[I]n Phrae, we are not really surprised that Siriwan got overwhelming support. In the past, Sanit helped Narong win the most votes of any candidate in the country. Why can't he do the same for his own

¹⁷ The principal-agent problems are discussed extensively in the literature on political behavior, particularly in the context of clientelism and electoral politics. The puzzle was focused on how the politicians, who are patrons, monitor the voters, who are their clients, to vote as promised (Lehoucq 2003; Muno 2010). But scholars have overlooked the relationship between candidates and vote brokers, who act as intermediaries between politicians and voters.

¹⁸ In 1995, the elections were still conducted under the multimember constituencies.

¹⁹ Interview, key vote canvasser of the Supasiri family, Phrae, 8 December 2009. See also *Matichon*, 16 December 2004: 11; *Khom Chat Luek*, 3 March 2002: 16; *Khom Chat Luek*, 17 December 2004: 3.

²⁰ *Matichon*, 6 June 1995; *Matichon*, 3 July 1995.

daughter?"²¹ Narong had been too complacent about his political support and had not paid attention to his constituency, relying solely on his vote canvassers. Siriwan and her father, on the other hand, had worked hard and taken care of people's problems on behalf of Narong for more than two decades. They were considered influential persons in the province, gaining loyalty from the lower levels of vote canvassers and the villagers. Local people called Siriwan "*mae liang*," a term used in the north to address an influential, well-to-do woman. Moreover, as a former aide of Narong and his team, Siriwan admitted that she knew their "tricks" and applied those same tricks to get herself elected. One powerful winning strategy was doing a big favor for the villagers by buying tobacco and other agricultural products from them at a high price during the electoral season.²² After this humiliating defeat, Narong decided to wash his hands of politics. He was, however, still actively involved in politics by supporting his followers and his own son to run for elections. The family feuds between the Wongwan and Supasiri families began in the mid 1990s, and elections in Phrae, which used to be relatively peaceful, have turned violent since that time. From 1995-2011, it became one of the most violent provinces in terms of numbers of election-related violent incidents and the overall death toll. Several vote canvassers of both the Wongwan and Supasiri families, including other political families and factions, were intimidated and killed in each election beginning in 1995. They became casualties of fierce conflicts among prominent families. Some of them got killed at the hands of their opponents, but some of them were slain because they betrayed or were disloyal to their bosses. Moreover, a few were killed by competing bosses because they refused to canvass for anyone.

In the 1996 election, Siriwan got elected again, this time with 130,322 votes, the highest in the province and among the highest of the country. But her Democrat team members failed to win their seats.²³ This outcome demonstrated that the factors most important to her victory were her popularity and strong personal vote canvassing networks, rather than the political party label or policies.²⁴ The other two winning candidates were new faces who came from another prominent family of Phrae—Auapinyakul. This election also included a dramatic upsurge in the already-virulent use of violence as part of election campaigning in Phrae. The province was identified by the national police as a

²¹ "Why Voters Dumped Narong," *Bangkok Post*, 16 July 1995: 20.

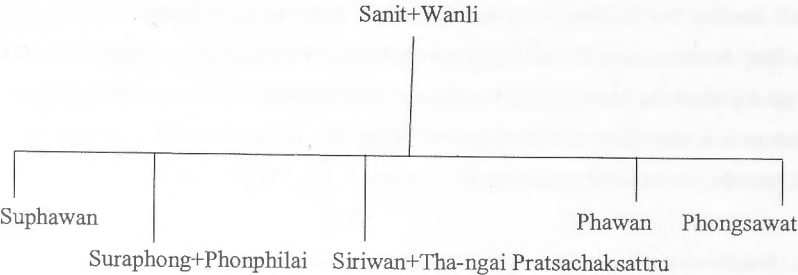
²² Interview, vote canvassers of Siriwan, Phrae, 9 December 2009 and 8 January 2010. Also see, *Bangkok Post*, 3 July 1995: 3.

²³ *Khao Sod*, 13 July 2000: 4.

²⁴ This was also true in the case of other successful MPs. The situation would be changed after 1997.

hotspot, with 21 hired gunmen operating in the province, including 10 former police. The Prime Minister, Banharn Silpa-archa, visited Phrae three times before the polling day and gave interviews that the province was full of gunmen and so-called “dark influences.” He expressed concerns that violent tactics would be used by a certain candidate to intimidate opponents to win elections.²⁵ Soon after his interview, more than 150 police officers from Bangkok were sent to Phrae. Several houses were searched and people were arrested along with the seizure of weapons. It turned out that the search targets were Siriwan’s tobacco processing facilities and her supporters’ houses. The search attempt was aimed to show that Siriwan was an influential figure who had many thugs working for her. A week before the election day, Siriwan complained to the media that many of her supporters were harassed and their houses were shot at during the night. After the election, Siriwan admitted that this election was much tougher than the first time she ran, and she and her canvassers had to fight hard to win this campaign. However, her key opponent, Vorawat Auapinyakul, claimed that Siriwan’s goons intimidated his vote canvassers into not campaigning for him.²⁶

Chart 7.2: The Supasiri Family (a selected genealogy)



Auapinyakul family

Another influential political family in Phrae which was involved in intense power struggle is the Auapinyakul clan, which had been in political alliance with the Wongwan family. The head of the family, Metha Auapinyakul, is a Sino-Thai businessman who earned the nickname “Columbus of Mining Enterprise” as he monopolized the mining business in Phrae and several other provinces.²⁷ Metha started as a bank manager in a

²⁵ *Thai Rath*, 19 October 1996: 17; *Thai Rath*, 28 October 1996: 1, 17, 23.
²⁶ *Matichon Sutsapda*, 3-9 December 1996: 31; *Thai Rath*, 19 October 1996: 2.
²⁷ Chai-narong 2000.

local branch of the Kasikorn Thai Bank in Phrae and later helped his father-in-law run a large tobacco plantation and a logging business. His wife's family, Kanthatham, was a prominent family in Phrae whose family line could also be traced backed to the governor of the Phrae region prior to the 1932 revolution. By marrying into an old established family, Metha has access to the world of the bureaucracy and its beneficial political connections. He expanded his father-in-law's tobacco plantation to 3,000 *rai*. Later he ventured into the mining business in Lampang province, a neighboring province of Phrae. Within six years he had become the founder and chairman of two mining companies, with joint-investment from wealthy families in Bangkok. He subsequently successfully obtained several concessions from the government in mining enterprises in many provinces around the northern region. One of his flagship companies, Banpu, was highly profitable to the extent that their son later registered it in the stock market. It has been one of the "hot companies" in the Thai stock market over the past several years. His company has been importing coal from state enterprises in China to Thailand. He was also involved in the activities of the Tobacco Association, in which the Wongwan family was very active as well.²⁸ The two families have had a good business and political alliance for two generations.

Metha was first elected to parliament in 1976. He failed a few times during the 1980s when he ran under the Democrat Party. Later Narong asked him to run under his team, and after that he became a prominent MP of the province along with Narong. Metha also joined Narong when Narong founded the Samakkhitham Party in 1992 and later moved with Narong to the Chart Thai Party. In 1996, Metha, like Narong, withdrew from politics and passed on his career to his sons and daughter. He has four children, three of whom have been involved in politics. The most successful one is his youngest son, Vorawat Auapinyakul (1959-), who started from the local level by being elected twice as the mayor of Phrae municipality, the first time in 1990 when he was only 31. He then ran for MP in 1996 under the banner of the Chart Thai Party and was elected handily. In addition, he also brought his brother-in-law, Tosaporn Serirak (1955-), who was running in the same team to enter parliament with him. Another Chart Thai candidate, who lacked the backing of a political family, failed to get himself elected.²⁹ That remaining seat, as mentioned, was won by Siriwan, a rising star who became famous overnight

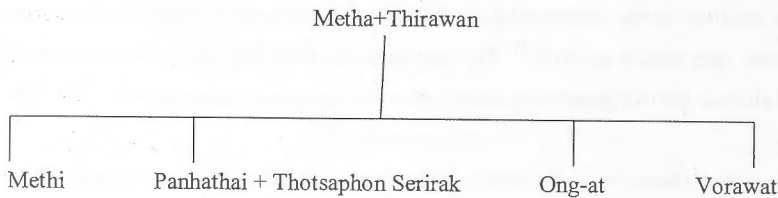
²⁸ Chai-narong 2000; *Than Setthakit*, 11 November 2004: 1, 2.

²⁹ Interview, local election commissioner, Phrae, 10 January 2010; Interview, local journalist, Phrae, 16 January 2010; Wanchart 2012: 66-71, 85-96.

after defeating the political giant Narong a year earlier. Therefore by 1996, Phrae politics had entered a new era of the young generation. They all were young bloods who were political heirs of established families in their home province. Tensions among the families remained high as no single family was capable of monopolizing the power in the province.

Four years later, election-related violent conflicts in Phrae further escalated to a new scale as a result of the combined effects of internal and external factors. The province witnessed a political realignment with the coming of an ambitious new national political party, changing styles of political campaigning, new political leadership, and new sources of capital.

Chart 7.3: The Auapinyakul Family (a selected genealogy)



Phrae political dynasties in the era of Thaksin and national political crisis, 2001-2011

The rise of Thaksin and his gigantic Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party brought massive change and a new power balance to the provincial political landscape. It was a sort of political tsunami that left only a few provinces untouched. Phrae was one of the most, if not the most, hard-hit provinces.

As mentioned above, political life in Phrae was defined by polarization even before Thaksin came to the scene. Three powerful political families were divided into two camps: the Supasiri clan versus the Auapinyakul and Wongwan clans. The polarization was, however, exacerbated by Thaksin’s party’s intervention. Siriwan’s family was still loyal to the Democrat Party, while the Auapinyakul family teamed up with the Wongwans under the banner of TRT. Thaksin and the Auapinyakul family were not

interested in power-sharing, and wanted to monopolize the political power in this province. Without Narong running, the Wongwan family played a less active role in this power struggle but the family decided to go along with the Auapinyakuls.³⁰ This led to a war of attrition between the two camps—the Supasiri family and the Auapinyakul-Wongwan alliance—which had equal capacity to employ violent tactics to win over their enemies.

Wongwan, Auapinyakul, Supasiri, and Thaksin

As discussed in Chapter 5, when Thaksin Shinawatra founded his Thai Rak Thai Party in 1998, he announced that his party would be a party that represented a different kind of politician—clean, young blood, highly capable, and modern. The strategy later changed as he realized that to be successful in elections, he also needed support from veteran provincial bosses. Around the country, Thaksin tapped into the resources and networks of influential political families. In Phrae, the Wongwan and Auapinyakul families were his targets.

Thaksin made his first move by approaching Narong to be the president of TRT's advisory board. As Thaksin aimed to gain a large number of seats in the north, his own home region³¹, and promoted himself as a prime minister of the northern people, he was looking for someone who had great influence in that sphere. Narong was a perfect choice as he possessed both a vast amount of wealth and political connections. He still had several politicians under his control and owned a business empire in the region. Narong and Thaksin had also known each other for a long period of time as businessmen originating from the north. The offer from Thaksin was accepted by Narong, and he confidently promised to Thaksin that he was going to help TRT win at least 35 out of 76 available seats from the north.³² Narong successfully exercised his power over several northern MPs by asking them to run under the TRT banner. Nevertheless, the appointment of Narong, who still had a tainted image from the drug incident, as key advisor to the party was criticized by the media and political observers as a step backward for Thaksin.³³

³⁰ Interview, Anuvat Wongwan, Phrae, 8 January 2010.

³¹ Thaksin's family comes from Chiang Mai province.

³² TRT finally won 54 seats in the north (the Election Commission 2001, <http://202.183.226/sorsor/numbermp.html>). Many of them were veteran MPs from Narong's faction.

³³ *Thai Post*, 11 June 1998: 1, 14.

Two incumbent MPs from the Auapinyakul clan were likewise approached by and eventually moved from the Chart Thai Party of Banharn to join the TRT. Their move made Banharn furious as it meant Chart Thai lost its two strongest candidates in the north. Narong was the broker behind this political deal.³⁴ In fact, there were many other local politicians in Phrae who wanted to run under the TRT as the party was gaining high popularity. But Thaksin and Narong were aware that only members of the Auapinyakul family were strong enough to compete with the Democrat team led by Siriwan. With the new electoral system of single seat districts, the party had to fill in the strongest candidate in each constituency. That was the reason that they tried very hard to convince both Vorawat and Tosaporn to switch parties. At the same time, Vorawat and Tosaporn were acutely aware that their campaign would be smoother if they did not go against the tide of popularity of the TRT and Thaksin.³⁵ It was therefore, a mutual benefit for TRT and their family to join forces. Tosaporn ran in Constituency 1, and Vorawat in Constituency 3. They were likely to win without any difficulty. TRT, however, had struggled to find a viable candidate to compete with Siriwan in Constituency 2. Rumors were spreading in Phrae that Siriwan was approached by TRT, and that she was asked to switch from the Democrat party to TRT. Later the story appeared in the national media through the speeches of the Democrat leader, Chuan Leekpai, that were given during the electoral campaign in several provinces. On one occasion, Chuan told the audience,

This election battle is unusual. I want to praise Siriwan or Mae Liang Tik, our Democrat MP, because she rejected the 50 million baht [US\$1.6 million] offer given to her by the TRT leader, asking her to switch parties. Once she rejected, Thaksin went to talk to her father, but she insisted she wanted to stay with the Democrat Party. So we have before us a committed politician who could not be bought off.³⁶

Siriwan came out to confirm this, adding that besides money she was also offered a ministerial post if she moved to join TRT. Thaksin later admitted that the talk between him and Siriwan's father actually happened, but said that it was Siriwan's father who

³⁴ *Manager Daily*, 8 November 2000: 14.

³⁵ *Naew Na*, 10 July 2000: 1, 6; *Manager Daily*, 18 November 2000: 11-12.

³⁶ *Khao Sod*, 18 December 2000: 8.

had invited him to meet at their house in Phrae.³⁷ The idea of having Siriwan join TRT was discussed in the talk, but no money or any position offered, according to Thaksin.³⁸ The dispute between the two sides about this political deal went on for almost four months. The Democrat Party used this point to discredit Thaksin and TRT, accusing them of “dumping” money to buy promising candidates. The factual details about this negotiation have remained unclear, but it is clear that there was an attempt to have Siriwan run as TRT candidate in the 2001 election³⁹. The attempt failed. The situation was therefore back to the normal polarization between the Supasiris and Wongwans/Auapinyakuls, albeit with the new involvement of the TRT.

The heat of the competition could be felt long before the election. In June 1999, Vorawat and Tosaporn organized a press conference accusing Siriwan and her family of murdering and intimidating their vote canvassers. Two were killed, two survived assassination, and another one who was editor of a local newspaper and their vote canvasser was intimidated into closing the newspaper.⁴⁰ They believed that the murders were politically motivated as one of those killed was a local journalist (who at the same time was a village headman and a vote canvasser of Vorawat) who ran a story strongly criticizing Siriwan’s role in obstructing local development in Phrae. According to them, soon after the story published, the journalist was killed.⁴¹ Siriwan denied the accusation and said it was merely an attempt by her rival to destroy her reputation prior to the election.⁴²

³⁷ According to Thaksin, he knew Siriwan’s family through Siriwan’s sister who has been working with him at his AIS (Advanced Info Services) company. Other TRT members further claimed that it was Siriwan’s sister who asked Thaksin to have Siriwan run for TRT in the 2001 election.

³⁸ *Matichon*, 4 September 2000: 1, 19.

³⁹ Siriwan said she was not in the negotiation meeting between Thaksin and his father, but she later knew from her father that Thaksin brought with him 20 million baht on that day. Siriwan claimed that her family pretended to go along but made a counter-offer that if Thaksin paid 70 million baht, she would move to TRT. Soon after, Chuan Leekapi called Siriwan asking about the deal, prompting Siriwan to hold a press conference to say she will not join the TRT. She believed that Thaksin was very furious with her not switching party. Interview, Siriwan Prassachaksatru, Phrae, 14 January 2010.

⁴⁰ In Thailand, it is common that local journalists work as vote canvassers for the politicians. Many political families either own local newspapers or have journalists on their payroll. Phrae is not exceptional (interview, local election commissioner, Phrae, 10 January 2010; interview, former PollWatch local committee, Phrae, 7 January 2010).

⁴¹ *Manager Daily*, 22 July 1999: 16; *Ban Mueang*, 2 June 1999: 1, 8. The dispute was over the issue of the development funds to support the local textile business that Vorawat and Tosaporn received from the government and channeled them to their constituencies. The project was accused by Siriwan of lack of transparency. Both groups used their own local media to attack each other over the issue (*Manager Daily*, 22 July 1999: 16).

⁴² *Manager Daily*, 29 July 1999: 8.

Closer to the polling day, more violent incidents occurred. On 21 January 2000, the house of the *kamnan* (sub-district head) of Mae Lai sub-district was bombed at night. The case was complicated as Vorawat claimed that the victim, who was his relative, was his vote broker and was attacked by his rival. The victim himself later went to report this incident to Siriwan, and gave an interview that the bomb was done by Siriwan's opponents aiming to "stir up" the situation. He was on the side of Siriwan.⁴³ On 22 November 2000, a sub-district councilor of Ban Mae Yang Thon was slain at his house. According to the police investigation, the murder was election-related violence as the police found that the victim was canvassing votes for TRT candidate, Vorawat, and the Democrat candidate at the same time.⁴⁴ On 12 December 2000, the Democrat's vote broker filed a complaint with the police, alleging that he was intimidated by Vorawat's campaigning staff.⁴⁵ A few days later, a vote canvasser of Tosaporn was reportedly harassed by knife by unknown people. She was asked to stop campaigning for the TRT if she wanted to stay alive. After this incident, Tosaporn urged the provincial election commission to "pay serious attention to the violent tactics employed by candidates in the electoral campaign, not just focusing on the vote buying activities, as the politics in Phrae turned more and more violent."⁴⁶ The day before the polling day, Siriwan's husband, who was a provincial police chief in Nan, a neighboring province of Phrae, was urgently transferred out of the area by order of the national police chief. The election commission made a complaint that he had been interfering in electoral competition in Phrae, helping his wife.⁴⁷ At the end, Vorawat and Tosaporn were able to secure seats in their stronghold. Siriwan likewise managed to get herself elected, though with difficulties and hardship, in the midst of Thaksin and Thai Rak Thai fever, particularly in the northern region, which is the home region of Thaksin's family. The animosity between the two camps remained.

The 2005 election turned out to be the bloodiest election in the history of Phrae. The incentives for both parties to win were equally strong. It was a chance for Wongwan/Auapinyakul, with the support of Thai Rak Thai, to monopolize power in the province by getting rid of their long-time enemies. For the Supasiri family, it was a

⁴³ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 29 January 2000: 2. In Thai local politics, especially after the decentralization process, it would be wrong to assume that relatives will always be on the same side. In several cases, they support opponents against their own family. In the 2011 general election, there were many prominent families running under different parties against each other.

⁴⁴ Interview, local official, 9 January 2010; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 22 November 2000: 17-18.

⁴⁵ *Matichon*, 12 December 2000: 14.

⁴⁶ *Matichon*, 18 December 2000: 14.

⁴⁷ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 7 January 2001: 10, 12.

battle to save their last stronghold—their home constituencies— and a share in provincial power.

The confrontation started long before the election. Siriwan's and her supporters' house were thoroughly searched by the police twice. First, in February 2002, some 200 policemen searched at several locations, including Siriwan's house, tobacco curing factories and gravel quarry, the home of the Democrat Party's branch president, and the Democrat Party's branch office. The search warrants cited that suspicious weapons and illicit drugs might have been hidden there, but nothing illegal was found. Similar searches were conducted in several provinces throughout the country ostensibly as part of the Thaksin government's efforts to suppress firearms and drugs. However, Siriwan viewed this "as political persecution aimed at discrediting the opposition."⁴⁸ In December 2003, Siriwan's brother's and sister's houses, and their vote canvassers' residences were searched again by police from Bangkok. Nothing illegal was discovered, but seven guns were seized. The police claimed the search was a part of the operation under the government's campaign against "influential people," launched since May 2003 (see Chapter 5). According to the police, Phrae became one of the search targets because politically-motivated murder cases occurred very often in the province.⁴⁹ There was a lurking report in the media that some members of the Supasiri family were put on the black list of "influential people" compiled by the provincial governor and police chief.⁵⁰ Tosaporn and Vorawat made their own list containing the names of the Supasiri family members, several of whom were local politicians, and submitted it to the Interior Minister. They showed evidence that some of the Supasiri family members were convicted and sentenced to jail for premeditated murder and illegal logging, and many other cases were still in court. Siriwan said she had nothing to do with those cases. She believed that she was unfairly treated by the government because she stood in the way of its goal to win all the seats in Phrae.⁵¹

The contest went from bad to worse in the run-up to the election when Thaksin announced the name of the candidate who would compete with Siriwan in Constituency

⁴⁸ *The Nation*, 28 February 2002: 2A.

⁴⁹ *Matichon*, 15 December 2003: 1, 5.

⁵⁰ *Thai Rath*, 19 July 2003: 1, 11. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Thaksin government asked every provincial governor and police chief to compile a list of influential figures in their province and send it to the government. But some TRT members also created their separate lists for the government.

⁵¹ Interview, Siriwan Prassachaksatru, Phrae, 14 January 2010; cf. *Khom Chat Luek*, 10 July 2003: 1, 14.

2. It was Anuvat Wongwan, political successor of *pho liang* Narong. Anuvat was a new face in politics. Prior to joining TRT, Anuvat was a businessman who was responsible for taking care of various parts of the Wongwan family business, including tobacco firms, in direct competition with Siriwan' family business. Though he previously spent most of his time doing business outside Phrae, his vote base was not smaller than Siriwan's, because of the popularity of TRT and the good standing of his family. Thaksin himself picked Anuvat as his choice to stand as the TRT candidate in the election, believing that only members of the Wongwan family could defeat Siriwan. He said to the voters when he helped his candidates campaign in Phrae on 11 December 2004,

People here have voted for Siriwan for several times. How was it?
Nothing has been getting better as she was with the opposition.
Choosing candidates from TRT is better. This time all of you should
change to vote for Anuvat. He can work with me side by side. I need to
have candidate from the Wongwan family compete in this constituency,
so we can fight. As long as I am a prime minister, I promise you all
gangsters must be taken down. I will take care of Phrae people, so
Phrae people do not have to be afraid of anyone.

He stayed overnight and slept at the famous local temple to show how serious and committed he was to Phrae people.⁵² This rousing speech by Thaksin occurred just two days after the violent incidents in which two key vote canvassers of Anuvat were shot. Adding fuel to that, Anuvat told the reporters that

I am never afraid of competing with Mae Liang Tik [Siriwan]... If I were afraid I would never run since Phrae Constituency 2 is a turf of influential people. If I do not run for an MP, this [dark influence] issue would never stop... and if I win this election over Mae Liang Tik, it would be a reward of my life.⁵³

A political battle between two major rival parties was clearly spiced up and underlined by the long standing rivalry between two most influential families.

⁵² *Khao Sod*, 15 December 2004: 31.

⁵³ *Matichon*, 26 January 2005: 11.

All tactics, both legitimate and dubious, were employed by both sides to win this high-stake election. Anuvat approached a group of old vote canvassers of his father, many of whom were currently working with Siriwan.⁵⁴ These veteran brokers were offered various kinds of material resources to switch sides to support Anuvat. During that time, a large number of Phrae villagers suffered from the problem of oversupply of agricultural products. They could not sell their products to the market, or were forced to sell them at a very low price. Anuvat owned many agricultural export business and tobacco firms, the total asset value of which was more than 1 billion baht. Therefore it was not a problem for his firm to spend more than 16 million baht buying a large amount of rice, corn, and tobacco from the farmers, including low quality products. He also asked his foreign business partners to help him buy the products. The conditions set by him were simple: he would not buy products from villagers in the clientelistic network of Siriwan.⁵⁵

Siriwan was thus in a relatively difficult position. Her father died in early 2002. Without Sanit's charisma and influence, a group of vote canvassers had switched their loyalties.⁵⁶ Her family business was affected by the political situation. The frequent search of her tobacco curing plants and other firms by the police disrupted her business. More importantly, big tobacco dealers in the north, especially Chiang Mai province, had not bought products from Siriwan's clients' network. This maneuver had heavily affected more than 1,000 traders, factory owners, and big farmers who worked with the Supasiri family. The Wongwan was able to muscle their influence over the tobacco industry community. One of Anuvat's brothers, Narit Wongwan, is the president of the Thai Tobacco Growers, Curers and Dealers Association (TTA) of Payao and Chaing Rai province, and very active in the national TTA.⁵⁷ At that time, it was shown that Siriwan's total asset value was 65.52 million baht, with 23.69 million baht debt. Siriwan's financial and political capital was significantly diminishing, and paled in comparison with the Wongwan's and Auapinyakul family's capital.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Interview, Anuvat Wongwan, Phrae, 8 January 2010.

⁵⁵ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 9 August 2004: 19; *Bangkok Post*, 22 January 2005: 3; *Ban Mueang*, 24 May 2004: 14.

⁵⁶ Interview, member of the Supasiri family, Phrae, 14 January 2010. This Supasiri clan member said many of their vote canvassers were "bought off with a huge amount of money" by their major rival.

⁵⁷ *Matichon* 15 August 2004: 11; *Than Setthakit*, 11 November 2004: 1, 2; *Manager Daily*, 25 May 2004: 14, 15.

⁵⁸ This difficult situation was admitted by their own people. Interview, member of the Supasiri family, Phrae, 14 January 2010; interview, key vote canvasser of the Supasiri, Phrae, 9 December 2009.

Both camps accused each other of using old-style political tactics such as threats, intimidation and violence to try to grab the seats. Some columnists lamented that the electioneering in Phrae looked like a war, not an electoral contest.⁵⁹ Vote canvassers were caught between two fiercely competing family-based factions. Those who were effective in gathering votes and those who had divided loyalties put their lives in danger. On 22 May 2004, Sivan Piangjai, a chairman of the Democrat Party branch in Phrae, was shot dead in his car and his body was dumped in the forest. The victim had been a long-time vote canvasser of the Supasiri family, when Sanit and Narong were still on good terms. He helped canvass a large number of votes for Narong to the point that Narong won a landslide victory every time he ran. When the two patrons split, Sivan followed Sanit and was a key man who had helped Siriwan defeat Narong with a big margin. When Siriwan first heard of the news, she rushed to see the corpse of Sivan and told the reporters that she deeply regretted what had happened because Sivan was her father's loyal aide and everyone in the Supasiri family loved him as a father figure to them. She admitted that Sivan was a key vote canvasser of her family and also a tobacco trader who had been fighting hard all of his life to protect the interests of farmers. Surprisingly, she begged everyone not to link this violent incident to the ongoing electoral contest. "Do not blame me, and I will also not blame anyone who did it. Every life has value. Good people's life should not be used as a political tool," she said.⁶⁰

No culprit was ever identified, like in most of the election-related violent incidents in Thailand, but local people and media believed the death was related to the business and electoral disputes. Some believed Sivan was killed because he was so influential in Constituency 2 to the extent that he could shape the voting results.⁶¹ Nevertheless, other local sources said Sivan, whose nickname was Uncle Buan, was lately more inclined to work with Anuvat as his family's tobacco business was in crisis with the problem of overstocking. He was reportedly going to sell his tobacco to Anuvat's Thepwoong firm, which was actively buying tobacco from farmers. The Supasiri family insisted that this news was not true, although they admitted that their family business and their clients, including Sivan, were facing a serious crisis since the dealers in Chiang Mai refused to

⁵⁹ *Daily News*, 2 February 2004: 33.

⁶⁰ *Manager Daily*, 25 May 2004: 14, 15.

⁶¹ Local observers noted Sivan controlled over 30 percent of votes in the Constituency 2 (interview, local politician, 13 December 2009; interview, vote canvasser of Siriwan, 9 December 2009).

buy their tobacco.⁶² Some of the Supasiris' supporting team claimed that Sivan told them before he was shot dead that he had been offered 200,000 baht from the opponent to not help Siriwan in this election.⁶³ Police investigating this case opined that electoral and tobacco business conflicts were the motivations behind this murder.⁶⁴

In the run-up to the election, Phrae witnessed a greater number of murders. On 4 December 2004, a president of Mae Yang Tan's Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO) was shot dead in his house. He was a vote canvasser of Siriwan in the 2001 election, but after being elected to the TAO president position in October 2004, he switched to support Anuvat.⁶⁵ Six days later, a group of gunmen attempted to assassinate a director of the TRT campaign team in Constituency 2 and his wife on the road. Both of them, who were key vote canvassers of Anuvat, survived. This family was working closely with the Wongwan family. Their daughter contested in the election for the Phrae Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) council in 2004 but lost in a very close race to a candidate from the Supasiri family.⁶⁶ In January, several houses of Siriwan's vote brokers were attacked with M16s, but nobody was injured or died. Police said the shootings were not designed to kill. Siriwan believed these attacks were acts of intimidation aiming to frighten her supporters to stop campaigning for her. After this incident, Siriwan's supporters put people to patrol in the area of their houses day and night.⁶⁷ One week before the polling day, there was a brawl between Siriwan's and Anuvat's teams when they were electioneering in one district. Siriwan accused Anuvat's team members of attempting to murder her by running her over. The other side claimed that their car was blocked and they were hit by Siriwan's supporters. Both sides filed a complaint at the police station.⁶⁸ The incident heated up a contest that was already tense in the final week of the campaign.

After a series of scandals and violent incidents months before the election, the three-time MP Siriwan was decisively defeated by Narong's son. Anuvat and Tosaporn both won in their constituency handily as their opponents were not as strong as Siriwan. After the

⁶² *Manager Daily*, 25 May 2004: 14, 15; *ASTV Manager*, 21 June 2004.

⁶³ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 2 February 2005: 18.

⁶⁴ *Daily News*, 24 May 2004: 1, 14.

⁶⁵ *Khom Chat Luek*, 6 December 2004: 2, 17; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 2 February 2005: 18.

⁶⁶ *Khom Chat Luek*, 11 December 2004: 1, 16. The Supasiris commented that this targeted family used to work for them but later turned against them and switched to the TRT (interview, member of the Supasiri family, Phrae, 14 January 2010).

⁶⁷ *Maticorn*, 18 January 2004: 11.

⁶⁸ *Manager Daily*, 25 January 2005: 1, 2.

official result came out, Siriwan went to file a complaint at the Election Commission office, saying that she was cheated. She vowed to fight till the end, “until I get justice in this election.”⁶⁹ It was clear that she had tried everything to keep her family’s only remaining MP seat but to no avail. With the success of Anuvat standing, the Wongwan family regained power and once again came back to dominate Phrae politics. Teaming up with the Auapinyakul family under the strong brand of Thai Rak Thai, they had the upper hand over Siriwan’s family, and stood a better chance to win in the next election. Backed by their strong political power, both the Wongwan and Auapinyakul families secured the profits of their businesses in the province.

The Supasiri family’s political power diminished at the national scene but remained fairly intact at the local level, as several clan members maintained their elective posts in municipal and PAO councils. Importantly, the popular and highly respected PAO president, Charnchai Silpa-uaychai (1954-2007), was also a political ally of the family. Born in a poor family in Phrae, he was a bright student who graduated from the prestigious Chulalongkorn Medical School and worked as a rural doctor for several years before turning to do business with friends in various sectors, including hospitals, hotel services, car sales, and money lending.⁷⁰ His political career started by being elected to the PAO council in 1995. In the following year, he was persuaded by Siriwan to be a team member of the Democrat Party and stand for Parliament, but he failed to get elected. After the failure at the national level, he came back to establish himself in local politics and was elected by PAO councilors to be the PAO President in 1997.⁷¹ In the first direct election of the PAO in Phrae in March 2004, Vorawat and Tosaporn tried to topple Charnchai by fielding a candidate who had a similar profile to him. Niyom Wiwatthana-ditthakun, a medical doctor-cum-businessman, was chosen and backed up by a political machine of the Wongwans and Auapinyakuls. Though it was not compulsory by law that PAO president candidates had to belong to a political party, Niyom ran under the official support of TRT. He and his key supporters knew very well that TRT was very popular in the area. Niyom was a PAO councilor from 1990 to 1999, a deputy speaker of the PAO council, and an elected senator in 2006. Besides, his wife had close connections to the Wongwan and Auapinyakul families.⁷² Niyom strongly believed that party brand and a backup from a powerful family could get him elected.

⁶⁹ *Manager Daily*, 9 February 2005: 15-16.

⁷⁰ Interview, PAO councilor, Phrae, 7 January 2010; *Matichon*, 1 March 2004: 8.

⁷¹ Before 2004, PAO president was indirectly elected by the PAO councilors, not by direct election.

⁷² Wanchart 2010: 72.

Charnchai, on the other hand, ran under the name of a local group, *Hak Mueang Pae* (Love Phrae).⁷³ However, it was not a secret that he received strong support from the Supasiri family. Charnchai won the competition, but the margin was not as big as his team expected. His victory was highly crucial not only for Charnchai, but for his allies like Siriwan's family, whose political space was squeezed out.⁷⁴

In late 2007, the political atmosphere in Phrae was stirred up again as the general election was going to be held in December, followed soon thereafter by the election of the PAO president in March 2008. It was the first national election after the coup in 2006 that ousted Thaksin. Polarization between political groups at the national level had inevitably intensified rivalries at the local level. The PAO president election was not less competitive, and the notoriety of Phrae's violent electoral politics came back to haunt people. On 23 October 2007, Charnchai, 53, a three-time Phrae PAO president, was gunned down in the morning at a public sports stadium. A gunman shot him from behind before fleeing on a waiting motorcycle, leaving his bullet-riddled body in a pool of blood. Since he was well-known and well-liked by local people, and local politicians around the country,⁷⁵ his murder case made big headlines in every daily newspaper and prompted the national and regional police to set up teams to hunt down the gunmen. This was a rare case for Thai police that election-related violent incidents were taken promptly and seriously. A week later, Crime Suppression Division officers, who had taken responsibility for the case from local police, arrested four men they believed to be behind the murder. According to the police, three of them were rookie gunmen who had been involved in local drug trade.⁷⁶ Another suspect was Jongrak Supasiri, who had been implicated by the other three men as the mastermind. Jongrak is a cousin of former Democrat MP Siriwan, and was well known among local people as an "influential" man. He was arrested before in the attempted murder of police officers, but later acquitted by court, and was sentenced by the Appeals Court to fourteen years in prison for the

⁷³ *Siam Rath*, 15 December 2003: 21.

⁷⁴ Interview, former team member of Charnchai's PAO campaign, Phrae, 7 January 2010; interview, key vote canvasser of Siriwan, Phrae, 9 December 2009.

⁷⁵ He was a former president of the PAO Association of Thailand, and had been very active in pushing for the decentralization plan and related local administrative laws.

⁷⁶ Interview, local police, Phrae, 13 January 2010. Police noted that because Charnchai was a very high profile and beloved politician, several professional gunmen dare not to take this job as they knew the police would investigate the case seriously. Thereby Charnchai's enemies hired the rookie, drug-addicted gunmen.

premeditated murder of a village headman in Muang Phrae district. The latter case has been pending at the Supreme Court.⁷⁷

Vorawat said Charnchai's slaying was politically-motivated as Charnchai had recently called a meeting with a group of 21 provincial councilors, and officially announced his support for the People's Power Party (PPP), the Thai Rak Thai reincarnated party. He also appointed his former opponent from TRT, Niyom, to be the PAO president's advisor.⁷⁸ Moreover, he was reportedly at odds with Siriwan and her younger brother Pongsawat Supasiri, who was speaker of the Phrae PAO. The major rift resulted from the dismissal of Pongsawat from the speaker's post by Charnchai in relation to the serious disputes over the bank loan for PAO projects.⁷⁹ Pongsawat, however, rejected the assumption by police that the murder was linked to a conflict over a bank loan. He said he would be "really stupid" if he really masterminded the murder, and also told the media that

my family's reputation had been severely damaged by the case. Siriwan and I have nothing to do with the murder of Charnchai. The real culprits behind the murder are those who are profiting from Charnchai's death, which is not my family.⁸⁰

Even though the Supasiri family persistently denied that they had anything to do with the tragic incident, local people seemed to believe that the family had somehow been involved. The conflicts between Charnchai and the Supasiris were not a secret among political observers in Phrae. Charnchai often came into disputation with the Supasiris over the control and allocation of the PAO budget. Many local sources also mentioned the strong interference of Siriwan in PAO activities as a major cause of their falling-out.

⁸¹ Charnchai's announcement that he was going to switch sides to support the Wongwan and Auapinyakul families was publicly known. This political move of Charnchai had

⁷⁷ *Khao Sod*, 4 November 2007: 2. These cases were previously used by Vorawat and Tosaporn during the 2005 election campaign to attack Siriwan.

⁷⁸ *Matichon*, 23 October 2007: 1, 12.

⁷⁹ Charnchai made a 120-million-baht loan from the Krung Thai Bank for PAO's 110 projects. Pongsawat stopped Charnchai from receiving the loan, saying it was not transparent. This prompted 21 councilors, under the control of Charnchai, to sign a letter to dismiss Pongsawat from the speaker's post. Pongsawat then turned to the Administrative Court to have the dismissal order reversed (*Bangkok Post*, 31 October 2007: 4).

⁸⁰ *Khao Sod*, 31 October 2007: 1, 15; *Bangkok Post*, 31 October 2007: 4.

⁸¹ Interview, PAO councilor, Phrae, 7 January 2010; interview, vote canvasser of the Supasiris, Phrae, 9 December 2009; interview, former local election commissioner, Phrae, 14 January 2010.

far-reaching consequences for the balance of power in the province. It meant that the Wongwan and Auapinyakul families were going to have a monopolistic control of Phrae politics at every level and the Supasiri family was going to lose everything. Charnchai's influence over local politicians was undeniable, as he controlled 21 out of 24 members of the PAO council. Many village headmen, *kamnans* and members of local administrative bodies also supported him. One *kamnan* who was a member of Charnchai's group said members of his group abided by Charnchai's political decisions without question as they "would readily back the elections candidates of political parties Charnchai supported."⁸²

Ultimately, it was clear that the Supasiris badly suffered from the whole incident. In the PAO president by-election on 9 December 2007, Anuvat, who had resigned from MP to run for this local position, won the contest in a landslide. He was chosen by both families to run in this by-election as it was important for them to have their own member heading the local administrative bodies. His easy victory came from the fact that he received unanimous support by former team members of Charnchai.⁸³ Two weeks later, the political strength of the Wongwan/Auapinyakul alliance was reaffirmed in the general election. They fielded three candidates, one incumbent and two new faces: Vorawat Auapinyakul, Niyom Wiwatthana-ditthakun, and Panhathai Serirak. Niyom replaced Anuvat who moved to a new position, and Panhathai, a fresh new face who had never run in any electoral contest, replaced Tosaporn, her husband who was banned from politics for five years after TRT was dissolved.⁸⁴ Panhathai is also a sister of Vorawat. Before entering politics, she was taking care of her family's mining business, Banpu Public Company Limited, and was also a board member of Sarin Property Company, a big real estate company.⁸⁵ Vorawat told the reporters that the reason

⁸² *Bangkok Post*, 31 October 2007: 16.

⁸³ *Matichon*, 6 November 2007: 10. Initially, there was a politician from another family, Phanom Khwan, wanted to run for the position. But senior figures from the Phanom Khwan family and the Wongwan family brokered the deal that Wongwan would spare the senate's post for the Phanom Khwan family in exchange for the latter family's decision not to stand for the PAO president election. The Phanom Khwan family was an old family who owns a hotel business in Phrae. One family member was elected MP once in 1976. They never succeeded in getting elected again after since. Their capital assets were relatively small compared to the Wongwan, Auapinyakul, and Supasiri families (interview, Phanomkhwan's family member, Phrae, 13 January 2010; more details on the Phanom Khwans in Wanchat 2012: 54-56, 82-84, 115-116; *Matichon*, 6 November 2007: 10).

⁸⁴ In the 2007 election, many family members of the banned politicians ran for MP to protect and maintain their family's political power.

⁸⁵ For details on Banpu Company, see its website: <http://www.banpu.com/th/>

Panhathai, a successful business woman, decided to run for this election was because she believed that voters “put their trust in the Auapinyakul family.”⁸⁶

In the final results, all three of them received overwhelming majorities from the voters. Siriwan and her Democrat team members were defeated again but by a larger margin this time. Charnchai’s murder had become a card played by the opposing team. Countless posters and banners were put up around the province during the election campaign, lamenting the tragic and untimely death of Charnchai. On 12 November 2007, right after filing candidacy registration at the election commission office, Vorawat and his team members rushed to the Phrae PAO sports stadium to pay homage to Charnchai’s soul at the spot where he was shot dead. They also asked for “moral support” from the late Charnchai so that they could win this election.⁸⁷ Though the justice system has not yet reached at the final verdict on the cause of his death, local people seem to have their own answers. A village headman in Phrae’s Long district, a hometown and political stronghold of Charnchai, said, “even a good man like the PAO president, who was well-known and well-liked by a lot of people, died because of politics. What would happen to smaller people like us?”⁸⁸ The Supasiri family was embarrassed at the Charnchai’s funeral when they had to leave early as they were not welcomed by his family. As one Supasiri family member lamented,

Charnchai’s death had been heavily politicized by our political opponents. His family did not even invite us to participate in the funeral ceremony... They treated us as an adversary. Now we do not have permanent friends, but we have permanent enemies.⁸⁹

After the 2007 election, Vorawat’s political career was on the rise. With a close connection to Thaksin’s sister, Yaowapa Wongsawat, and monopolistic power in his locality, he received a cabinet post in the Somchai Wongsawat government for the first time since he entered politics, and again in the Yingluck government.⁹⁰ Anuvat was successful and popular with his new post. Charnchai’s political network, *Hak Mueang*

⁸⁶ *ASTV Manager*, 14 November 2007.

⁸⁷ *ASTV Manager*, 15 November 2007.

⁸⁸ *Bangkok Post*, 31 Oct 2007: 16.

⁸⁹ Interview, Supasiri’s family member, Phrae, 14 January 2010.

⁹⁰ Unlike other provincial bosses in the Yingluck cabinet who lost their position after working for only a brief period, Vorawat firmly retained his seat. Yingluck has rotated him to several positions; currently he is minister of science and technology.

Pae, was integrated into his network and well supported by him through the PAO budget and jobs. For this reason, he has a strong and solid power base. In the latest PAO election in October 2011, however, Anuvat's power was challenged by his own ally. Vorawat publicly supported one candidate to stand against Anuvat as he felt that Anuvat was too independent and had not accommodated his demands. More importantly, in the general election in July 2011, Vorawat was very angry when he knew that Anuvat tacitly supported a candidate from the Bhumjaitai Party of Newin Chidchob (whom the Wongwan family had a close relationship with since the 1980s) to compete with his sister in Constituency 1. Eventually, Anuvat won the election over Vorawat's candidate as he acquired strong support from the majority of PAO councilors (22 out of 24).⁹¹ But a new line of conflict has then emerged—this time it was the Wongwan versus Auapinyakul family. Both sides claimed they truly represented the pro-Thaksin movement in Phrae. Vorawat used his ministerial post and his close relationship with Thaksin's sister to facilitate the Red Shirt mobilization in his constituency. Anuvat abandoned the Bhumjaitai Party and turned to Thaksin after the 2011 election; he and his PAO councilors also built a strong relationship with many local Red Shirt groups in Phrae in order to strengthen their power.⁹² Nevertheless, it is too early to foresee how the friction between the Wongwans and the Auapinyakuls will evolve.

After the 2007 defeat, the Supasiri family was in its weakest position ever. A family member was accused of involvement in a high-profile murder, many vote canvassers shifted their loyalty, and the family business was in a precarious condition. In the 2011 general election, Siriwan was given the 22nd position on the party list slate of the Democrat Party, a reward for being a long time loyal member of the party. It was the first time, however, since 1995 that she did not run for the constituency seat. The party list position that she received from her party was in a safe zone for being elected. For someone who once made headlines by "defeating a political giant," this move was clearly an embarrassing retreat. She fielded her two siblings to stand in the constituency seat, and both of them were overwhelmingly defeated by Pheu Thai candidates, led by Vorawat. They received only about half of the votes won by their opponents. Moreover, their family failed to mobilize a sizeable party list votes for the Democrat Party. In Phrae, the Democrat Party received only 22,231 party list votes, while Pheu Thai swept

⁹¹ *Maticchon*, 6 November 2011; Interview, Natthakon Withitanon, local scholar, 12 November 2011.

⁹² Interview, Natthakon Withitanon, local scholar, 12 November 2011.

61,867 votes.⁹³ This election reflected the Supasiri family's comparatively weaker financial and political position in the aftermath of two consecutive electoral defeats, as well as a series of violent scandals. The popularity of Thaksin and his allied parties definitely played a role in their loss to a certain extent. But if the family was in a stronger position, they would have been able to withstand those political forces—just as prominent political families in some other provinces have done.⁹⁴ The 2011 electoral contest was less bloody than the past elections; one vote canvasser was killed and few people were intimidated.⁹⁵ It was one of the calmest elections in the history of Phrae since 1995. Violence, however, could erupt again anytime in the coming elections as the struggle for a monopoly of power among provincial bosses is far from over.

“No permanent friends, only permanent interests”: a deadly polarized power structure

In summary, all three political families discussed in the case of Phrae province are economic elites of the province who actively engaged in political contestation. Electoral procedures have been a channel for them to enter into national politics to accumulate power and enhance wealth. It is also a theatre of conflict that defined the fortune of the families in political as well as financial fronts. Elections thus became a matter of life and death. Political life in this small but polarized province has been full of colorful stories of family feuding, conflicts, cooperation, intrigue, betrayal, ambition, temporary alliance, revenge, and deceit. It is clearly far from the smooth picture that has been long painted by the patron-client framework (see Chapter 1).

The economic activities in Phrae are still relatively backward, not highly developed, mainly based on primitive accumulation, political connection, and the exploitation of natural resources. The local economy is mainly based on low-skill, labor-intensive industry, which generally requires a license or concession from the government. As explained in Chapter 3, these lucrative concessions are commonly acquired by and secured through political connections. Having access to political power through elective posts is therefore highly important and rewarding, and wealth and political power

⁹³ See full details of Phrae election results in http://phrae.nfe.go.th/songlib/popup.php?name=knowledge1&file=p_readknowledge&id=45

⁹⁴ For the prime examples of the political clans who could survive Thaksin's attacks, see Chapter 11 on Buriram's Chidchob and Chapter 12 on Sa Kaeo's Thienthong.

⁹⁵ *Khao Sod*, 28 August 2011: 1; *Banmueang*, 5 June 2011.

support and enhance each other. Electoral battles between powerful business-political families are fiercer than normal elections, and require vast resources and resoluteness to defeat the rivals. This imperative encourages politicians, like the Wongwans, the Supasiris, and the Auapinyakuls, to build strong political machines and to resort to violent practices.

Election-related violent incidents in Phrae, as well as in other provinces in Thailand, are fundamentally shaped by local factors. The situation seemed to change slightly after 2001, but local conditions remain more decisive than national factors. Though the national factors, notably Thaksin government's "war on influential people" and Thaksin's interference in consolidating local power, played a role in exacerbating conflict, violence was primarily determined and perpetrated by local players. The root cause of electoral violence is the fierce struggle between provincial bosses to have a monopoly of power. Power seekers resort to violent methods to eliminate their key rivals or disloyal followers, paving the way to electoral victory and domination. The next chapter discusses the political situation in Nakhon Sawan, a highly fragmented power terrain recorded as the most violence-prone province in central Thailand.

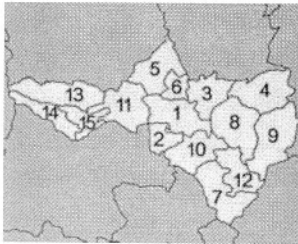
Nakhon Sawan: Fragmented, deadly political terrain



Nakhon Sawan is located in the upper north of the central region, popularly known by its old name of Paknam Pho. It is one of the largest provinces in the central region of Thailand, in terms of both population and area, well known for the convergence of the Ping, Wang, Yom, and Nan rivers to form the Chao Phraya. It is an important gateway to the northern region. Neighboring provinces are (from north clockwise) Kamphaeng Phet, Phichit, Phetchabun, Lop Buri, Sing Buri, Chai Nat, Uthai Thani and Tak. Nakhon Sawan began as a primary settlement of Chinese immigrants in Thailand and the large established Chinese community has driven the provincial economy since the early 19th century. Most of Nakhon Sawan's prominent local business groups and political families are descendants of the Chinese settlers. Because of the convergence of major water ways, the province has been central to river traffic and a hub of commercial trading and transportation. It is therefore not surprising to find that the owners of river and bus transport companies established themselves as important business leaders. Nakhon Sawan is also one of the most important areas for rice production in the country.

Agriculture is still a primary economic activity and income source for people in the province, with rice, corn and cassava as main products. As an agriculturally based province, the personal annual income of Nakhon Sawan (70,035 baht) is lower than the national average (160,556 baht).¹ Beyond that, there are small and medium-sized agricultural-related and food industries and firms investing in the transportation business. The construction business sector is large and profitable, as the Nakhon Sawan Federation of Industries and the Nakhon Sawan Chamber of Commerce has turned the province into a modern logistics hub linking the central and the northern regions.² Most Nakhon Sawan local politicians either directly own or have a share in construction companies through family connections. With a population of over one million people, the province currently has six MP seats.³

Nakhon Sawan is subdivided in 15 districts (*amphoe*), and these districts are further subdivided into 130 sub-districts (*tambon*) and 1328 villages (*muban*).



- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Mueang Nakhon Sawan | 9. Phaisali |
| 2. Krok Phra | 10. Phayuha Khiri |
| 3. Chum Saeng | 11. Lat Yao |
| 4. Nong Bua | 12. Tak Fa |
| 5. Banphot Phisai | 13. Mae Wong |
| 6. Kao Liao | 14. Mae Poen |
| 7. Takhli | 15. Chum Ta Bong |
| 8. Tha Tako | |

¹ Data based on National Economic and Social Development Board 2010.

² *Prachachat Thurakit*, 8-11 April 2010: 24.

³ The number was reduced from seven to six seats in the 2011 general election in line with the changing number of constituency seats nationwide. See Election Commission of Thailand, Nakhon Sawan Province's website for further information: <http://www2.ect.go.th/home.php?Province=nakhonsawan>

The “rainbow” province: a fragmented power landscape

The political landscape in this province is different from many others in Thailand as it has never been dominated by just one or two prominent political families. Several families have fiercely competed for power involving different maneuvers in a volatile political atmosphere. No single group has ever succeeded in controlling politics and business in Nakhon Sawan. When one group or individual strove for monopoly power, the bloodshed was inevitable. Unlike Nakhon Si Thammarat (see next chapter) and Phrae, political parties played a less critical role than political families and factions in electoral contestation and political alignment. Nakhon Sawan is thus usually called a “rainbow province” in the sense that its political landscape is always comprised of several groups and personalities with different political ideas and affiliations. The absence of a power monopoly makes political competition in this province fierce and bloody.

We can see from the table 8.1 below how fragmented the political landscape of Nakhon Sawan has been. In the past, except in 2005, the province has never been dominated by one political party, let alone one political family or faction. Its fairly large size is not sufficient to explain its political fragmentation as there are other larger provinces, including Nakhon Si Thammarat and Buriram⁴, that have been controlled by one party or single family. The dispersal of power in Nakhon Sawan stems from the fact that no local political groups have been able to gain access to and maintain monopolistic control over the local resources required for establishing predominance. If polarization is the situational factor that determines violent political outcomes in Phrae, it is fragmentation that produces the same outcomes for Nakhon Sawan.

⁴ Both provinces have been allotted nine MP seats as compared to six in Nakhon Sawan.

Table 8.1: Nakhon Sawan MPs and its political parties

Election date	Number of MP seat	Number of political party winning seats
22/4/1979	6	1
18/4/1983	7	2
27/7/1986	7	2
24/7/1988	7	3
22/3/1992	7	3
13/9/1992	7	4
2/7/1995	7	4
17/11/1996	7	4
6/1/2001	7	3
6/2/2005	7	1
2/4/2006 (only TRT competed)	7	1
23/12/2007	7	5
3/7/2011	6	3

Source: the Election Commission of Thailand; Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior.

Leading political families: Khamprakob, Nirot, and others

Khamprakob: from politics to business

The Khamprakob family is the oldest political family in Nakhon Sawan, and one of the country's oldest active political families.⁵ Sawas Khamprakob (1919-), the head of the family and a veteran politician, is a man of humble origins. After receiving a law degree from Thammasat University, he began his career as a lawyer before entering politics. In 1942, he was elected to the Nakhon Sawan municipal council and appointed mayor when only 25. Then he was persuaded by senior politicians to run for MP in 1946 under the Democrat Party, of which he himself was one of the founders. He was successful in his first and second elections. In 1957 he shifted to the Serimanangkasila Party of Phibun Songkhram, and again in 1969 switching when he joined the military-backed Sahaprachatai Party of Thanom Kittikachon. After the 1973 uprising, he founded his

⁵ As previously discussed, the phenomenon of Thai political dynasties is relatively new, especially compared to neighboring country like the Philippines. Almost all of the families currently holding power in Thai politics entered national politics after 1973. There were only a few political families whose power could be traced back to the 1940s or 1950s: among them, Chaiyanan from Tak, Limpaphan from Sukhothai, and Angkinan from Phetchaburi.

own party, Kaset Sangkom and was elected consistently until 1983. Since then he has switched parties on several occasions in order to be elected in almost every election. However, after failing twice in 1995 and 1996, he stepped down—undoubtedly with an impressive record of being elected MP 12 times, and holding 8 ministerial posts in total. He also successfully brought his nephew, Prathueang Khamprakob, and his son, Veerakorn Khamprakob (1954-), into Parliament as team members. Prathueang was first elected in 1969 and won seven elections subsequently until he stopped in 1995. Veerakorn, the third son of Sawas, first became MP in 1983 and was elected six more times until being banned in 2007 when the Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT), a party for which he was a committee member, was dissolved. The family's power was at its peak between the 1980s and the 1990s, especially in 1983, 1998, and 1992 (September), when clan members secured three out of seven MP seats in the province.⁶ No other family in Nakhon Sawan has surpassed this performance. Other families were only able to have one member elected in each election.

The Khamprakob family was not wealthy when it entered politics in the early 1940s. Sawas did not run any businesses when he started his political career. He initially built his family to be politically influential. According to Sawat, it was an honor for his family to be called a “political family of Nakhon Sawan” and he wanted to pass on the political legacy to the next generation.⁷ Later on, by the late 1950s, however, after gaining access to government resources through ministerial posts and having been in power for decades, his family managed to connect political power to wealth. The family has invested in the construction business by founding a company named “Sahakan Witsawakon” in 1954⁸ and later expanded to real estate as it possessed and had accumulated vast tracts of provincial land over a long period of time. Khamprakob is a political clan with wide connections, a plentiful war chest, and a large entourage. Several politicians in Nakhon Sawan who were active and well-known in the 1990s and 2000s were former Kamprakob political aides.⁹

⁶ Tawatchai 1998: 101-103; *Wattachak*, 27 July 1997: 15-16.

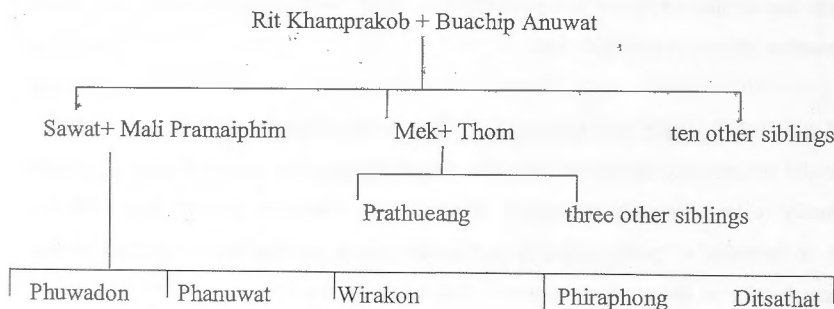
⁷ Tawatchai 1998: 103.

⁸ Noppanan 2006: 336.

⁹ Interview, local politicians and local journalist, Nakhon Sawan, 1 September and 5 September 2010. See also *Prachachat Thurakit*, 24 February 2000: 2.

The political influence of Khamprakob has been in decline since the late 1990s. Sawas, as head of the team, lost to a new young opponent in the 1995 poll.¹⁰ A year later, in the following election, Veerakorn was the only family candidate elected. Some new faces emerged and successfully challenged the family's power. Though Veerakorn managed to secure his seat, his position was unstable because he, at that time, belonged to the scandal-ridden Terd Thai faction in the Chart Thai party, led by Narong Wongwan from Phrae. Many members of this notorious faction were accused of corruption and political scheming. The media and coalition parties harshly criticized their behavior, finally forcing Prime Minister Banharn to dissolve parliament and call for new elections.¹¹ Veerakorn then needed to look for a new political party with which to run for election.

Chart 8.1: The Khamprakob Family (a selected genealogy)



Nirot: from business to politics

The Nirot family, prominent in the province, was different from the Khamprakobs. They accumulated wealth for decades until becoming one of the most successful local capitalist groups in Nakhon Sawan before turning to politics. Thavorn Nirot (1927-2008), head of the family, a hard-working Thai entrepreneur of Chinese descent, pioneered a bus company until it became one of the biggest in the northern region during the period from the 1970s to the 1990s. He started from nothing, helping his mother sell goods in the Nakhon Sawan city market after World War Two. Then he used some of his savings to buy a few trucks carrying passengers and agricultural products from the city

¹⁰ Sunai Julapongsathon (1951-) was a young blood politician from Chart Pattana who defeated Sawas, and since 2001 has become one of the most prominent Nakhon Sawan MPs under Thaksin's allied parties, and a vocal supporter of the red shirt movement.

¹¹ See more discussion of this political episode in Chapter 11, as Buriram's most powerful political family, the Chidchob, also belonged to this notorious faction.

to outer districts. He also bought rice from farmers and sold it to merchants in the Pak Nampo market, a highly profitable venture that earned him healthy income. In 1957, he expanded his family business to chicken farming and within a few years his “Thavorn” farm became the largest chicken farm in the north. In 1962, the family started running a bus service between Nakhon Sawan and Chaing Mai. Their transportation business grew rapidly; the number of buses increasing from 35 in 1962 to 250 in 1979. At its peak, Thavorn Company had 500 buses running from Bangkok to the north and between the north and northeast, and employed a total of 2,000 staff. Since the bus company was highly profitable, the Nirot family had dropped other business investments, such as rice trading, and focused mainly on transportation.¹² In order to run a legitimate business and enjoy a business monopoly, the transport company needed to acquire concessions from the government to operate along permitted routes. Every company competed fiercely to obtain these lucrative concessions. As discussed in Chapter 3, the surest way for local businessmen to acquire government concessions (and other rents) is to have a direct access to parliament by fielding family members in elections. The Nirots followed this path as well.

Like other large Sino-Thai families, Thavorn has five children. He sent them all to study in the United States with his own money, a practice that only a wealthy family could afford to do, particularly in the 1970s. Once his family business was relatively stable, Thavorn decided to enter local politics. He was elected as an independent candidate for Nakhon Sawan municipal council in 1958, and never failed to be elected until he passed away in 2008. In 1983, he formed a local political group called “Phatthana Banmueang” (develop the homeland) which subsequently dominated the municipality. As a head of “Phatthana Banmueang,” he was elevated to mayor. He was very successful in developing Nakhon Sawan municipality into one of the most beautiful and most comfortable in which to live.¹³ The success earned his administration many national awards and repeated victories in municipal elections. From 1958 to the early 2000s, electoral competition in the Nakhon Sawan city municipal area was very peaceful, compared to situations in local and MP elections in other districts. The Nirot family secured a power monopoly in the city municipality for several decades without any real

¹² Thavorn 2008: 54-57.

¹³ Nakhon Sawan municipality provides the cheapest clean tap water to every household. Its huge green public park, full of sport equipment, was voted the best park in the country. Thavorn also renovated the municipal office and turned it into a gigantic and elegant building based on the model of the American White House. On top of that, municipal schools offer English, Chinese, and Arabic language courses to their students.

challenge. This was partly due to the family's solid financial support. Almost all prominent local business families or groups in Nakhon Sawan city had supported the Nirot family in elections; several of them provided money for campaigning while others fielded key members of their families as candidates for municipal council in Thavorn's team. In this way, municipal projects were fairly distributed through the group's networks. This powerful collection of business owners covered a wide range of economic activities, from transportation, hotels, department stores and retail outlets, private hospitals, agricultural machinery, construction hardware, tourism business, to media ownership.¹⁴ The Nirot's family business, which expanded from buses and chicken farming to real estate, land development, hotels, shopping malls, tourism, cable TV, publishing, and construction after the 1990s, was another major source of electoral funding.¹⁵ The membership of the municipal council was composed mainly of wealthy, urban businessmen. These affluent candidates' campaigning did not rely much on political parties or any formal associations. They campaigned on their own rather than under a party banner, and used business employees as vote canvassers.¹⁶ A strong war chest plus the widespread popularity of Thavorn's team among local voters made the polling contests a non-event. Nonetheless, after being in power for 23 years and finishing his fifth term, Thavorn finally stepped down as a mayor in 2004 when he was approaching 74 and passed his political legacy to his second son, Jitkasem Nirot (1952-). Without a long-standing charismatic patron, the city municipal elections have become more exciting. Nirot's power was challenged by the Kamprakob family.

Though the Nirot family's political power is enormous, its territory has been limited primarily to the city. The family has never been able to assert control over rural areas of the province. Pinyo Nirot (1951-), the eldest son of Thavorn and thus far the only MP from the clan, always ran in Constituency 1 covering the city municipal area. Pinyo obtained a bachelor and master's degree in business management from the United States. After graduating and returning to Thailand in 1976, he helped his father run the family business for a period of time before starting his own businesses, a water bottle-producing factory and a dog farm, which were not successful. He took a keen interest in politics,

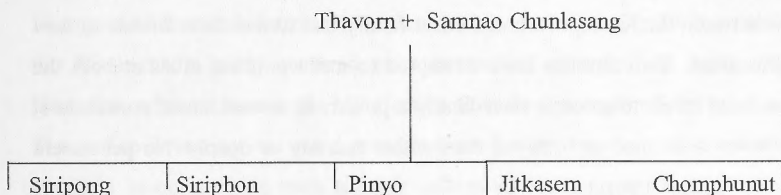
¹⁴ Key families were Tanvisut, Sunthon Lekha, Sattayaprasert, and Kunawong, owner of a big department store in Nakhon Sawan city (*Prachachat Thurakit*, 17 January 2000: 23; Nakhon Sawan City Municipal 2005).

¹⁵ *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 10 (16 December 2001- 15 January 2002): 12-14.

¹⁶ Murashima's study (1987) of elections of Nakhon Sawan city municipal council in 1980 had similar findings. He found that most candidates on the city council, except one, did not belong to a political party, and political parties themselves made no attempt to play a role in the local elections. Given this situation, he noted, candidates in city council election give little thought to using party names to attract votes.

was elected to municipal council from 1985-1992, and worked as a key vote canvasser for the Khamprakob family for several years before standing for national elections himself. He ran for MP in March 1992, under the Samakheetham Party¹⁷, and was elected with strong family support.¹⁸ He has hopped from one party to another in every election since then. In 1995, he shifted to the Chart Pattana Party, then to the Chart Thai Party in the 2001 election, and later again joined the TRT to run for the 2005 election as a head of the TRT's Nakhon Sawan team. Pinyo credited Suphanburi province's progress to Banharn, of which he attributed to the unity of Suphanburi politicians under the lead of big boss Banharn. He aspired to do the same for his home province. The problem with Nakhon Sawan, according to him, was the lack of cooperation and unity among politicians belonging to different political parties and factions.¹⁹

Chart 8.2: The Nirot Family (a selected genealogy)



Pinyo's view, one shared by many Nakhon Sawan politicians, was true. Apart from Khamprakob and Nirot, there were several other families or individuals who had come to share power in the province since the 1970s. Among them are included Sawitchat, Asuni na Ayutthaya, Intharasut, Julapongsathon, Jamsai, Siriwannasan, Panudomlak, and Rojanasathien. One particular figure from the Rojanasathien family is worth discussing. Boonchu Rojanasathien (1921-2007) a renowned banker and tycoon from Bangkok, was not born in Nakhon Sawan but had been elected as Nakhon Sawan MP six

¹⁷ As mentioned in Chapter 3, this party was founded after the 1991 coup by the coup group "the Khana Raksa Khwam Sangop Riaproi Haeng Chat" (the National Peacekeeping Council- NPKC). The party, led by Phrae MP Narong Wongwan, attracted many old and new politicians from the powerful families in several provinces.

¹⁸ His personal financial status was also fairly strong. In September 2001, Pinyo publicly declared that he has total asset 136.8 million baht, and his wife 17.87 million baht (*Khao Sod*, 1 November 2001: 1, 10, 11).

¹⁹ Interview Pinyo Nirot, Nakhon Sawan, 3 September 2010. Also see his comments in *Khao Sod*, 4 October 2000: 3.

times from 1986-1996, with the help of an influential Nakhon Sawan boss.²⁰ During the 1970s-1990s wealthy businessmen from Bangkok who wanted to be MP would find a “backward” province, in which they had reliable local political brokers, and spend considerable money (through the local boss’s political machine) to get elected. Nakhon Sawan was a perfect place for this kind of political operation as the political landscape was wide-open with no supreme boss. Reportedly the first time Boonchu ran in Nakhon Sawan in 1986, he was sarcastically called “Boonchu-James Bond” as he spent stupendous quantities of money, distributed in black leather suitcases, buying votes and buying local leaders to work as his vote canvassers.²¹

None of above families or individuals managed to stay in power for long. They were elected once or twice as MP then disappeared from the political scene. In every election, new political faces made their presence felt. Alliances between families, business elite clusters, and other personal followings were loose, unstable, and often shifting. The relationship between the Khamprakob and Nirot family had turned from friends to foes within a generation. Both families have attempted to make political allies at both the national and local levels to enhance their family’s power. In several cases, nonetheless, their allies have abandoned or betrayed them either secretly or openly. No permanent friends, just permanent interests.

Nevertheless, not all big business families in Nakhon Sawan became political. Several of them preferred doing business and stayed away from direct involvement in politics. One main reason is the volatile and violent nature of political contestation in the province.²² Another is that their business operation did not depend heavily on political connections or coercive power. Instead they were able to directly access the financial institutions in Bangkok or, in some cases, foreign investors for loans and technology, bypassing local power and relying on more market-based mechanisms. Their sources of revenue mainly come from service businesses such as hotels and education; from trading (equipments,

²⁰ Nawi 1993: 100-106; *Thai Rath*, 20 March 2007.

²¹ Interview, local politicians and local journalist, Nakhon Sawan, 1 September and 5 September 2010. Prior to “landing” in Nakhon Sawan, Boonchu had been elected twice as an MP for Chonburi. But he inconveniently ran into conflicts with *kamnan* Poh, supreme boss of Chonburi, so he had to find a new place to contest. At the same time, there was another big business tycoon from Bangkok, Thanet Telan, running for MP in Nakhon Sawan who failed to get elected as he had no local boss helping him. This “stray dog” practice, however, has been in decline since the 2001 elections as it became ineffective with growing political localism and new electoral laws, in accordance with the 1997 constitution, which demanded that candidates have strong roots in their constituency.

²² Interview, Supoj Wangpreedalerkul, vice president of Nakhon Sawan Federation of Industries, Nakhon Sawan, 6 September 2010.

stationery, steel); or from manufacturing (sugar, and others).²³ Families that have been active in politics, on the contrary, are running types of businesses that need political power to enhance and protect their wealth. The construction, transportation, land development, and real estate businesses create enormous wealth for local elite families. As discussed in Chapter 3, these lucrative rent-seeking enterprises entail fierce competition for the profitable, long-term, and monopoly contract, license or concession from the government. Intimidation and other forms of violent tactics were frequently employed in order to ward off business rivals. Political power is desirable for stronger connections to government and virtual immunity from prosecution against illegal activity. Consequently, in Nakhon Sawan, the stakes of electoral contest are extremely high. Unlike Phrae, in which violence began in the late 1990s, Nakhon Sawan has witnessed electoral violence regularly since 1979. It has many cases been intertwined with business conflict.

Examples of election-related violence are recorded as follows. In 1979, a candidate from the Kitsangkhom party survived an assassination attempt.²⁴ In April 1983, Pravat Nianphak, a front runner in the MP election from the Kitsangkhom Party, was shot dead. The police investigation noted two motives for the murder: electoral conflict and conflicts in competition with another influential local figure over a marble mining concession.²⁵ In July 1986, a Ratsadorn Party vote canvasser was intimidated until he had to flee his home.²⁶ In the March 1992 election, Nakhon Sawan was declared a hot zone by the police national office. A few days later, an Ekkaphap Party vote canvasser was killed; this incident prompted an angry outburst from Bunchoo Rojanasathien, a head of the Ekkaphab Party and also MP from Nakhon Sawan, criticizing the complete failure of the police to prevent violence.²⁷ The 1995 election witnessed another violent incident when Democrat candidate Bunphan Sutthiwiriwan was attacked while speaking to his audience from a campaign truck. He survived, but his henchmen were injured.²⁸ The situation was not better in the 1996 election as vote canvassers from several parties were intimidated by tough guys during the campaign. Each party pointed to their

²³ Siriwiriyakul family (education, hotels, and sugar factories) and Itthichai Charoen (construction machinery, steel trading) are primary examples (EGAT survey 2011: 9-5 – 9-6; interview, Supoj Wangpreedalertkul, Nakhon Sawan, 6 September 2010).

²⁴ *Matichon*, 17 April 1979: 1, 12.

²⁵ *Matichon*, 10 April 1983: 1, 12.

²⁶ *Matichon*, 16 July 1986: special 3.

²⁷ *Matichon*, 19 March 1992: 21; *Matichon*, 20 March 1992: 21.

²⁸ *Thai Rath*, 24 June 1995: 17.

opponents. A brother-in-law of a prominent candidate from the Chart Pattana Party was also shot dead in his car a few days before polling day.²⁹

Electoral violence in Nakhon Sawan reached its peak in the run up to the general elections in 2001. The more democratic constitution promulgated in 1997 could not eradicate the violent electoral campaign methods as long as the local political and economic conditions remained largely unchanged. Furthermore, a decentralization process implemented since 1997 made the wide-open political space in this rainbow province even wider. "New men," emerging from less wealthy and less established family backgrounds, competed with the political heirs of elite families and displayed "the required savvy for the age of mass electoral politics."³⁰

New and old local elites: fragmentation, consolidation and breakdown of political order

Up until the late 1990s, all politicians in Nakhon Sawan, though affiliated with different parties and factions, came from similar backgrounds and knew each other very well. They were basically alumni of the same elite school in the province and children of prominent families. As some of them said, "it was a close-knit community. We had known each other as friends or as schoolmates. We hobnobbed with each other and we always met at parties and social events even when we were political rivals."³¹ Another one made a similar comment: "if you went to ten different social events in Nakhon Sawan, you still met the same group of people."³² This sociological underpinning had crucial consequences for the pattern of electoral violence in the province. As one experienced politician explained, "the elites in Nakhon Sawan do not kill each other. When we have conflicts, it is our subordinates who are killed. For example, vote canvassers who work for the enemy would be got rid of in order to teach them a lesson." However, he admitted that the situation has changed since decentralization: "now the elite start to target each other because 'new elites' have emerged. These new elites come

²⁹ *Thai Rath*, 15 November 1996: 23.

³⁰ See Kerkvliet (1995) for a comparable phenomenon in Philippine politics during the 1950s-1960s.

³¹ Interview, Somsak Arunsurat, Deputy Speaker of the Nakhon Sawan Provincial Council, Nakhon Sawan, 2 September 2010.

³² Interview, Vimolsri Chaopreecha, former candidate for Nakhon Sawan MP, Nakhon Sawan, 4 September 2010.

from different backgrounds. Not everyone knows each other like the old days. It is getting more fragmented and alienated.”³³

On the evening of 29 January 2000, five days before the PAO elections, Prasert Viboonrat, Nakhon Sawan PAO head caretaker, was shot dead from a long distance by an unknown sniper while giving a speech to a large crowd of voters. The hit man used a laser rifle with a silencer for precision and sound reduction. This type of assassination is not common in Thailand, especially locally, because a gun with this high caliber is very expensive (500,000 baht) and usually not available in the market. It is restrictedly to authorized government officials in a few special units.³⁴ The state has employed professional snipers to suppress demonstrators in 1973, 1992 and most notoriously in 2010. Prasert’s murder thus alarmed the police and local politicians around the country. The year 2000 was called “the year of voting dangerously” as there were nation-wide direct elections for local offices (Provincial Administrative Organization [PAO] and sub-district); direct elections for the senate; and the general election (with a completely new electoral system).³⁵ The national police chief sent his best investigative team to Nakhon Sawan to solve the case.

Prasert came from humble origins, with no parents or relatives involved in politics. Unlike children from elite families who went to prestigious high schools and universities in Bangkok or even abroad, Prasert received a modest education from local schools. When he was young, he was well-known for his unruly behavior with a gang of ruffians. This reputation continued after he was elected to village headman and then sub-district head in his hometown. With a keen interest in politics, he tried to run for MP once but completely failed, so he turned to local politics and has been elected a provincial councilor since the early 1990s. Veerakorn Khamprakob supported his first time election victory but the relationships deteriorated after one of Veerakorn’s village headman vote canvassers was killed. Veerakorn suspected Prasert was behind the murder. After this incident, Prasert went to work for Pinyo Nirot instead. Decentralization and its newly empowered local administrative bodies provided good opportunities for Prasert who had relatively low social and cultural capital to make his presence felt in the circle of

³³ Interview, long-standing Nakhon Sawan provincial councilor, Nakhon Sawan, 2 September 2010.

³⁴ According to police files, this rifle has been used only once in local political conflicts when a notorious Phetchaburi godfather, Somchit Phuangmani was shot dead on 2 April 1980 (*Matichon Sudsapda*, 8-14 February 2000: 89-90). See Chapter 10 for politics behind Somchit’s murder.

³⁵ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 2 February 2000: 12, 18.

Nakhon Sawan elite. In late 1998, Pinyo supported his running for PAO chairman, which he won over the incumbent, Amnat Sirichai, by only one vote.³⁶ The victory was a result of heavy lobbying. Some members denied voting for him, reportedly saying “I will not support a thug to rule the province.” This statement made him furious.³⁷

Nevertheless, Prasert was aware that some provincial councilors and locals did not welcome him, so he attempted to change his tainted image. He donated his own land to the local school and distributed large amounts of the PAO budget for local development. He made many new allies to ensure he could win the next election clearly. But making allies brought with it enemies. Prasert was asked by a former MP, Thirawat Siriwanasan, prominent businessman-turned-politician and a patriarch of the Siriwanasan family, to help his wife get elected as senator for Nakhon Sawan in exchange for helping Prasert’s team to win the PAO election.³⁸ The alliance between Prasert and the Siriwanasan family was frightening to other provincial political groups since both had a strong voter base and the latter had an ample war chest (from a construction business and a rock mining and crushing plant) to enable victory in local or national elections.³⁹ Prasert’s interference in the senate election upset two other powerful families who had fielded their family members for the contest.⁴⁰ Therefore, Prasert created a lot of enemies who wanted to get him out of the way. According to local observers, his enemies collectively contributed money to hire professional gunmen to get rid of him.⁴¹

A series of violent incidents occurred after Prasert’s death. A village headman, who was a vote canvasser for Prasert’s team and Nakhon Sawan MP, Prasart Tanprasert, was shot and seriously injured on the PAO polling day. Prasart said he knew who the mastermind of the murder was, and announced to the public: “I have never been afraid. I go here and there alone. However, if I were shot dead, I can guarantee that another MP in this province will be surely dead... my family will not let him live.”⁴² After the senate elections, a losing candidate’s house was attacked, but he survived. He believed that it

³⁶ At that point, prior to 2000, election to chairman of the PAO was an indirect election, decided by provincial council members.

³⁷ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 2 February 2000: 17.

³⁸ Two elections were being held at about the same time: PAO elections on 5 February 2000 and senate elections on 4 March 2000.

³⁹ The Siriwanasan family owned a large construction company called “Pornsawat Construction” established in 1969 (Noppanan 2006: 331).

⁴⁰ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 2 February 2000: 17; *Prachachat Thurakit*, 24 February 2000: 2.

⁴¹ Interview, local journalist, Nakhon Sawan, 1 September 2010.

⁴² *Khao Sod*, 6 February 2000: 2.

was intimidation to make him refrain from protesting voting results, in which he had accused a certain winner of vote buying. Another local politician's house was bombed. The police investigation found that the attack was related to electoral conflicts over the senate poll.⁴³

The situation calmed down for a few months before erupting in bloody scenes again before the 2001 national election. Political power remained fragmented. The only change was the brand of political party with which each politician affiliated. Pinyo's father forced him to shift from the Chart Pattana to the Chart Thai Party due to a "gentleman's agreement" Thavorn gave Banharn before the elections. A few former MPs, including those from the Siritwannasan family, followed Pinyo to the Chart Thai Party. Veerakorn, along with some of his subordinates, abandoned the New Aspiration Party to join the Thai Rak Thai Party of Thaksin. He was, however, frustrated with one of his team members who switched allegiance at the last minute deciding to run for Chart Thai with Pinyo. "This was most ungrateful," he said. Finally Veerakorn had to ask his beloved 81-year-old father Sawas, who had been disqualified from senate elections (as a result of committing electoral laws violation) to run in that constituency.⁴⁴ Other veteran MPs scattered and ran under different parties. The Democrat Party recruited a young candidate, Kasem Panudonlak, from a construction tycoon family to stand in Constituency 2. Every party had high hopes of winning Nakhon Sawan, in which seven House seats were up for grabs. The election results reflected highly fragmented power in Nakhon Sawan, as Chart Thai and TRT won three seats each and the Democrat Party one. TRT could not repeat its miraculous performance in Nakhon Sawan, as it had in other northern provinces. Worse, Veerakorn, a six time MP and team head of the TRT team, and his father, suffered stunning defeats from their opponents from Chart Thai. It was the first time since 1946 that Nakhon Sawan had no MP from the Khamprakob family. Local observers pointed out that the family's defeat was largely the result of "old school" electioneering tactics, relying mainly on force and intimidation, employed by the team members, of which voters increasingly disapproved.⁴⁵ Another startling fact in this election was that all incumbents, with the exception of Pinyo, failed to get re-elected.

⁴³ *Krungthep Thirakit*, 25 March 2000: 13-14, and *Khao Sod*, 6 June 2000: 2.

⁴⁴ *Bangkok Post*, 2 December 2000: 3.

⁴⁵ Interview, local journalist, Nakhon Sawan, 7 September 2010.

In the end, betrayal and violence were business as usual in volatile Nakhon Sawan. Vote canvasser intimidation was reported to the police. A group of thugs wandered around in several areas, particularly in Constituency 3 and Constituency 4, forcing rival vote brokers to switch allegiance or stay neutral. According to one vote canvasser, he was asked by goons

with whom do you want to work? If you do not want to work with us, it is ok. But stand idle. Do not help anyone. Otherwise you will be in trouble. I have warned you. You know.⁴⁶

A Chart Thai vote canvasser in Constituency 4 barely survived an assassination attempt. Another vote canvasser in Constituency 5, a deputy mayor of Paisali municipality, was shot dead during the campaign. He had been working for a TRT candidate before being asked to switch to another party. However, it was reported that he kept canvassing votes for both candidates at the same time, and this possibly led to his tragic death.⁴⁷ A few months after the poll, another famous *kamnan* in Takli district who failed to get his boss elected was shot dead by hired gunmen.⁴⁸ It was not until the following election in 2005 that power in the province was consolidated. It was achieved through the collaboration of local and national bosses.

TRT targeted Nakhon Sawan in the 2005 election, as it was one of the few provinces in the north that the party had yet to control. The “War on Dark Influence,” (see Chapter 5) used effectively in other provinces, had failed in Nakhon Sawan. The provincial governor submitted a list to the government, identifying only seventeen unimportant figures as “influential people.” It was reported that the governor was afraid of the provincial “big bosses” so he did not dare to mention any significant names. Thaksin was highly upset with his list.⁴⁹ The situation went from bad to worse when unknown gunmen shot and severely injured a local police officer working to suppress the dark influence. The investigation found that politically backed local mafias were behind this attempted murder as the government’s tough policy on mobsters damaged their underground business.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See a full interesting report in *Krungthep Thurakit*, 1 January 2001: 5.

⁴⁷ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 19 November 2000: 1, 4.

⁴⁸ *Daily News*, 19 July 2001: 2.

⁴⁹ *Khao Sod*, 11 July 2003: 1, 12.

⁵⁰ *Thai Rath*, 30 December 2003: 1, 19.

It was clear that Nakhon Sawan bosses formed a political force to be reckoned with. Nevertheless, Thaksin succeeded, for the first time in the history of the province, in persuading all local factions to join forces under his party, asking them to forget past mutual animosities. By mid 2003 Thaksin approached Pinyo, the most respected and charismatic figure, to act as his political mediator. Though Pinyo's task was difficult, he succeeded in persuading all incumbent MPs from different parties (bar one) to run under TRT.⁵¹ TRT's slogan was "Seven Nakhon Sawan MPs united into one. The full potential for Nakhon Sawan development." Banyin Tangpakorn, the TRT candidate in Constituency 6, commented to the media "there will be no more conflict among politicians like in Suphanburi... and we will definitely develop our province into a bigger one than Suphanburi."⁵² The result was emphatic. The Thai Rak Thai party swept all seven seats in Nakhon Sawan in the 2005 general election, and polling was relatively peaceful compared to previous elections. Only one violent incident occurred.⁵³ TRT campaign head, Pinyo, admitted that TRT popular policies (particularly the war on drugs and universal healthcare) combined with strong candidates were two crucial factors in his team's landslide victory.⁵⁴

Under the new circumstances, the province managed to have a brief period of peaceful politics from 2003-2006. The municipal and PAO elections that were held several months prior to the national election went smoothly because the deal between prominent bosses had been resolved. The Nakhon Sawan city mayor election, held on 7 March 2004, was a contestation of power between two families who were both now working under Thaksin. Jitkasem Nirot, Pinyo's younger brother, represented his family, while Veerakorn backed up one less well-known candidate to compete with Jitkasem. Both claimed to have support from Thai Rak Thai party, but finally it was clear that TRT supported Jitkasem when Yoawapa Wongsawat, Thaksin's sister and deputy leader of TRT party, came to Nakhon Sawan municipality on 28 January 2004 to support

⁵¹ Interview, Pinyo Nirot, Nakhon Sawan, 3 September 2010. In the beginning Veerakorn did not cooperate as he saw Pinyo as his long time rival. Finally, Thaksin had to intervene by fielding Pinyo in the party-list slate (15th) and Veerakorn in a constituency-seat.

⁵² *Daily News*, 23 November 2004: 36. He mentioned Suphanburi of Banharn because Chart Thai party was the strongest competitors of TRT in Nakhon Sawan in that election.

⁵³ On 29 December 2004, a vote canvasser of the TRT candidate in Constituency 5 was shot dead (*Matichon*, 18 January 2005: 14).

⁵⁴ Interview Pinyo Nirot, Nakhon Sawan, 3 September 2010.

Jitkasem.⁵⁵ The competition went peacefully and Jitkasem won by overwhelmingly margins, continuing his family's long dominance of municipal politics. The PAO election that was held a week after the city municipal election also went peacefully. All Thai Rak Thai MPs, except Veerakorn, unanimously supported Amnat Sirichai, former PAO head and businessman, to oppose the incumbent, a brother of Prasert Viboonrat. TRT allowed Amnat to officially use the party brand in his campaign. Amnat won the election easily and there were no political murders. After the election, Amnat gave an interview expressing satisfaction that

now with the unified MPs, it is easy for me to work. I have always wanted politicians in Nakhon Sawan to work together. The goal is now achieved and the conflicts are decreasing. The PAO can rely on MPs in bringing government budget to the province. Then the development will go in the same direction.⁵⁶

A few months later, Thaksin's government held a cabinet meeting in Nakhon Sawan as a gesture of gratitude to Nakhon Sawan politicians and voters. It was on this occasion that Thaksin gave a speech that later caused an uproar from the opposition, as he said

I will be straightforward here. Those provinces who put their trust in us [TRT Party], we will take special care of you. Of course we need to take care of people in the whole country, but time is limited. So we need to spend time in the provinces that trust us in particular. The provinces who placed little trust in us, have to wait. It is not that we are not going to treat you, but we need to set priorities.

He promised Nakhon Sawan significant development as people in the province unanimously voted for TRT candidates.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Prachachat Thurakit*, 23 February 2004: 33. Jitkasem is the second son of Thavorn and replaced his father as a manager of Thavorn Farm Company in 2003 before running for mayor. The family company was not in a good position during the time he oversaw it as it had to compete fiercely with other emerging bus companies. Eventually it had to sell 80 % of their buses to another big political family that owned a transportation business empire in Nakhon Ratchasima, the Cherdchai family. The economic crisis in 1997 and spike in oil price during the Iraq war led the family transport business to endure a heavy loss (*Than Sethakit*, 30 March 2003: 29; interview Pinyo Nirot, Nakhon Sawan, 3 September 2010).

⁵⁶ *Khao Sod*, 14 May 2005: 25.

⁵⁷ See Thaksin's full speech in *Thai Rath*, 1 November 2005: 1, 14, 16. Pinyo mentioned that Thaksin's cabinet had approved 4 billion baht fund for mega development projects in Nakhon Sawan, but after the coup the budget was cut in half.

The situation, however, changed dramatically after Thaksin was toppled by the 2006 coup. With the fall of Thaksin, and strong pressure from the military, the factions splintered into many directions. The political landscape returned to a rainbow situation. Pinyo, as a former head of the TRT team, was not able to resist army pressure therefore he left TRT and switched and went to a small party.⁵⁸ Veerakorn and Banyin abandoned Thaksin too and joined another new party.⁵⁹ The result of the 2007 election showed the most fragmented result in the history of the province, as its seven seats were shared by five parties (see table 8.1 above).⁶⁰ Some local patrons have tried to capitalize on the power vacuum created by the coup. The most ambitious of all was a PAO president Amnat Sirichai. He aimed to monopolize power, and his political ambition made electoral competitions intense and bloody again. Many lives were lost, including his own.

Amnat Sirichai: ambition with a (violent) cost

On the night of 11 July 2010, during the World Cup Soccer final match, Amnat was assassinated by a professional sniper while watching the exciting game along with thousands of others in the courtyard of Nakhon Sawan city hall. He died in exactly the same way as his predecessor Prasert Viboonrat, killed by a precision rifle from afar. The logic and motives behind his murder were also similar to those of Prasert.

Amnat (1942-2010) came from a very poor family, a son of Nakhon Sawan farmers. As a boy, he had to work in several menial jobs, including fetching vegetables for pigs, to support his own education. His marriage to a daughter of a Nakhon Sawan provincial councilor opened the door for his political career. He was recruited by his father-in-law to be a team member for provincial council elections, and was consistently elected after 1983.⁶¹ In 1997 councilors voted him head of PAO but he was replaced by Prasert Viboonrat a year later after fierce lobbying. He staged his comeback in 2004, with strong support from Pinyo and the TRT. Afterwards, he was selected by his peers to be the president of the Northern PAO Federation (2004-2006) and president of Thailand PAO

⁵⁸ He moved to Ruamjai Thai Chat Pattana Party led by Chettha Thanajaro and Suwat Liptapanlop.

⁵⁹ Both of them moved to Matchima Party led by Pracha Leophai-ratana and Somsak Thepsuthin.

⁶⁰ Interview Pinyo Nirot, Nakhon Sawan, 3 September 2010). Other observers also mentioned the interference of the military in the electoral campaign (interview Nakhon Sawan city municipal councilor, Nakhon Sawan, 2 September 2010; interview, local vote canvasser, Nakhon Sawan, 3 September 2010).

⁶¹ See biography of Amnat in his creation volume (2010), and also *Khao Sod*, 14 May 2004: 25; *Post Today*, 16 July 2007: a12.

Association (2006-2008) respectively. As a president, he was a very vocal critic of the government's implementation of decentralization, which lacked enthusiasm and clear direction. This bolstered his popularity among local politicians. When the Constitutional Court dissolved the TRT party in 2007, Amnat suggested to his local colleagues the idea of creating their own party named the "Thong thin Thai Party" (Thai Local Party) to stand in the general election. He believed that the party could win at least 20 seats, as more than a hundred capable MPs were banned from competing.⁶² The idea was well accepted by many local politicians, but failed to materialize.

Back in Nakhon Sawan, Amnat tried to monopolize power by fielding his own people in every position including helping his wife get elected in the 2008 senate election.⁶³ He supported many local candidates in the TAO polling contests, which put him in conflict with other influential MPs in the province who usually control the TAOs through their followers.⁶⁴ Furthermore, he planned to control the city municipality that was permanently dominated by the Nirot family. One of Amnat's close political associates was recruited to oppose Jitkasem at the end of his term.⁶⁵ According to the unwritten local code of conduct, this move was deemed ungrateful because the Nirot family had helped him politically and financially for a long time.⁶⁶ For this reason, Pinyo decided to run against Amnat in the 2008 PAO presidential election. Pinyo's goal, as a leading member of the Nirot family, was not to win but to teach Amnat a lesson that winning power in this province "was not that easy."⁶⁷ It was Amnat who won, but he had to put more energy and investment into his campaign than expected. Amnat's ambition did not stop there. He planned to quit as PAO president when the national election was announced, then have his key associate to replace him, to assist him to run for MP. He chose to associate with the Bhumjaitai Party of Newin Chidchob, formerly right hand man of Thaksin, in support of his ambitious plan.⁶⁸ The Bhumjaitai Party, newly established in 2008, aimed to win as many seats as possible and to strengthen their

⁶² *Siam Rath*, 1 June 2007: 1, 9; *Matichon*, 24 July 2007: 8.

⁶³ His wife was subsequently disqualified because she did not fully disclose her total assets to the National Anti-Corruption Commission, an offense that violated the constitution. However, Amnat fielded in his wife's younger sister in the by-election and got her elected.

⁶⁴ Interview, TAO president for a sub-district in the Muang district, Nakhon Sawan, 3 September 2010. Generally in the past, candidates for TAO president would be supported by the Nirot, Khamprakob, or Panudomlak families, and only a few ran independently.

⁶⁵ Interview, local journalist, Nakhon Sawan, 7 September 2010.

⁶⁶ Interview, hotel businessman and former candidate for Nakhon Sawan MP and mayor, Nakhon Sawan, 5 September 2010; interview, local journalist, Nakhon Sawan, 7 September 2010.

⁶⁷ Interview, Pinyo Nirot, Nakhon Sawan, 3 September 2010.

⁶⁸ See political role of Newin and the Bhumjaitai Party in Chapter 11.

power in the 2011 general election, especially in the north and northeast. The party had been using its control of the Interior Ministry to enhance its electoral prospect nationwide by tapping into the networks of leading local politicians, especially PAO presidents, in each province. Amnat became their perfect local partner. He was ambitious, popular, and resourceful. He promised to win at least five seats in Nakhon Sawan for the party in exchange for a ministerial post.⁶⁹ Each of Amnat's strategies undoubtedly created new enemies for him as he trespassed on other bosses' political territory. Amnat confided to one of his friends that the modern era of Nakhon Sawan politics would be controlled by his Sirichai family, instead of the old elite families.⁷⁰

Amnat's death was caused not only by his political ambition for power monopoly, but also by fraudulent business schemes. His financial situation was precarious before he became PAO president, as he was in debt from failed investments in provincial hotels and entertainment complexes. One of his companies was about to be declared bankrupt.⁷¹ This forced him to use his political power to recoup his financial losses. The PAO budget was not distributed transparently and he heavily interfered in bidding for PAO construction projects. Amnat's family owned a construction company and it always won the contracts for PAO construction. No other companies had a chance, even Amnat's key business associates. Amnat's egregious self-interest made his allies angry and eventually they turned on him. According to Nakhon Sawan government officers, provincial construction bidding was one of the most scandalous activities as it involved corruption, coercion and violence. Moreover, the few honest government officials who disapproved of the PAO president's dubious practices were intimidated and suspended.⁷² Many past murders in Nakhon Sawan were related to conflicts in the construction business, and the perpetrators had never been prosecuted.⁷³ A number of corruption cases regarding PAO activities were investigated by the National Anti-Corruption

⁶⁹ Interview, city municipal councilor, Nakhon Sawan, 2 September 2010.

⁷⁰ Interview, Amnat's friend and a former candidate for Nakhon Sawan MP, Nakhon Sawan, 4 September 2000.

⁷¹ Finally, there was a court order delivered on 31 March 2008 to freeze his company's assets. See Ratchakitchaanubeksa, 125: 75 (1 July 2008): 109.

⁷² Interview, senior government official in city municipality and PAO, Nakhon Sawan, 2 September and 3 September 2010. First, the bidders who had no political connections would be offered money to withdraw. If they refused to accept the money, they would be intimidated or assaulted.

⁷³ Usually, perpetrators were never arrested. In some rare cases, however, the former candidates for MP, the TAO president, or municipal councilors were charged by the police but later acquitted. See, for example, *Khom Chat Luek*, 1 September 2004: 3; and the court case in 2005 in *Matichon*, 30 September 2005: 12; *Thai Rath*, 30 September 2005: 19.

Commission. Amnat had several cases pending court decision and he was being sued by several opponents.

Business and political conflicts surrounding Amnat exacerbated the situation in Nakhon Sawan. Prior to his death on 12 July 2010, a series of violent incidents against local politicians occurred. In February 2008, a vote canvasser for a candidate for Chumsaeng municipal councilor was shot dead. A few days later, the house of a construction businessman who was running for the senate was bombed; he had accused his opponents of violating the electoral laws and the case was under investigation. In September 2008, a losing PAO councilor candidate was shot dead. The police found that he was involved in many legal cases. He, along with the losing candidate for PAO head from Chart Thai Party, lodged several complaints against Amnat after the election, alleging that Amnat broke the law during the election campaign. Not long after that, one of Amnat's political advisors survived an assassination attempt; he was injured but his driver was killed. At about the same time, the house of well-known former TRT MP Banyin Tangpakorn was bombed with a heavy M67, fortunately leaving no casualties. The conflict between Amnat and Banyin was well known to local people. In February 2010 there was another political casualty. Paichit Panudomlak, a powerful, senior PAO councilor and father of former Nakhon Sawan TRT MP Kasem Panudomlak, was brutally gunned down by a group of gunmen. He and Kasem were preparing to run for MP under the TRT banner in the 2011 election, and were expected to win.⁷⁴ His death heightened political tensions and led to expectations that more violence would follow. Amnat's death was thus not a complete surprise, but nonetheless came as a terrible shock because it was so brazenly executed in a public space.⁷⁵

Those behind Amnat's murder have never been identified, let alone arrested. Many people definitely benefited from his death. Nevertheless, Amnat's assassination brought the province into political chaos. The breakdown of political order that had existed since the coup went from bad to worse. Corrupt police and some figures from the criminal underworld adeptly exploited the situation. According to the local voters, the by-election of PAO president, to replace Amnat, on 5 September 2010 became an "ugly battle

⁷⁴ Details of these political murders were reported in Nakhon Sawan local newspapers. See, in particular, *Khao Siam*, 16 August 2010: 1-4.

⁷⁵ Interview, journalist and friend of Amnat, Nakhon Sawan, 4 September 2010.

between crooks and thugs.”⁷⁶ The two leading candidates were well-known for their unruly and dishonest behavior, and both of them were running as proxies of their bosses. One was a former policeman, boxing camp owner, and avid gambler. He used to supply protection for local mafias who owned gambling dens, underground lotteries and brothels. Later he turned to local politics and was elected provincial councilor but continued his work with gangsters. He was independent of Amnat and had his own support from influential figures.⁷⁷ In this by-election in particular, he was financially supported by an illegal cartel, comprising a corrupt high ranking police officer and a big boss from a neighboring province, Uthaitani. The second leading candidate was a gangster turned politician who owned a large underground business, involving prostitution, underground lotteries, gambling, drugs, and illicit transportation. His construction cartel also monopolized business in several provinces in the lower north by using force to scare away his business rivals. A power vacuum in Nakhon Sawan gave him a perfect opportunity to expand his business empire.⁷⁸ Another candidate was also a former police officer notorious for his extrajudicial killings. When he quit the police, he established a security company monopolizing protection business in Nakhon Sawan.⁷⁹ His brutality scared off opponents, including provincial council members. Amnat appointed him to a PAO administrative position and assigned him many “dirty jobs.” He had created many enemies for himself and Amnat. This candidate was proud of his record. “I am a fighter,” he declared, “if I did not fight, I could not live in Nakhon Sawan and I would not stay alive till now. Political struggle is very tough here.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Interview, senior local journalist, Nakhon Sawan, 7 September 2010; a small vendor, Nakhon Sawan city hall, 7 September 2010; former Nakhon Sawan MP, Nakhon Sawan, 5 September 2010; government official in charge of overseeing Nakhon Sawan PAO head’s by-election, Nakhon Sawan, 3 September 2010.

⁷⁷ Interview, local journalist and hustler, 3 September 2010

⁷⁸ Interview, local journalist, Nakhon Sawan, 7 September 2010; hotel businessman, Nakhon Sawan, 6 September 2010. This boss used to be Amnat’s business partner but later turned against him when Amnat stopped providing his company with contracts. I was told that he struck a lucrative deal with the candidate he supported— if the candidate won the election, this boss will get five percent commission fee from all PAO construction projects. It should be noted that during the war on “dark influence” carried out by Thaksin government in 2003, this strongman was put on the blacklist by the authority and prosecuted on many charges. However, he made his political comeback after the coup.

⁷⁹ Every big company and government unit had no choice but to hire security guards from his company because that was the only way to ensure “safety” would be provided. Interview, local journalist, Nakhon Sawan, 7 September 2010.

⁸⁰ Interview, candidate for Nakhon Sawan PAO president’s by-election, Nakhon Sawan, 4 September 2010.

At the beginning, Pinyo announced that he was going to oppose these two candidates for the PAO chairman post, but he withdrew his candidacy at the very last minute.⁸¹ He explained in the press conference that his mother requested he not stand because it was too dangerous and not worth risking his life.⁸² Behind the scenes, however, Pinyo's pullout was the result of political negotiation between political heavyweights in Nakhon Sawan after the killing of Amnat. They agreed that they had to temporarily unite to avoid the situation degenerating into full-scale war between warring factions. They agreed to give support to one candidate (the boxing camp owner) unanimously; Pinyo was asked to withdraw in exchange for a pledge from other groups that they would not field candidates opposing the Nirot family in the city municipal election. The political territory was divided up so that the province could have a provisional peace. Pinyo accepted the deal as he knew too well that since his family already controlled the city municipality, further control over the PAO, which involved a larger budget and massive manpower, would not be welcomed or tolerated by other factions.⁸³

Despite the deal, violence still broke out as one small political faction did not agree to the negotiation. They fielded a strong candidate and put up a real fight. In the run up to the election, both sides tried hard to lobby PAO councilors for support. When lobbying failed, violence was employed. On 20 August 2010, two weeks before the election day, Meekhom Sakulrat, a leading PAO councilor for Payuhakiri district and a wealthy businessman, was shot at point blank range and died in front of the Nakhon Sawan Polytechnic School. It was known that he was approached by one candidate asking for help, but he chose to help another candidate instead. This killing was perpetrated as a signal to other councilors to choose the right side. After this incident, several councilors, and Amnat's wife, fled the province to Bangkok and did not return until the poll was over. Nobody wanted to risk becoming the next victim.⁸⁴ Neither candidates nor their canvassers dared to canvass votes publicly. The campaign virtually stopped—no rallies,

⁸¹ He had already collected the registration form from the election commission office and put up his campaign billboard. Interview, Saranyoo Athitsayanyakorn, director of Nakhon Sawan election commission, Nakhon Sawan, 7 September 2010.

⁸² *Khom Chat Luek*, 11 August 2010. Pinyo also told me that "it is not difficult to win this election, but I do not know how long I could stay alive after that." Interview, Pinyo Nirot, Nakhon Sawan, 3 September 2010.

⁸³ Interview, long-time vote canvasser and municipal member, Nakhon Sawan, 7 September 2010; election commission officer, 7 September 2010. Jitkasem Nirot was also aware of the issue of power-sharing. When asked about the prospect of running for MP, he firmly said no, saying that the Nirot family already has his brother as an MP. Interview, Jitkasem Nirot, Mayor of Nakhon Sawan city municipality, Nakhon Sawan, 2 September 2010.

⁸⁴ Interview, local journalist, Nakhon Sawan, 1 September 2010.

no caravan, no door knocking, and no speeches.⁸⁵ On polling day, only 50.29 percent of voters turned up to cast their ballots, a very low turnout for a PAO president election. Moreover, invalid votes (votes for no candidate combined with spoiled votes) hit a record high of ten percent, clearly reflecting the electorate's dissatisfaction with both candidates. At the end, the candidate supported by a group of local bigwigs won the election with a clear majority.⁸⁶ A year later, unfortunately, the provincial election commission charged that the winning candidate had violated electoral laws. The case has been forwarded to the Appeal Court and the decision is still pending. In the meantime, he has been suspended from the job until the court decision. Tensions arose in the province. It is highly likely that violence will break out soon as the balance of power has been disrupted again.

One veteran politician complained that, following the coup, as experienced politicians were banned and political parties dissolved and weakened, "politics in the province is controlled by hoodlums who know nothing except using force."⁸⁷ Another one summed up the situation in Nakhon Sawan with a candid remark: "politics here is full of gruesome murders because there is no mighty godfather. Every boss has quite equal power so no one is afraid of anyone. That is why they kill each other again and again."⁸⁸

Now we turn to the last violent province, exploring politico-economic structures and electoral violence in another fragmented territory—Nakhon Si Thammarat, the most dangerous place for voting in Thailand.

⁸⁵ My personal observation, Nakhon Sawan, September 2010. The political atmosphere in Nakhon Sawan a week leading up to the poll was calm but tense.

⁸⁶ *Khom Chat Luek*, 8 September 2010: 8. Interview, Saranyoo Athitsayanyakorn, director of Nakhon Sawan election commission, Nakhon Sawan, 7 September 2010.

⁸⁷ Interview, former candidate for Nakhon Sawan MP and mayor, Nakhon Sawan, 5 September 2010.

⁸⁸ Interview, Thap Krit District's municipal councilor, Nakhon Sawan, 7 September 2010.

Nakhon Si Thammarat: Inter- and intra-party violent fighting



Nakhon Si Thammarat is located 780 kilometres from Bangkok on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Thailand, the most populous province of southern region, and the second largest southern province in terms of area. It is mainly rugged hilly rain forest. The large area of water of the Songkhla lakes basin connects the province to Songkhla, Phatthalung, and Trang, forming the distinct geographical setting called the mid-south. Since the late seventeenth century, the region has been known for its rich natural resources. The land was “harvested for bamboo, therapeutic herbs... animal hides and tusk ivory” and “the forest people collected bamboo, resin, rubber sap, honey and rattan which they bartered for rice with cultivators on the plains.”¹ Geopolitically, the province has long been the center of governance in the southern region. Because of its topography, distances, and rough environment, the Siamese Royal government in the past had only nominal control over the region. Nakhon Si Thammarat was a powerful local proxy on whom Bangkok had to rely. In a position of regional hegemony, the province’s ruler enjoyed formidable political power and economic prosperity. Amid the extensive reforms of King Chulalongkorn, however, the Bangkok elites attempted to centralize power and curb the dominance of ruling local elites. Nakhon Si Thammarat’s

¹ Reynolds 2011: 48-49.

autonomous power was reduced when the government designated Songkhla, its neighboring province, as the center of the southern administrative circle of provinces (*monthon*).² But Bangkok did not always prevail. Because of difficult access to this inhospitable frontier territory and poor governance infrastructure, matters of security and justice were often left to forceful local leaders. A local historian noted that even though the southern railroad line was built in 1907, the area was largely still an isolated place. Indeed, it was still being settled up until the late 1950s.³ Unsurprisingly, the province has a long tradition of lawlessness, “banditry,” rural toughness, and pirating.⁴ Since the late 1970s, the province has had a reputation for its frequent politically motivated killings. Also, it competes with Chonburi and other notorious provinces for the highest crime rate in the country.

Nevertheless, as already discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, the high rate of homicide or “everyday” violence does not necessarily indicate violent electoral politics. Several provinces with high crime rates have managed to conduct peaceful elections. The provincial political economy is a decisive factor creating conditions for high-stakes, fierce, and violent contestation. Underground and illegal economic activities are rampant in many areas of Nakhon Si Thammarat and make large sums of money for several local big men who control these businesses. This includes smuggling and counterfeiting; drug trafficking; prostitution; running casinos, gambling dens, and underground lotteries; illicit mining and fisheries; automobile theft; extortion; and protection rackets. As discussed in Chapter 3, the nexus between illegal economy and political actors produced deadly electoral competition. As elsewhere, electoral politics in Nakhon Si Thammarat are closely related to political-economic conditions.

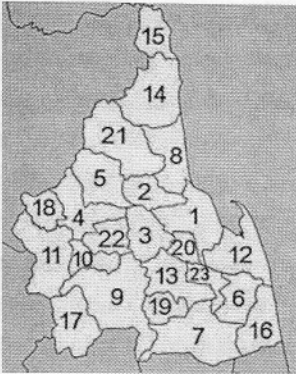
As one of the country’s most populous provinces, Nakhon Si Thammarat has been assigned ten MP seats in the national election.⁵ Nakhon Si Thammarat is subdivided into 23 districts. The districts are further subdivided into 165 sub-districts (*tambon*) and 1428 villages (*muban*).

² Reynolds 2011: 49-50. Though the administrative unit was titled “Nakhon Si Thammarat,” the administrative center was at Songkhla (Tej 1977: Appendix III).

³ Mana 2003: 25-36.

⁴ Trocki, unpublished; Thomas 1975.

⁵ According to the Election Commission data in 2007, there were two other provinces that have ten seats of MPs: Udon Thani and Buriram. Provinces that have more MPs seat than Nakhon Si Thammarat are Chiang Mai (11), Khon Kaen (11), Ubon Ratchathani (11), Nakhon Ratchasima (19), and Bangkok (36).



- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Mueang Nakhon Si Thammarat | 13. Ron Phibun |
| 2. Phrom Khiri | 14. Sichon |
| 3. Lan Saka | 15. Khanom |
| 4. Chawang | 16. Hua Sai |
| 5. Phipun | 17. Bang Khan |
| 6. Chian Yai | 18. Tham Phannara |
| 7. Cha-uat | 19. Chulabhorn |
| 8. Tha Sala | 20. Phra Phrom |
| 9. Thung Song | 21. Nopphitam |
| 10. Na Bon | 22. Chang Klang |
| 11. Thung Yai | 23. Chaloem Phra Kiat |
| 12. Pak Phanang | |

Prior to 1976: ideological electoral campaigns

Electoral competition turned fierce in Nakhon Si Thammarat after the late 1970s and reached its highest level in the 2005 national election. Prior to the troubled period, elections in the province had been relatively calm and gave a platform to many honest and capable politicians, who came from relatively poor families and started their careers as local school teachers, lawyers or civil servants. After several years of hard work in a district, either native to them or adoptive, and being loved and respected by the local people, these individuals were asked to run for elective positions. With the full support of the electorate, they won elections handily with very simple electioneering—door to door knocking. This method required no major investment and no political machine.

Three names, plus one, were cases in point: Cham Jamratnet, Sawai Suthipitak, and Nom Upparamai. Cham (1898-1978) was MP for Nakhon Si Thammarat five times. Before running for elections, he was a school teacher and civil servant whose young life was inspired by the revolution of the People's Party that overthrew the absolute monarchy in June 1932. He stood for elections and won from 1937-1957, and in the House of Parliament he earned a good reputation as a vocal and dedicated MP fighting for the welfare of his constituents (Cham 1978). Sawai (1917-1994), followed his father's footsteps and became a teacher and civil servant. As a bright student, he received a masters degree in Economics from Thammasat, after which he was offered a teaching job at Thammasat University while working at the Comptroller General's Department. During the Second World War he joined the underground Free Thai movement led by Pridi Bhanomyong. After the war, he was elected in his hometown and appointed a secretary of the prime minister, a very prestigious position for a politician from a humble family from the south.⁶ Nom (1911-1983) was another outstanding MP from Nakhon Si Thammarat who at one point of his political career was elevated to the position of deputy House Speaker and minister for education. He taught at many local schools before proceeding to work at the Interior Ministry and later became a lawyer. He entered politics first as an elected councilor for Nakhon Si Thammarat Muang municipality, and later became a deputy mayor for several terms. In 1952 he ran for the lower house and was elected and won another three times. The 1969 general elections, held under the Thanom Kittikachorn government, was the last election that he stood for. The last position before he stepped down was as Deputy House of Parliament Speaker. His reputation as an honest, polite, humble, and ideologically committed politician was widely acknowledged at home and abroad; he was awarded a number of certificates of merit for his work, and after he retired from politics he was invited by many institutions to give lectures on local history, geography and language.⁷ These three fine politicians were quality lawmakers in the early period of Thai Parliament, and had counterparts in several other provinces. It is ironic that prior to the 1973 democratic uprising, when Thai parliament did not actually control much power and perks, and the stakes were not high in electoral competitions, the country witnessed a large number of high caliber

⁶ The government he served was toppled by the coup in 1947. He withdrew from politics and established his law firm, but finally had to flee the country in 1949, along with several supporters of Pridi, as he was one of the targets of political persecution of Phibun's government (Vichien 2000; Narong 2005: 41-44)

⁷ David Wilson (1966: 219) notes that Nom "has sought public office for more abstract motives than money.

politicians entering the House. The situation changed dramatically after 1973, as discussed in Chapter 3, when a the new type of politician came to the scene.

Besides the three honorable cases, it is pertinent to discuss one additional figure from Nakhon Si Thammarat: Surin Masdit, who represented and struggled in a transition period from the old era of peaceful and non-spectacular competition to the new era of turbulent elections.

The Democrat Party versus the Ketchart family: violent competition for dominance and territory

Masdit family

Surin Masdit (1927-1986) was a respectable three-time legislator who represented Nakhon Si Thammarat from 1969 to 1976.⁸ As a child from an extremely poor family with no secondary school education, he was remarkably successful. He started out as a janitor, and then became a secretary of the city municipality before being elected municipal councilor and eventually speaker of the municipality. Soon afterwards he worked as the main vote canvasser for Democrat candidate Sawai Sawasdisarn (a rival of Cham and Nom), for several years and ran for the position himself in the 1957 election but failed to get elected. He finally succeeded in 1969. As a young MP under a military dictatorial regime, he made himself known for his open criticism of the army for its secretive budget and operations. At the same time, he founded and edited the local newspaper named "Siangrat," (People's Voice) a hugely popular newspaper in Nakhon Si Thammarat because of its direct criticisms of incompetent and corrupt local officials. As a result of his outspoken role, he became popular among progressive students and dissidents who were challenging the regime at that time. After the fall of the Thanom-Praphat government in 1973, he was elected twice in 1975 and 1976, and was appointed as Minister in the Prime Minister Office under Seni Pramoj's government. His progressive role continued throughout this turbulent period of "democratic experiment." Unfortunately, his ministerial term was very short as it was disrupted by the brutal student massacre and the 1976 coup. Surin, along with the other two ministers of the Democrat party, were accused by right wing groups of being communists, a serious

⁸ For the colorful life of Surin and his political role, see Narong 2005: 51-54; Tawatchai 1998: 158-60, and; Chaliao 2000.

charge that endangered their lives. Therefore he fled and later entered the monkhood to protect himself, and withdrew entirely from politics.

Throughout his political career, Surin was loyal to the Democrat Party. He never switched to another party. In fact, he was the key person who made the Democrats immensely popular in Nakhon Si Thammarat. He built a strong network of vote brokers through his friends and relatives and expanded the voter base of the party. And his articulate and aggressive oratorical style became the prototype of the Democrat's electioneering. The newspaper he founded had also served as the party's mouthpiece. His reputation and strong voter base paved the way for two of his political successors to enter the House with ease. His daughter, Supatra Masdit, a USA master's degree graduate who retired from teaching at Thammasat to run for MP, was elected in 1979 with the highest number of votes in the province. She had a successful political career, was elected an MP seven times (never losing in a single race), and was the first female MP to be appointed a minister. She served as PM's Office minister twice, from 1988 to 1990 and 1997 to February 2001. After that she faded from politics, but the Masdit family still had another member serving as an MP in the parliament. Surachet Masdit, the eldest son of Surin, became a legislator for Nakhon Si Thammarat in September 1992 after working as a bureaucrat in the Health Ministry and later serving as a provincial councilor after 1985. As the eldest son, he had taken care of the family's political business, acting as a power broker for his father and his sister locally while they were doing their duties in Bangkok.⁹ Supatra and Surachet, as well as their father, were loyal members of the Democrat party; their long-running electoral victories partly relied on the party brand, and, in turn, strengthened the popularity and influence of the party in Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Samphan Tongsamak

Another political figure who helped the Democrat party to assert dominance in the province was Samphan Tongsamak (1942-). A local teacher and journalist-turned-politician, Samphan was the longest serving MP and a leading figure of the Democrat party in Nakhon Si Thammarat. He won elections thirteen times consecutively from 1975 to 2007. Well known for his political shrewdness since he was young, many candidates requested he work as their vote canvasser. Samphan was Surin's political protégé, from whom he had learnt various electioneering techniques. His political

⁹ *The Nation* 9 February 2009: 1B; Tawatchai 1998: 158-60.

persuasiveness and manipulative skill were legendary. A story was told that in the run up to the 1975 election, when he was asked by Surin to have a meeting with the rector of Nakhon Si Thammarat Teaching College in order to invite him to run for MP for the Democrat. Samphan did not actually go to the meeting, instead he told Surin that the rector declined the candidacy—and proceeded to run on his own.¹⁰ He was also keen to establish his vote canvassing network. His early career as a teacher in local schools helped him build strong networks with teachers, many of whom later became key vote canvassers for him. He never lost an election. His promotion to the post of deputy minister of education from 1983-1988 and minister of education from 1992-1995 helped reinforce his strong patron-client relationship with the teaching community. Also, Samphan often visited his constituency and cultivated relationships with a wide range of social groups, including not only monks, students, village headmen, local politicians, civil servants, and also some local fellows with shady backgrounds.¹¹

After the 1975 elections, the Democrat party led by Samphan and the Masdit family, along with other candidates, tried to assert political dominance over their opponents. But the path to dominance was not a smooth one, and took a long time. In fact, it was quite bloody. Relationships among Democrats were equally unstable as they were fighting against each other for political hegemony. Contrary to popular myth or even scholarly conventional wisdom that the Democrat Party had long dominated the southern region, including Nakhon Si Thammarat, it was really only after the July 1995 election that the party succeeded in consolidating its provincial base in Nakhon Si Thammarat (and other provinces in the south).¹² The Democrats' most formidable and long-standing opponent was the Ketchart family.

¹⁰ Interview Nattawut Karnpob, former personal secretary of Samphan, 2 August 2005, by Narong Bunsuaykhwan, quoted in Narong 2005: 56.

¹¹ *Matichon*, 7 April 2001: 11; *Matichon*, 10 May 2001: 1, 21.

¹² For the conventional account of the Democrat party, see Noranit (1987); for the Democrats and the south, see Jiraporn (2004). The Democrat Party itself loves to label its party “a party of southern people.” The exceptional work which rightly discusses and tries to challenge the existing myth is Askew 2008.

Table 9.1: The performance of the Democrat Party in comparison to other parties in Nakhon Si Thammarat, 1975-2011

Election Date	Democrat Party	Other Parties	Total
26/1/1975	5	3	8
4/4/1976	8	0	8
22/4/1979	3	5	8
18/4/1983	9	0	9
27/7/1986	9	0	9
24/7/1988	4	5	9
22/3/1992	7	2	9
13/9/1992	6	3	9
2/7/1995	10	0	10
17/11/1996	10	0	10
6/1/2001	10	0	10
6/2/2005	10	0	10
23/12/2007	10	0	10
3/7/2011	9	0	9

Source: Nakhon Si Thammarat Election Commission; Narong (2005: 28-36)

Ketchart family

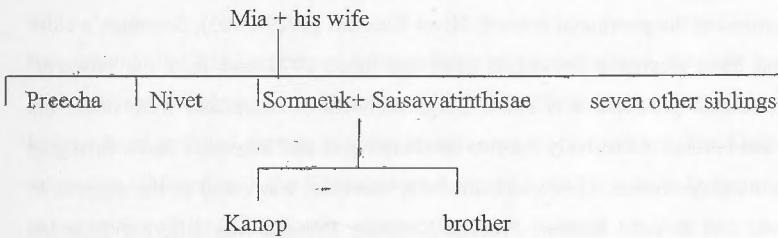
The gripping story of the power struggle in Nakhon Si Thammarat is not complete without reference to its most famous and powerful family, the Ketcharts. The family has been actively involved in provincial political life since the late 1970s and was a key actor in the province's ferocious political battles. The three most renowned family figures were Preecha, Nivet, and Somnuek, who together made the family legendary, being called by locals the "three musketeers."¹³ They were sons of a well-to-do business family.¹⁴ Their father, Mia Ketchart, was a self-made man with great diligence. By the 1940s, Mia had set up shops trading agricultural tools and construction materials, and owned a fresh market, an apartment block, rice and vegetable farms, and a bullfighting den (a very popular local sport associated with gambling). His mother was a hard-working housewife who helped her husband farming and selling food in the market. Apart from Preecha, Nivet, and Somnuek, they had another three sons and three

¹³ Interview, senior local vote canvasser, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 21 January 2000.

¹⁴ The following information on early period of Ketchart family, if not otherwise mentioned, is based on Ramai (2000: 67-73) and Pradit (1998: 102 -190).

daughters living together in a large house. Most of their children became merchants or traders, with only two working in the bureaucracy. Local people called the Ketchart's patriarch "Nai Mia" (boss Mia), a name borne with pride in the family, as he had a reputation for being charismatic, respectable, and very generous.¹⁵ Many people sought out his family for various kinds of help, and the Ketcharts provided free food and jobs for the poor and unemployed. Many neighbors worked in their farms and dens. The respected Ketcharts naturally earned the status of local patron.

Chart 9.1: The Ketchart Family (a selected genealogy)



During election campaigning, Ketchart's house was frequently visited by many politicians. "Nai Mia" was courted by candidates from different parties to work as a vote canvasser, and he agreed to work for some of them. The young family members of Ketchart thus had a good grasp of politics. Among Nai Mia's heirs, the seventh child, Somnuek Ketchart (1940-), had the most successful political career. With seven terms as Nakhon Si Thammarat mayor, from 1985 to 2011, Somnuek was one of the longest serving local politicians in the country and dubbed by the media as "the permanent mayor of Nakhon"¹⁶. He was elected first as municipal councilor in 1980, then elevated to the post of deputy mayor in 1982 and mayor two years later. Before he stood for election, he was a successful businessman who owned a cattle ranch, a construction company, a saw mill, and a newspaper. His "Muangtai" (Southern City) newspaper was highly popular and was in competition with "Siangrat" of Surin Masdit. Given his Bangkok-based university education, fluency in English, excellent leadership skills, and

¹⁵ "Nai" is originally used to mean a member of the nobility, but now mainly used for mister, master or boss.

¹⁶ "Nakhon" is a short and popular name that people refer to Nakhon Si Thammarat province. Somnuek's impressive record is only second to Hat Yai Mayor Kreng Suwannavong who was in power for 29 years from 1973-2002. For Kreng's political career, see *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 13 (16 March- 15 April 2002): 36-38.

personal wealth, he possessed greater resources than his opponents. He was very popular with voters as his administration pioneered numerous welfare projects and infrastructure development, including free healthcare, affordable and high quality education, sport stadiums, and cheap water and power supplies.

Under his administration, Nakhon Si Thammarat municipality received many domestic and international awards. Somnuek was invited to conferences and workshops to talk about local development. Regarding elections, there were many times when his team won all the available councilor seats, and sometimes he even ran uncontested for the mayoral post. The Ketchart family not only had complete control over the municipality, but also dominated the provincial council. Nivet Ketchart (1929-2005), Somnuek's elder brother, had been elected a provincial councilor since 1973 and held the powerful position of council president ever since. Large numbers of councilors were under his patronage and control. Effectively the two brothers Nivet and Somnuek had a firm grip on their political territories. Their predominance, however, was owed to the support of their beloved and forceful brother, Preecha Ketchart. Preecha was different from his brothers as he never held a formal political position throughout his life. Nevertheless, even without the elected post, he commanded tremendous political influence. According to his enemies, he had a domineering and vicious persona, but to his friends and followers Preecha was a respectable and benevolent man. Called by locals "Nai hua Cha"¹⁷ and earning the title of "Nakhon godfather" from the popular press, Preecha's life conveniently fitted the notion of "life-imitating-art, more than art imitating life."¹⁸ He was a man of broad connections and charisma, feared and loved by people, and followed by an entourage of loyal subordinates roaming the city day and night. People in disputes asked for his mediation, and people in serious trouble likewise sought his help. He had been allegedly involved in the Nakhon Si Thammarat underworld of crime and racketeering for decades.¹⁹ Undeniably, his influence was critical to his brothers' political success. He exercised his political muscle behind the scenes in every way he could to ensure that his family's political dynasty was not overpowered by rivals. With

¹⁷ *Nai hua* is a common, unofficial title used by people in the south to address a respectable well-to-do man. It is equivalent to *pho-liang* in the north.

¹⁸ It was not a secret that Preecha was highly impressed by the main character in the famous novel *The Godfather* by Mario Puzo and repeatedly read the book (which had been translated into Thai in 1979 and had become very popular) in order to learn lessons from the story. Interview, former local gunman, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 21 January 2010.

¹⁹ It was reported that Preecha and his followers had operated protection rackets, ransom, gambling dens, brothels, and underground lotteries. Interview, former local policeman and former gangster, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 21 and 22 January 2010.

Preecha in the shadows, Nivet and Somnuek enjoyed firm control of their political organizations with no difficulty.

Since the 1980s, the Democrats had tried very hard to penetrate into the terrain of the Ketcharts' power but they had not succeeded. The Ketcharts, on the other hand, attempted to expand their territorial power from the municipal and provincial council to the House of Legislature but to little avail. Both sides were persistently defeated when they went beyond their strongholds, but they kept fighting. This situation made electoral contestation in Nakhon Si Thammarat from the early 1980s to the late 1990s extremely fierce and often fatal.

Even though the Ketcharts stood independently at local elections, they chose to affiliate with major political parties in the national elections. Those parties likewise wanted them to be a local political partner in order to win over the Democrats. The Ketcharts were originally affiliated with the Kitsangkhom Party of Kukrit, the main Democrat opponent in national politics. The family entered the national arena for first time in the 1979 election, fielding Somnuek as a candidate, but he failed to get elected and never ran for MP again (concentrating instead on municipal politics). In the April 1983 election, the family made another attempt. This time Nivet was appointed head of the Kitsangkhom team that was up against the Democrats, led by Samphan Tongsamak and Supatra Masdit. Nivet ran in Constituency 1, which mainly covered the muang municipal area, a family power base. Electoral results demonstrated that the Kitsangkhom candidates put up a good race, but they still lost to the Democrats. Nivet, as team leader, obtained the highest number of votes but it was not enough to elect him to the House. The Democrats won all nine seats and Samphan Tongsamak was rewarded by his party the post of Deputy Minister of Education.²⁰ But the Ketchart family did not give up hope of having a family member in the House, as they led a group of Kitsangkhom's candidates competing with the Democrats again in 1986. This time another family member, Vichot Ketchart, who resigned from the post of provincial councilor to run for MP, was head of the team. Unfortunately, though Vichot and his colleagues gained more votes than in the previous election, they were still crushed by the Democrats.

As mentioned above, electoral contests in Nakhon Si Thammarat were highly violent. But the patterns and perpetrators of violence had significantly changed from the 1970s to

²⁰ Pradit 1988: 103-107.

1980s. Before the 1980s, electoral violence was related to the ideological conflicts and government's suppression of the communist insurgents. At that time, some areas of Nakhon Si Thammarat province were under the influence of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), especially the Thung Song, Ron Phibun, Chian Yai, Hua Sai, and Chauat districts adjacent to the Banthat Mountain. A number of local residents in these districts went to the jungle and joined the communist armed struggle. The spreading of communist ideas and the clout of the CPT certainly helped two Socialist Party candidates win seats in the constituency in 1975 and 1976, the first and the last time that the province had radical, left-leaning lawmakers.²¹ As a stronghold of the CPT, the areas intermittently witnessed violent clashes between government soldiers and insurgents, and the violence spilled over to the electoral sphere. For example, on the polling day of the April 1976 election, in the Thung Song district that was a stronghold of the Thai Communist Party, there was a report that a group of 30 militia soldiers in green uniforms went around the village intimidating voters not to go cast ballots, and four villagers had been reportedly killed two days earlier.²² In the next election in April 1979, communist insurgents attacked a precinct in Chauat district on voting day trying to snatch ballot boxes and clashing with soldiers patrolling the area. The intense fighting lasted for around 20 minutes and resulted in the loss of one sergeant.²³ The violent battles between state officials and rebels surrounding electoral campaigns finally faded by the early 1980s once the CPT had collapsed.²⁴

Since then, election-related violence was conducted by warring local political factions and families. The ultimate goal of the violent tactics was to win the election, not to disrupt it. The April 1983 campaign marked a watershed in the changing patterns. The election witnessed intimidation by opposing camps: the Ketchart family and the Democrats. Immediately after the poll, the winning candidate Samphan requested

²¹ Those two candidates were Chamni Sakdiset and Akom Suwannop. Chamni was later a key member of the Democrat Party. For a history and operations of CPT in Nakhon Si Thammarat, see Saroop (2009: 302- 327) and Phu Banthat Group (2001). For the popularity of left-leaning parties in the 1975 and 1976 election, see Chapter 2.

²² *Prachachat*, 4 April 1976: 1, 2, and 12.

²³ *Matichon*, 23 April 1979.

²⁴ The fall of the CPT, explains Anderson (1977; 1990), was primarily caused by the three-corner war of 1978-80 among Communist China, Communist Vietnam, and Communist Cambodia. During the war, Vietnam invaded and occupied most of Cambodia, and it defeated the Chinese army that attempted to occupy Vietnam. Both Vietnam and conquered Cambodia stopped providing the CPT with weapons, money, protection, and cross-border safety. Also, China (to which the largely Chinese leadership of the CPT was loyal) shut down the CPT's propaganda radio station and other bases in Yunnan in exchange for the Thai government's support for the Khmer Rouge. See Chapter 4 for the broad picture of the changing patterns of electoral violence from the 1980s to 1990s.

protection from the police as he claimed that his life had been threatened by a "local influential figure" so that a by-election would be staged,

[T]herefore I could not be incautious. Everyone knows how threatening the influential people in Nakhon Si Thammarat are. If they can get rid of me, then nobody stand in their way... since the communist rebels' power diminished, now the local gangster stepped in terrorizing residents. If anyone refused to be under their thumb, they would be threatened and pillaged. Everyone knows who the gangster's leaders are, but no one dare speak up.²⁵

The Democrats frequently accused the Ketchart family of using "dark influence" to win elections. In both general elections in 1983 and 1986, the slogan of the Democrat team led by Samphan Tongsamak was "Do not elect mafioso to the House." The message clearly attacked the Ketchart family.²⁶ Ahead of the 1986 election campaign, the political situation heated up when Samphan demanded that the government deploy police forces down to Nakhon Si Thammarat, arguing that the province was facing a serious problem of "dark influence." Samphan and other Democrats further complained to Prime Minister Prem Tinasulanond that Kitsangkhom's supporters in Nakhon Si Thammarat used a lot of gambling and illegal money to fund their electoral campaigns against the Democrat Party. Because he was a minister in the coalition government, the government responded promptly to Samphan's complaint. In late 1985, minister of interior General Sith Jirarat ordered a major police operation led by the infamous Police Colonel Sanphet Thammathikun (1940-) to crack down on Nakhon Si Thammarat mafia. This politically motivated scheme ended in a bloody operation. Born in Surat Thani, neighboring province of Nakhon Si Thammarat, Sanphet had spent most of his career suppressing banditry in troubled provinces, his colorful character earned him the nickname "Jack Parlance lawman."²⁷ Sanphet was a rogue police officer who believed that to suppress serious crime police had to operate outside the normal scope of the law. He was hence notorious for the practice of extrajudicial executions. To carry out the assigned operation in Nakhon Si Thammarat, he enlisted a group of local thugs to help him patrol the city. Sanphet worked closely with Samphan to subdue the underworld

²⁵ *Matichon*, 21 April 1983: 3.

²⁶ Pradit 1988: 112.

²⁷ People thought he looked like a famous Hollywood actor who portrayed some of the most intense and gripping villains in several movies.

networks of Preecha Ketchart. According to Samphan, once he arrived in the province, a senior local policeman, who was a mutual friend of both he and Preecha arranged a meeting among the three to try to stall or halt the operation. Samphan issued an ultimatum to his adversary Preecha:

you tell your people that if they want to contest politics either local or national ones, they must stop all unlawful activities. Otherwise, if you guys want to make money from illegitimate business, then you have to refrain from politics and so I will pretend that I do not know what kind of business you are in.

Preecha refused to make a deal.²⁸ Afterwards, Sanphet called a meeting with the police officers from the whole province, declaring in front of them that

from now on we are going to a battle... it is a tough war fighting our enemies without knowing when it will end. We might be wounded or even shot down. So everyone get yourself ready.

He also told the police who had been under the payroll of the outlawed gangs to quit or transfer to work in other provinces as he could not work with the corrupt officials.²⁹ Full-scale war had been further justified when Sanphet called a press conference officially accusing several Nakhon Si Thammarat provincial councilors of being members of criminal gangs who used dirty money to manipulate provincial politics. The press conference caused an uproar. At a provincial council meeting on 5 November 1985, Vichien Ketchart, council chairman, joined other councilors in strongly condemning Sanphet's allegation and demanded he be transferred out of the province immediately. The motion was carried by a unanimous vote. The formal letter was sent to the national police chief and interior minister in Bangkok, but to no avail.³⁰

Nothing could stop Sanphet. He delivered named coffins to the temple near every single of his target's houses, and a few days later those coffins were actually needed. Many local ruffians, felons, gunmen, thieves, and gang members, including Preecha, were

²⁸ See the story about this interesting encounter in Sanphet's unpublished piece of writing (Sanphet, unpublished paper).

²⁹ Sanphet, unpublished paper.

³⁰ Pradit 1988: 108.

forced to flee to save their lives.³¹ Those who did not escape, for whatever reason, were brutally gunned down. The killing spree was widespread particularly in city areas, in which the Ketchart family power base was located. The operation received a mixed reaction from the local people. Many of them were glad that the criminal gangs were suppressed. However, many were disappointed with the motives behind and consequences of this operation. It was clearly a politically motivated plan to weaken the Democrats' political opponents. On the one hand, vote canvassers who were not on the Democrats' side effectively became casualties of this war. On the other hand, it was a free ticket to those vote brokers or local mafia on Sanphet's and Samphan's sides to continue their illegal activities. The Ketchart family business empire was in ruins. Police blocked their financial transactions and closed down Preecha's illicit business affairs, including gambling dens and underground lotteries. The economic bases of their power were crumbling.³² Despite this, provincial criminal activities continued, merely changing hands from one kingpin to another. Sanphet's key henchmen took over the Nakhon Si Thammarat underworld and established themselves as new gang leaders.

It was no surprise that the July 1986 election was violent. Since the start of the campaign, three vote canvassers of the political parties opposed to the Democrats had been executed by unknown hit men in different locations. One key Democrat vote canvasser was also shot dead. The deputy police chief of Nakhon Si Thammarat said that from January to April, vast numbers of people in warring political factions had been murdered.³³ In the run up to the election day, candidates and their supporters were campaigning in an ever more difficult, life-threatening situation. In August 1987, one month after the poll, Samphan's house was bombed. He immediately blamed "the influential figure" for the incident. It was not difficult to figure out to whom he was referring.³⁴ The climate of fear and hostility remained until the following July 1988 election. Certain cases of election-related violence were connected to previous conflicts.

³¹ Some gunmen were ex-communists who, after emerging from the jungle, either worked independently or with a big man. They were another primary target of Sanphet. Many of them had to wait until Sanphet left the province before they could come back home safely. Preecha reportedly went to Chonburi to live with *kamnan* Pho, Somchai Khunpluem. Interview, former local police and former friend of Preecha, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 22 January 2010. Also see Chamlong Fangcholchit, "Pol. Col. Sanphet Thammathikul and Jatukham Ramthep (ending)," *Nation Suddasda*, 24 December 2007: 75.

³² Informants mentioned a comparison between Preecha and *kamnan* Pho. Preecha, unlike the Chonburi godfather, had not diversified or expanded his business to legitimate ones, so his power was in disarray when his network of underground economy was destroyed. Interview, former MP candidate and vote canvasser for Nivet Ketchart, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 26 January 2010.

³³ *Matichon*, 8 May 1986: 1, 2; *Matichon*, 22 July 1986: 1, 2.

³⁴ Despite that, there was a strong rumor among the local people that it was a self-perpetrating act (Pradit 1988: 104-105).

For example, on 5 May 1988, one man was found shot dead in his own house in Muang district. The victim was identified as a former aide of Pol. Col. Sanphet and also a key vote canvasser of Samphan in the last election. The relationship between him and Samphan turned sour after the election, and eventually they turned from allies to foes.³⁵

In following elections, the Ketchart family switched from Kitsangkhom Party to General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's New Aspiration Party (NAP), as they hoped that a new political partner would assist them in subjugating old political rivals.³⁶ The conflict continued. Be that as it may, a new group of young blood politicians emerged and complicated the battle for a power monopoly in this volatile province. In July 1988 the Democrat Party lost all three seats in Constituency 3 to young candidates from Khao Na Party: Chamni Sakdiset, Witthaya Laewparadai, and Sutham Sangprathum. All of them were progressive student activists in the 1970s and novices at electioneering, except Chamni who had run once before in 1975. Their vigorous, determined, and fresh campaign, plus a selling-point of being home-grown, gave them electoral success. They continued their impressive performance in the subsequent two elections in March and September 1992, joining the Palang Dharma Party of Maj. Gen. Chamlong Srimuang.³⁷ For the Democrats, these political newcomers were a new major obstacle to their aspiration of political monopoly. Just as in earlier years in regard to the three Ketchart brothers, they came to be known as the "young three musketeers."

Throughout the 1990s, electoral violence in Nakhon Si Thammarat primarily stemmed from a power struggle between the Ketchart family and the Democrats. The emergence of new faces added fuel to the fire but did not shape or change existing cleavages, because the Democrats succeeded in persuading the newcomers to work with them in the

³⁵ *Matichon*, 6 May 1988, 1, 2.

³⁶ Following a trend of soldiers entering the parliament, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh formed the New Aspiration Party in 1989. A core of his party members comprised of retired military officers, bureaucrats, and local notables. For the role of Chavalit and his NAP party, see King 1996.

³⁷ The Palang Dharma Party was established in 1988 by then popular Bangkok governor Chamlong, a religious ascetic who eats one meal a day and has taken a vow of celibacy. During the 1970s, however, he was part of the right wing mobilization against the progressive movements of student-labor-farmer alliance. The core members of its founder came from the Santi Asoke Buddhist sect and young professionals. The party was popular among the urban middle class, particularly in Bangkok, as it projected the clean image of its leaders. The party was not successful in the outer provinces though. The victory of its three candidates in Nakhon Si Thammarat was thus highly impressive and significant. For the role of Chamlong and the Palang Dharma Party, see Chapter 3 and 4, and Sombat (1989); McCargo (1997); King (1996).

1995 general election.³⁸ At the same time, the Ketchart family's power and support had dwindled as a consequence of the ugly battles with Sanphet. Many followers left the Ketcharts. The turning point came in 1999 when Preecha passed away. The loss of its indispensable coercive resource threw the family into disarray. Family enemies fully exploited their disintegration in the 2000 PAO elections. These local elections were highly important as they laid the political foundations for the general election in 2001. Local election winners would be in a position to exercise immense power and budget under the control of the PAO office to help their team win on the national stage. The PAO election was very close and vote canvassers on both sides lost their lives in the violent campaign. Ketchart's team led by Nivet and backed by the NAP Party won 25 seats out of a total number of 42, and the rest were won by the Democrat-backed and independent candidates. The result made Nivet strongly believe that councilors would elect him chairman of the Nakhon Si Thammarat PAO. However, a group of the Democrat MPs led by Chamni Sakdiset interfered and lobbied councilors to vote for their candidate, Vithun Detdecho, Chamni's right-hand man and cousin. The lobbying turned nasty when some councilors were kidnapped and locked up in a safe house in a neighboring province until voting day, 15 February 2000. The Ketcharts could not reach some of their team members. On voting day, the atmosphere was extremely tense. The provincial governor deployed 200 police to secure the meeting hall, in which the vote for chairman was taking place. Nivet lost to Vithun by 19 votes to 23. Several team members had clearly betrayed him, and his legendary record of serving 21 terms as the chairman of the provincial council had come to an end.³⁹ A wave of political killings took place after this political intrigue, and several local vote canvassers and councilors were victims.⁴⁰

Without Preecha in charge of the Ketcharts' political schemes, the family was powerless; they were unable to pull the strings as they had done in the past. Political struggles in Nakhon Si Thammarat demonstrated that coercive force was imperative to the acquisition and maintenance of power. By the end of the 1990s, the Democrats had achieved nearly complete political control of the province as they held all MP seats in

³⁸ Only Sutham refused to join the Democrats. He stayed with Palang Dharma, and later was one of the founding members of the Thai Rak Thai Party.

³⁹ See details in *Siam Rath*, 16 February 2000: 1, 10; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 16 February 2000: 12, 18.

⁴⁰ See the murder case of the Democrat MP's headquarter in Chauat district in January 2000 (*Matichon*, 5 January 2000: 1, 31); murders of Samphan's vote canvassers in April 2001 (*Khao Sod*, 7 April 2001: 11); the assassination of PAO chairman's advisor in May 2001 (*Matichon*, 10 May 2001: 1, 21); the failed assassination of provincial councilor for Pak Panang district on August 2001 (*Matichon*, 29 October 2001: 1, 21).

the July 1995 and November 1996 general elections and had their own person elected as the PAO chairman. Now, they wanted to take over the last territory of power that they had not yet succeed in controlling— the city municipality. The Ketcharts, on the other hand, vowed to save their last territory at all costs.

The Ketchart family's last stand, Democrat intra-party conflicts and small bosses

There were four important elections being held in Nakhon Si Thammarat in the first half of the 2000s: the general election in 2001, the city municipal election in 2003, the PAO election in 2004, and the February 2005 national election. The Democrats emerged as clear winners in all contest, except the municipal one. The Ketchart family withdrew from the general election in 2001 as they realized they had no chance of winning and they wanted to focus on the municipal level, their last stronghold. The 2003 municipal election was crucial as it was the first direct election for Nakhon Si Thammarat city mayor. Somneuk's position was to be challenged by candidates supported by famous Democrat MP Surin Pitsuwan. Surin was a Harvard Ph.D. graduate and a former Thammasat lecturer in the Political Science Department, elected as an MP for the first time in 1986. A former Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1992 to 1995 and the Minister in the same ministry from 1997 to 2001, he enjoyed a high international profile and was reportedly aiming to run for the position of United Nations general secretary. Ironically, his standing in the province was not on a par with his international fame as he was accused by other Democrats of abandoning his constituency and losing touch with local voters. Other candidates viewed him a vulnerable member of the team due to his infrequent visits to the constituency. He was perceived as the team's weak spot.⁴¹ Political infighting within the Democrat party was common in Nakhon Si Thammarat as everyone wanted to acquire hegemonic power over this most populous of southern provinces. Intra-party conflicts heightened after the party achieved its dominance in the mid 1990s. One strategy for the Democrats to be on top of their party fellows was to head the electoral campaign team and have their own people take control of local elective posts. Surin, while still being an MP, volunteered to lead the campaign for the city municipal elections in 2003 for the Democrats. He claimed it was time he took the helm as Samphan Thongsamak, former Democrat campaign leader, had failed many times in defeating the Ketchart family. Surin delivered good results as Democrat candidates won half the total municipal council seats. It was the first time Ketchart's

⁴¹ Comments made by a key vote canvasser of the Democrat quoted in Narong (2005: 63).

team failed to have absolute control in the municipality. Somneuk, however, managed to win the first direct election as city mayor.⁴²

The 2004 PAO Chairman election

Political battles between the two rival camps continued in the following elections. In 2004, in the first direct election for PAO chairman, the Ketchart family supported their main ally, Surachai Danwattananusorn, former Pak Panang district councilor, to challenge the incumbent. The Democrat Party announced they would not field any candidate.⁴³ The announcement stemmed from existing conflicts between the two Democrat factions led by Surin Pitsuwan and Chamni Sakdiset. Chamni supported the incumbent, Vithun Detdecho, while Surin's key political aide, Sayan Yutitham (who was provincial council president under Vithun's administration) put himself forward as an alternative candidate. The Democrat Party's committee did not give endorsement to either Vithun or Sayan as they did not want to take side. Finally both of them ran as independent candidates, but locals were well aware of their political allegiances. As mentioned, the phenomenon of intra-party conflict is normal for the Democrat Party in the southern region as the party brand was very strong, motivating ambitious members to compete for party candidacy for the local and national elections. The Thai Rak Thai party also got involved in the competition as they wanted to assert their power in a Democrat party stronghold. Initially, the party wished to field Sanphet Thammathikun, the famous lawman and former Commander of Provincial Police for Nakhon Si Thammarat who carried out the violent crackdown on criminals in the 1980s. Sanphet had been a member of the party since it was founded and assisted in TRT's election campaign in 2001, fighting the Democrats (his former allies in the 1980s). Nevertheless, the TRT had formed a tactical alliance with and relied largely on the Ketcharts in penetrating the Democrats' terrain, therefore it acceded to the Ketcharts' proposed candidate.⁴⁴ The election thus witnessed both major intra- and inter-party conflicts.

The two main candidates, Vithun and Surachai, were experienced, well-connected and savvy political figures who had been involved in provincial politics for decades. Vithun (1955- 2009) was a close relative and long-time political aide of Chamni Sakdiset. He

⁴² *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 26 (April 2003): 30-31; *Siam Rath*, 30 April 2003: 23.

⁴³ Even though Nivet did not run for the chairman, the Ketchart family fielded several young family member as candidates for provincial councilors (*Matichon*, 10 February 2004: 22).

⁴⁴ *Matichon*, 6 January 2004: 22; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 26 January 2004: 15; *Matichon*, 6 February 2004: 22; *Siam Rath*, 11 February 2004: 23.

came from a poor family background, had been elected as provincial councilor since 1984 and canvassed votes for Chamni for many years. Known as a local strongman, Vithun owned cock- and bull-fighting dens, and a few scandals made him notorious. On 2 August 1999, on a trip to Bangkok, he and his friend were stopped and their car searched by the police. The police found a heavy load of drugs and weapons in their Mercedes-Benz. Prior to this search, the police had received information from their sources that traffickers were moving drugs from the south to the capital. However, with a few phone calls to a "powerful person," Vithun was out on bail with only a charge of carrying an offensive weapon in public, while his friend faced a severe charge of possessing drugs, was refused bail and locked up in jail. The scandal made headlines for several days and was discussed in the parliament as Chamni was by that time a Deputy Minister of Interior and Vithun an assistant of Chamni and provincial councilor. The opposition accused Chamni of interfering in the police investigation and having a gangster as his political assistant.⁴⁵ The scandal notwithstanding, six months later council members elected Vithun PAO chairman, defeating Nivet Ketchart. During his first term, provincial councilors complained and charged him with physical assault and intimidation in connection to PAO competitive construction biddings.⁴⁶ In addition, his chairmanship was consistently challenged by the opposition councilors led by vengeful Nivet, with the support of Surachai. Vithun survived all political maneuvers aiming to overthrow him, but, because of the council fighting, his administration hardly passed any laws or implemented any policies.

Against this backdrop, the PAO election on 14 March 2004 was closely monitored by police as the prospect of extreme violence loomed large. It was a neck-and-neck race and in the end the poll was won by Vithun by a small margin. Pre- and post-electoral violent incidents took place leaving two dead and one serious injured. In the final stage of electioneering, there was a serious dispute between two of Vithun's vote canvassers, as one accused the other of secretly lending support to the opponent. Only two days after the dispute, the accuser, who was a personal secretary of Chamni and former councilor, was shot dead at night after finishing his canvassing.⁴⁷ Two weeks after the poll,

⁴⁵ *Thai Post*, 3 August 1999: 1, 16; *Thai Post*, 5 August 1999: 1, 16; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 6 August 1999: 15-16; *Matichon*, 7 August 1999: 20.

⁴⁶ There was one contractor lodging an assault charge against him with the Mueang police station in March 2000 (*Siam Rath*, 27 March 2002: 20). His administration was often in conflict with the public officials over the issue of transparency of the construction project. Interview, former Nakhon Si Thammarat PAO's official, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 29 January 2010.

⁴⁷ *Matichon*, 2 March 2004: 1, 13; *Matichon*, 4 March 2004: 1, 5.

another chief vote canvasser of Vithun was gunned down. The police investigation found that, after the election, the victim's life was targeted by the losing candidate, an influential person in the area.⁴⁸ Lastly, on 8 May 2004, masked gunmen on motorcycles opened fire on Suyit Chusuthon, a newly elected provincial councilor, at an intersection; he survived but was badly wounded.⁴⁹

The 2005 national election

After local people and observers thought they had witnessed the most violent electoral conflict in the history of the province, the 2005 general elections delivered even more deadly outcomes. In this election, the Ketchart family consistently joined TRT in an attempt to expand their territorial power and defeat the Democrats. The TRT campaign director was Sutham Saengprathum, former Nakhon Si Thammarat MP and one of the fabled "three musketeers" who successfully challenged the Democrat Party's dominance. The TRT fielded new faces and veteran candidates and expected to gain two or three seats, putting high hopes in Constituency 1 in particular because the Ketchart family was fielding its own third generation, Kanop Ketchart (1970-), the eldest and beloved son of long-standing mayor Somnuek. Kanop, unlike his father and his uncles, grew up in a different environment which had no connections to the underworld. Being a former student activist and bright engineering graduate from the esteemed Chulalongkorn University, he obtained his doctorate in engineering from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and came back to work as a university professor in Thailand and was rapidly promoted to the position of deputy dean.⁵⁰ Kanop was thus a very formidable candidate, possessing a good education, wealth, social status, and membership in a political dynasty. Moreover, he was very young and energetic and an extremely hard-working candidate, spending two years in advance of the scheduled election electioneering and visiting every single household in the precinct. Another factor that strengthened his confidence of winning was the fact that there were 66,000 votes in the municipality, the family fortress, which constituted 60 percent of all voters in Constituency 1.

The Democrat party was hence not confident of retaining their seat in this constituency. The incumbent Huwaideeya Pitsuwan, younger sister of Surin Pitsuwan, was a weak

⁴⁸ *Matichon*, 3 April 2004.

⁴⁹ But he could not speak after since as the bullet cut through his vocal cords. See *Phunam Thongthin*, 4: 50 (April 2005): 85.

⁵⁰ Interview, Kanop Ketchart, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 3 December 2009.

Democrat candidate as she had only served as MP once (in 2001).⁵¹ At the last minute, with a great surprise to political observers and TRT, the Democrat party changed its candidate. Huwaideeya was moved to the party list seat at number 47 (with little chance of being elected), and Surin moved from the party list to replace his sister in Constituency 1.⁵² Despite having won six elections, Surin admitted that this election was to be the toughest of his political career. He explained why he had decided to make his comeback in the constituency:

[C]ompetition in the area is becoming dirty and violent, and getting worse... local voters have been threatened by influential groups not to help the Democrat candidate... It was too hard for my sister to handle.⁵³

His explanation regarding “influential groups” was clearly a revival of the old political discourse the Democrat party had employed to attack the Ketchart family in the past. Kanop, on the other hand, attacked the weakness of Surin,

Local people want a representative who stays in the constituency, works on their behalf and coordinate projects with the government... People have not benefited from their representatives as much as they should because their MP is rarely here and has taken little interest in local issues.

His campaign posters asked local people bluntly “what has Mr Surin done for you during his 19 years in parliament?”⁵⁴ Both the TRT and Democrat party devoted their time and energy electioneering in this constituency (and another two that TRT thought they had a chance to win). It was a Thaksin policy that the party would not waste time in constituencies they could not win. In Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thaksin publicly conceded that the party expected only 2-3 seats.⁵⁵ The statement was reinforced by Sutham, the TRT campaign manager, and reflected in the way the party funded their campaign. The

⁵¹ She had an opportunity to run for the constituency seat in 2001 as Surin had moved to the party list seat. Surin, however, had to fight hard with Samphan and Chamni to secure the candidacy for his sister because those two MPs wanted to field their own people. Finally Surin won this bitter infighting at the expense of other party factions' leaders.

⁵² It was chaotic as massive campaign posters and banners of Huwaideeya in every spot throughout the precinct had to be taken down and replaced by Surin's posters in the last stage of campaigning.

⁵³ *The Nation*, 4 February 2005: 5A.

⁵⁴ *Bangkok Post*, 1 February 2005: 3.

⁵⁵ *Prachachat Thurakit*, 31 January 2005: 10.

stakes were exceptionally high in Constituency 1, a battle between “two doctors,” in which the opposing candidates were long-time rivals. The Ketchart family wanted to get revenge for their unexpected defeat earlier in the municipal council election and to fulfill their long-time political dream to have family member in parliament. Kanop was carrying the burden of his family’s unfulfilled aspirations. Surin likewise could not lose since his family would then have no representative in the House. The Democrat heavyweights such as Chuan Leekpai, former prime minister, Apirak Kosayodhin and Abhisit Vejjajiva had to make several visits to Surin’s constituency, an indication of how precarious his position was.

The Special Branch Police’s secret poll and intelligence report indicated that the TRT had a chance of winning three seats in Nakhon Si Thammarat, including Constituency 1, and the contests (along with Buriram and Phrae) were prone to violence.⁵⁶ The fierce competition among candidates prompted the Region 8 Police office (covering the upper south region) to closely monitor the movements of suspected local hit men in Nakhon Si Thammarat and neighboring provinces who were plotting attacks on candidates and canvassers. Police beefed up surveillance operations in the run-up to the election by setting up check-points at strategic locations and conducting weapons searches. One week before election day, the Region 8 Police raided eleven locations in Nakhon Si Thammarat, including the houses of local politicians and canvassers, in search of illegal weapons. The main targets were Surin’s and Kanop’s key vote canvassers, and large amounts of weapons (machine guns, hand guns, and grenades) were found and seized.⁵⁷ In spite of tight security, the 2005 poll was the most violent national electoral competition in the history of the province. Regarding electoral results, the Democrat Party was able to secure all ten seats as they had done in the previous elections, and Surin narrowly escaped a humiliating defeat. Kanop, on the other hand, failed to make history for his family. But he remained active pursuing his political career.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Khao Sod*, 22 December 2004: 31. The Special Branch Police, or the “Santibal” in Thai, was a police unit responsible for detecting and investigating political crime. Their activities generally include collecting and analyzing data, and submitting intelligence reports to the government. One of their routine tasks was to conduct a secret nationwide poll survey, infamously known in Thai as “Santibal poll,” regarding the general electoral competitions. For a brief history of the organization, see Tyrell Haberkorn, “Special Branch Police,” (unpublished paper 2012). Also see Chapter 7 and 11 for the 2005 elections in Phrae and Buriram (respectively).

⁵⁷ *Khao Sod*, 27 January 2005: 15; *The Nation*, 2 February 2005: 5A. These raids were part of Thaksin’s “war on influential people” (see discussion of this policy in Chapter 5).

⁵⁸ Interview, Kanop Ketchart, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 3 December 2009. Kanop believed that if Surin did not replace his sister, he would definitely have won the competition. After the election, he was appointed to be an assistant for Minister of the Prime Minister Office, and later an advisor of the Nakhon Si Thammarat mayor.

In the aftermath of the victories obtained by the Democrats in the 2004 PAO election and 2005 general elections, the Democrat Party had reached political predominance in the province. And Nakhon Si Thammarat became “the Capital City of the Democrats” as it had contributed the largest number of seats to the party.⁵⁹ It played a pivotal role in the party’s electoral strategy. Ironically, the acquired party domination exacerbated conflicts and deepened the divisions between the democrats. Almost all of Nakhon Si Thammarat’s influential political families, except the Ketchart family, had associated themselves with the Democrat party. These prominent families were: Sakdiset, Boonyakiat, Senpong, Kaewparadai, Wichaikun, Masadit, Pitsuwan, Adithepworaphan and Thongsamak. No family has been able to achieve economic or political domination over the other families. The fragmentation of power among the Democrats lies in the fact that none of them belonged to a prominent business family. Most of them, except the Adithepworaphan family, had backgrounds in law or teaching before entering politics.⁶⁰ Once they became lawmakers, they started doing business by putting investment in public companies, the stock market, natural resource extraction, or owning local enterprises, particularly construction. This pattern of wealth accumulation and power contrasted the pattern witnessed in Phrae in which prominent political families generally arose from elite business families.⁶¹ And because of the environment of unsettled political terrain and consequently fierce political struggle, each faction had to construct his/her own networks of supporters and then attempt to glue them together through patronage, money and coercive power.

As illustrated above, many Democrat MPs (not different from their opponents) had themselves surrounded by a group of followers who had shady backgrounds or were connected to illegitimate businesses.⁶² This pattern significantly shaped the course of political struggle in Nakhon Si Thammarat. As a professional politician-turned-

⁵⁹ The party gained 97 constituency seats in the 2005 general election. Therefore the seats it obtained in Nakhon Si Thammarat constituted 10 percent of the total.

⁶⁰ The Adithepworaphan family owns the Toyota dealership for Nakhon Si Thammarat. Narisa Adithepworaphan, a second generation of the family was an MP since 2001. See her and her family asset in: <http://www.thaiswatch.com/politician/info/pid/POL0000000589>.

⁶¹ It is, however, similar to the “politics to business” pattern of the Kamprakob family in Nakhon Sawan (see previous chapter).

⁶² A notable example of this was Nom Temrat, key political aide of Samphan Tongsamak, who was supported by his boss to get elected as a provincial councilor. A big-time gambler, land speculator, and one of the most powerful local big men, he was shot dead on 9 May 2001, not long after the PAO elections in which he ran and lost. Over his career, he had made a lot of enemies in the locality (*Matichon*, 10 May 2001: 1, 21; *Matichon*, 13 May 2001: 23; *Matichon*, 28 May 2001: 19).

entrepreneur, being elected to the House gave the access to profitable opportunities and power linkages with other businessmen and political authorities. The political position was also crucial to protect themselves and their followers from investigation and prosecution over illegitimate and/or unlawful conduct. In Nakhon Si Thammarat, political power constantly shifted from one faction to another within the Democrat Party. The fact that each political faction has relatively equal influence in the province has made the intra-party competition for political offices in Nakhon Si Thammarat very tense and prone to violence. The conflict usually started in the process of candidate selection. Each group lobbies party leaders fiercely to field their relatives or key supporters. The entitlement to Democrat candidacy became a valuable political resource worth fighting for. Back-stabbing and betrayal were normal among warring factions.⁶³

The 2008 PAO Chairman election

Fierce Democrat Party infighting has been manifested in various cases. The 2007 city municipal election witnessed friction between the Pitsuwan and the Senpong families, both of whom fielded their own candidates to compete with Somnuck. The long-standing mayor won handily as loyal Democrat loyal voters were split.⁶⁴ Infighting occurred again in the 20 April 2008 PAO chairman election. Chamni Sakdiset and Chinnaworn Bunyakiat, both high-ranking members of the Democrat Party, fielded their cousins who stood against each other for the post. The Ketchart family and TRT party did not compete. This election clearly proved that intra-party competition is as fierce and deadly as inter-party conflict. Media described the contest as “a striking thunderstorm” as both camps employed dirty tactics to overpower their enemies, including vote-buying, lawsuits, intimidation, violent attacks, as well as sinister black magic.⁶⁵ Many vote canvassers on both sides were assassinated.⁶⁶ It was certainly the most violent PAO

⁶³ There was an infamous case in the 2005 general elections in which one Democrat incumbent made a large sum of money (around 10 million baht) by “selling” his candidacy to an ambitious fellow. Interview, former MP candidate, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 3 December 2009; interview, local businessman, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 20 January 2010.

⁶⁴ *Khom Chat Luek*, 15 May 2007: 5.

⁶⁵ On 5 February 2008, a group of monks found that a black magic ceremony was done on temple grounds, evidenced by broken tiles and burning pictures of candidates with their names in folding papers. According to the monk, the ceremony was an old practice aiming to curse the targeted person to death (*Matichon*, 7 February 2008: 8; *Daily News*, 7 February 2008: 1, 15).

⁶⁶ For instance, the failed assassination of the candidate for the deputy PAO chairman during the election campaign (*Khao Sod*, 16 September 2007: 15); the killing on 28 April 2008 of a contractor and TAO chairman who was a key vote canvasser of his relative in the PAO elections (*Phunam Thongthin*, 8: 87, May 2008: 33); the murder in early May 2008 of a businessman who canvassed votes for his niece large enough to win over the candidate from an influential local family in Tasala district (*Manager*, 3 June 2008); and the assassination of the famous gunman nicknamed “Juab Paknang” on 25 May 2008, who was

election in the history of the province. The winner, Vithun Detdecho, Chamni's cousin, won by a slight margin. A few months after the election, 200 police searched the house of the new PAO chairman and found a large stock of machine guns and ammunition. The PAO chairman Vithun believed that this search was politically motivated.⁶⁷ Only a year later, voters had to cast a ballot again for a by-election for PAO chairman as Vithun suddenly died of cancer.⁶⁸ The by-election on 24 January 2010 was unequivocally a war of Democrat against Democrat; there were five candidates, four of them affiliated with a current Democrat MP (Chamni Sakdiset, Surin Pitsuwan, Chinnaworn Bunyakiat, and Witthaya Kaewparadai). The only non-Democrat candidate, Kriangsak Phuphantrakun received political, tactical support from the anti-Democrat forces in the province.⁶⁹ The anti-Democrats felt that politics of the province needed to be changed and the Democrat's political monopolization had to be stopped. The candidate they supported, however, was a former member of Bunyakiat's team in the previous PAO election. In this sense, every contender was, to certain extent, tainted by association with the Democrat power machine. There were two front-runners: the one backed by Chamni, who was able to solicit support from most Democrat MPs and Vithun's family, and the one supported by Chinnaworn Bunyakiat, the then Minister for Education. The electoral contest was tense. Of the five candidates, three were locally known for their involvement in illegal businesses and underground activities. After Vithun's fall, conflicts between the Democrats deepened, thus increasing the chances of violent confrontation. A telling manifestation of the highly volatile situation was the fact even after winning, the elected candidate was not brave enough to go anywhere public. He locked himself in his house for almost a month, protected by his own bodyguards and police. He was told by his political advisers that he faced the real danger of being assassinated by his rivals.⁷⁰ Provincial election commissioners were concerned by this prospect of post-election violence. There were precedents of elected candidates being killed before an official announcement, therefore enabling the runner-up to be declared the winner instead.⁷¹ In

incriminated by the police in connection to the murder of the contractor on 28 April 2008 (*Manager*, 12 August 2008).

⁶⁷ *Matichon*, 18 October 2008; *Matichon*, 22 October 2008.

⁶⁸ His sudden death was a topic of discussion. Most local people believed that he died, not from cancer, but from black magic. Personal observation and interviews, local residents, Nakhon Si Thammarat, December 2009 and January 2010.

⁶⁹ This led to strange bedfellows, as it comprised of the Ketchart family, some TRT members, red shirt groups, a few Yellow Shirt factions, and a group of gamblers and gangsters. Personal observation and direct participation in election campaign, Nakhon Si Thammarat, December 2009 to February 2010.

⁷⁰ Personal observation, Nakhon Si Thammarat, January 2010. See also the news report in *Siam Rath*, 26 January 2010: 24; *Siam Rath*, 15 February 2010: 21.

⁷¹ Interview, local election commission officer, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 26 January 2010.

this sense, it was not completely paranoid to be overly cautious. In fact, during the campaign, all major candidates were put in bullet-proof cars with their personal bodyguards or gunmen, and some of them even wore bullet-proof vests.⁷²

Small local bosses and scattered violence

Even though the province does not have a nationally famous godfather, there are several groups of small-scale local bosses or local big men in the province who make their living from smuggling, gambling, prostitution, drugs dealing, underground lotteries, illicit trade, protection racketeering, and other fraudulent business. When these illegal activities are connected with politics, as elaborated in Chapter 3, they make political competition prone to violence. In addition, plentiful natural resources, such as forests, minerals, rubber, seafood, oil, and vast land drive fierce political struggle at elections. Nakhon Si Thammarat has a large agricultural sector, covering a wide range of enterprises from mining, forestry, rubber and coffee plantations, fisheries, and shrimp farming. These types of business need considerable manpower and land and strong muscle to control them, and, political influence to obtain licenses and ward off business rivals. Business and political conflicts are closely intertwined. Disputes over land entitlement, land encroachment, bidding for licenses and construction projects frequently breed violence. Intimidation and murder are employed to get rid of enemies who stand in their way to the exploitation of rich natural resources and the monopolization of the lucrative businesses.

As a result, violent conflicts among the local bosses and their henchmen are common in Nakhon Si Thammarat. Most of these petty gangsters are naturally vote brokers for prominent politicians. With the support of their powerful bosses, many of them have moved into legitimate politics and successfully transformed themselves. The differentiation between crime and politics, criminals and politicians has been blurred in this dangerous, power-fragmented province.

The case of a politically motivated murder of a journalist in Nakhon Si Thammarat reaffirmed the province's notoriety. On the night of 1 August 2008, Atiwat Chaiyanurat, a reporter of *Matichon daily newspaper*, was shot dead at home in Nakhon Si

⁷² Personal observation, Nakhon Si Thammarat, December to January 2010. Interview, local journalist, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 28 January 2010.

Thammarat. Shortly before his death, he had reported on many cases of corruption in local administrative organizations. Because of his articles, certain politicians had been disqualified from running for local elections. A preliminary investigation suggested that his murder was linked to his journalistic work. Apart from reporting on corruption, he also covered a police manhunt for a gunman who had been in the district prior to the local election. His investigation into the search for the assassin angered a senior provincial civil servant who had allegedly protected the gunman. Atiwat and his family had received death threats several times. The fact that the killing took place inside his house and was carried out by highly professional gunmen indicates that the murder was not only premeditated but also arranged by influential figures. In the end, the son of a prominent PAO politician, an enemy of Atiwat, was summoned and investigated by the police.⁷³ The murder of a journalist should not be ignored by observers or the state since, compared to other countries (like the Philippines or Sri Lanka), killing journalists is less widespread in Thailand. Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 3, Thai political bosses normally avoid using violence against media personnel as it causes too much public attention.⁷⁴

The local elections for the posts of Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO) chairman and councilor were no less violent than the competition at the municipal, PAO and national levels. For a long time, there had been evidence linking many homicide cases to competition for the office of village and sub-district headman. This type of political killing was rampant in the 1970s; large numbers of village and sub-district headman had been murdered throughout the province.⁷⁵ Since the beginning of decentralization, with direct elections for local administration, Nakhon Si Thammarat has been one of the hot spots (perhaps the “hottest” spot) facing rampant electoral-related violence. Vast numbers of vote canvassers, including candidates themselves, have been killed during both pre- and post- election periods. Each political faction has supported their own relatives and subordinates in running for the TAO offices in order to control the local budget and manpower deemed vital to their success in winning elections at higher levels.

⁷³ Interview, local journalist, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 28 January 2010. For further details and progress of the case, see *Matichon*, 5 August 2008; *Khao Sod*, 20 October 2008; *Matichon*, 31 October 2008.

⁷⁴ Another recent case of the murder of a journalist occurred in Suphanburi province, a province of a “peaceful” strongman, Banharn Silpa-archa. On September 27, 2008, *Matichon* journalist Jaruek Rangcharoen was fatally shot, and it was believed the killing was related to his reporting on local government corruption.

⁷⁵ See an excellent study in regard to local violence in Nakhon Si Thammarat during the 1970s by Trocki (unpublished: 29).

To sum up, since the 1995 general election, Nakhon Si Thammarat has been dominated by the Democrat Party at the national level, but highly fragmented at the local level. The Democrats' domination of the national level, however, has been constantly challenged. The electoral contestation of the province has been marred by violence as a result of both inter- and intra-party conflicts. The Democrats dominated the province in the same fashion that they have done in other upper southern provinces, using local cultural identity, patronage, and strong political machine.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the coercive force was as equally important as other factors, and was integral to the political struggle for the monopoly of power. Infighting among the Democrats and hostilities between them and their rivals are not yet over. The spread of local competing clans contributes to the frequent occurrence of violent incidents in local election campaigns.

In the next three chapters, I examine three relatively peaceful provinces—Phetchaburi, Buriram, and Sa Kaeo. These locations assume different political characters, power structures, and patterns of electoral conflict from what we have seen in the three violent provinces discussed in this part. Their experience unravels the possible variations of domination and contestation of power in Thai provincial politics.

⁷⁶ Askew 2008; Pichai, Somchet, and Vorawit 1988.

Phetchaburi: The blood ties that bind

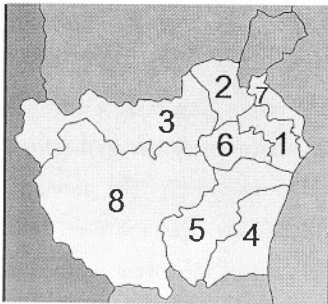


At first glance, Phetchaburi's profile has all the necessary factors for pervasive electoral violence: a lack of monopoly of power, the involvement of local politicians in the illicit economy, plus the abundance of gunmen (read: coercive resources). The province, however, has managed to have remarkably peaceful elections over the past three decades. What was the missing causal linkage or, put in another way, what preventive measures averted deadly conflict from erupting in the province? A close investigation into the political life of this medium-large coastal province, linking the central to the southern region, has revealed a non-violent pattern of power struggle.

Phetchaburi is a medium-large province with a fairly small population, which makes it one of the least densely populated provinces in the country. Neighboring provinces are Ratchaburi, Samut Songkhram and Prachuap Khiri Khan. It is a coastal province not far from Bangkok (only 150 kms distance), with the Gulf of Thailand to the east and a mountain range forming the boundary with Myanmar. It takes only 1 hour's drive from the capital to this popular vacation destination (known since King Rama the Fourth's time) which provides travelers with more tranquil and less expensive accommodation and facilities than its counterpart on the east coast or the southern islands. The provincial economy is mainly based on agriculture, trading and small-scale industry that relates to

its rich natural resources, including tropical trees, valuable minerals, sea products, etc . The province's location and abundance of natural resources are ideal for coastal smuggling, illegal logging, and contraband goods trading sold in Bangkok and other major provinces. Gambling, underground lotteries, and drug trafficking are also prevalent, and have become profitable businesses for local politicians and bureaucrats.¹ If we compare the province to Chonburi, a coastal province on the other side of the country which bears a striking resemblance to Phetchaburi but is more affluent, one could say that Phetchaburi is under developed. In terms of infrastructure, tourism and industrial development, Phetchaburi is far behind Chonburi. The province's Gross Provincial Product per capita is, however, higher than Phrae, Buriram, Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Sa Kaeo.²

The province is subdivided into 8 districts (*amphoe*), which are further subdivided into 93 sub districts (*tambon*) and 681 villages (*muban*).



- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. Mueang Phetchaburi | 5. Tha Yang |
| 2. Khao Yoi | 6. Ban Lat |
| 3. Nong Ya Plong | 7. Ban Laem |
| 4. Cha-am | 8. Kaeng Krachan |

As mentioned, Phetchaburi is infamous as “the gunmen capital” of Thailand frequently identified by the Police Department as having the highest concentration of hired gunmen

¹ Pasuk, Sungsidh, and Nualnoi 1998: 33, 96, 105.

² According to the data in year 2008, Phetchaburi Gross Provincial Product (GPP) was 50,443 million baht and its GPP Per Capita was 109,227 million baht, while Chonburi's GPP and GPP Per Capita are 657,545 and 544,160 million baht respectively (National Economic and Social Development Board 2008).

in the country.³ In preparation for election security prior to each national poll, the activities and movement of groups of gunmen in Phetchaburi are always under close police scrutiny because the mercenaries from Phetchaburi are popular and in demand among the politicians throughout the country who want to use violence to eliminate their enemies. Hit men from Phetchaburi are popular because of their acquired reputation for accuracy, effectiveness, and discretion. However, most “killing orders” are from outside the province, particularly cases of politically motivated murders, because political competition in the province is relatively peaceful.⁴ Phetchaburi is therefore a prime example of the geography of supply and demand of violence being separated and not necessary overlapping (see previous chapters). A province that has a high concentration of gunman is not necessarily an electorally violent-prone province, and vice versa. In Thailand, coercive resources like gunmen are a highly mobile workforce, conveniently facilitating a long-distance demand for violence.

Besides being named a gunmen capital, news media, popular writers and observers usually call the province a “land of savages” or “city of the ruthless.”⁵ These inauspicious names have damaged the province’s image and hurt local tourism and business; local residents and politicians complain about this ‘notoriety’.⁶ The local people have a point. Despite the high numbers of gangsters and hired gunmen, Phetchaburi does not have the highest murder rate in the country.

Phetchaburi is definitely not a province devoid of crime and illegality, but the data show that it is not in the top-ten. In terms of homicide, it was rated somewhere between 13th to

³ See the information in the report by the Research and Development Division of the Royal Thai Police Department (unpublished: 17-20). For the account of Phetchaburi gunmen in the 2001 election, see King-oe Lao Hong, “Gunmen ready for the poll: Helping their boss to the House,” *Krungthep Thurakit*, 9 November 2000: D1 (in Thai), and “Revealing gunmen blacklist: On sale during election campaign,” *Daily News*, 16 November 2000: 1, 3. During Thaksin’s administration, the government agency announced that Phetchaburi had 15 groups of hired gunmen, one of the highest in the country (*Khao Sod*, 21 June 2003: 1, 11). And see a news report on *Matichon* (22 October 2004) for the stories of Phetchaburi gunmen in the 2007 general electoral contest.

⁴ It is common to find in the police investigation that the perpetrators of political killings in several regions were hired guns from Phetchaburi’s gangs. See, for example, the case of murders in Rayong (*Khao Sod*, 18 January 2001: 1, 6); the political kidnapping and intimidation in Samut Prakarn (*Thai Post*, 14 December 1999). Sometimes Phetchaburi’s assassins travelled far to the south to execute their jobs. For example, the murder case in Nakhon Si Thammarat (*Matichon*, 31 January 1992: 1, 22). Even Banham Silapa-archa and his team members of Chart Thai party in Suphanburi were also the clients of Phetchaburi’s gunmen, hiring them to be their security guards during the election campaign in the 1980s (*Matichon*, 7 April 1983: 9).

⁵ See, for example, *Sarakadee* magazine (1993: 53-59); Piak Chakkawat 2005: 70-128.

⁶ It becomes the normal issue for debate in electoral contests in Phetchaburi on how to rescue the province’s image. See, for instance, the campaign in the 1988 election (*Matichon*, 10 May 1988: 2); in 2005 (*Bangkok Post*, 25 December 2004: 3), and; in the 2011 poll (*Matichon*, 13 June 2011).

20th in the country.⁷ According to 2010 police data, Phetchaburi ranks number 23rd for homicide. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, when the province started to build its reputation as the “land of savages,” Phetchaburi was even then not among the top-ten for murder. Nonetheless, the province’s murder ranking taken per capita is significantly higher: in certain years, the province ranked number 10th.⁸ Other than Phetchaburi, there are several provinces which constantly appear in the top list of those plagued by criminality more seriously than Phetchaburi, namely Surat Thani, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Songkhla, Trang, Chumporn, Krabi, Phatthalung, Chonburi, Nakhon Ratchasima, Phetchabun, Chinag Rai, Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya, and Suphanburi.⁹ Also, the public has never perceived provinces such as Krabi, Suphanburi and Ayutthaya as “lands of savages,” despite having actual high murder rates. However, the more important point is that there is no correlation between the homicide rate and election-related violence. Some low homicide rate provinces have faced rampant electoral killings. Phrae is a case in point. Whereas some high homicide rate provinces have managed to hold peaceful elections; Trang, Krabi, and Suphanburi are good examples of this.

Phetchaburi’s tainted image as a hotbed of criminal violence and politically motivated murders probably stems from the impression people received from the brief period of the province’s bloodstained history in the early 1980s. Even though the province has been tranquil and uneventful since the mid 1980s, the gripping stories linger on in people’s minds, including those of academics. As will be demonstrated in the following section, Phetchaburi has turned from a ferocious, violence-prone place to a strikingly peaceful one.

⁷ The top-ten list in 2010 includes the following provinces (by ranking order): Pattani, Songkhla, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Surat Thani, Narathiwat, Yala, Chonburi, Trang, Phatthalung, and Chiang Mai. This shown result was calculated by the author from the raw data provided by the Central Information Technology Center (http://statistic.police.go.th/dn_main.htm). The three provinces in the deep south- Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, only entered the top-ten list after the violence severely broke out in the areas since 2004. For the data on the homicide rate from 1983-1996, see Worawan Chutha et al. 2000; from 1997-2010, see the Central Information Technology Center’s website (http://statistic.police.go.th/dn_main.htm).

⁸ See the detail in Worawan Chutha et al. 2000: 12-13. Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994: 76, in the brief section that they discussed Phetchaburi’s godfather, mentioned that in terms of crime statistics “Phetchaburi ranked third (behind Chonburi and Nakhon Si Thammarat),” but there was no exact reference provided. The information is in contrast to the data I have collected either in terms of absolute number or ratio. Many other works similarly referred to Phetchaburi as the prototype of the Thailand’s violent, gangster-dominated province, including Nishizaki 2004, 2011, Ockey 1992. This is also contrary to my findings.

⁹ See the Research and Development Division of the Royal Thai Police Department (unpublished: Appendix n); Worawan Chutha et al. 2000; the Central Information Technology Center’s website (http://statistic.police.go.th/dn_main.htm).

From violent to peaceful province: the days before the family domination (1950s-1983)

The Angkinan family and their enemies

If Phrae has the Wongwan family as its well-known provincial political dynasty, Phetchaburi has the Angkinans. For years, members of this powerful family have been elected to parliament. Some of them obtained coveted ministerial positions and/or became prime ministerial advisors. This family has dominated both local and national politics in Phetchaburi for longer than any other family. It has built and sustained a strong connection to the military, the police and high-ranking civil bureaucrats, and has a wide informal network with groups of local notables and the underworld community. Their path to power had not been smooth since they had to fight fiercely with other political groups that had the similar goal of controlling provincial politics. During the open era of democratization and parliamentary politics in the 1970s, five major political forces emerged in Phetchaburi: the Angkinan clan, the Thianlai group, the Samphawakhup family, the Somjit Phuangmani group, and the *kamnan* Chong clique. The intense political struggles between these rising, ambitious powers produced deadly consequences for the province. Within a decade, however, the Angkinan family had survived severe political battles and emerged victorious.

The Angkinan family is one of Phetchaburi's old established families. The founding political patriarch of the Angkinan family was Phat Angkinan (1911-1968). Phat was a son of the late Phum Angkinan, who was in turn the son of a Chinese immigrant who became a fabled lawyer during King Rama VI's reign. Due to his remarkable career, Phum, who was posted to Phetchaburi as a public prosecutor, received the noble title of "khun" and a royally-bestowed surname.¹⁰ He then became Khun Angkinanpong and practiced law in Phetchaburi until he passed away. He was loved and respected by the local residents as he kindly helped the poor and the helpless by providing them with cheap or even free legal counseling and services.¹¹ It turned out that his noble deeds did his descendants good political service when they stood for elections. Khun Angkinanpong had ten children with four wives, and two of his sons, including Phat, entered politics.

¹⁰ Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994: 77.

¹¹ Natchanut 2000: 91-93.

Phat Angkinan, like his beloved father, was a legal practitioner. He married the daughter of a big wealthy Phetchaburi family, and with her he had two sons, Piya and Yut Angkinan, both of whom later became highly successful and prominent provincial politicians.¹² After Khun Angkinanpong passed away, Phat established a law firm and made himself known to the locals as a dedicated lawyer who helped poor clients. Many of Phat's clients, including those who had shady backgrounds, became his political clients and brokers when he decided to run for municipal elections. In 1948, he won the mayoral race and remained in office for ten years.

During his mayoral terms, other opposing local camps challenged him unsuccessfully. The most potent challenger was a group led by his own nephew, who Phat eventually persuaded to be his ally, thus avoiding unnecessary fighting. His sons learnt and later adapted this strategy as a way of handling opposition. Phat's electioneering style could be labeled a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, it was charitable and innovative (for that period), for example advertising at the movie shows or giving a political speech during the intermission of film screening (a free entertainment service provided by him during the election campaign). He also distributed goods to local residents and treated them to special feasts to show his generosity.¹³ On the other hand, his campaign usually employed a large number of local tough guys and intimidating gunmen providing security everywhere he went. The distinctive character of Phat's entourage was open display of firearms in public.¹⁴ Phat's spectacular campaign style was clearly an exercise in coercive power and a demonstration of domineering force aimed at intimidating his rivals and impressing locals. These strong-arm tactics initiated by Phat were adopted by other powerful local figures, including his enemies and his own sons in the ensuing years.

¹² In total, Phat has six children with several wives; two children with a first wife, one adopted daughter who later on married the police chief of Phetchaburi, and three other children with unknown wives. See the oral history of Phat and his family collected by the Local Data Base Project, the Academic Resources and Information Technology Center, Phetchaburi Rajabhat University in "Phat Angkinan- Phetchaburi" (<http://gold.pbru.ac.th/rLocal/stories.php?story=02/06/19/1008993>); Yut 2003: 1.

¹³ Yut confessed that his family handed out an enormous amount of moonshine liquor (brewed by himself), an estimated 32,000 bottles per election campaign. See "Yut Angkinan: Political Legend of Phetchaburi, episode 2- rowdy teenager life in Phetchaburi" *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 29 (July 2003): 26-28.

¹⁴ Natchanut 2000: 95.

Phat stepped down as mayor to run as MP for Phetchaburi in 1957 and had his nephew replace him as mayor.¹⁵ He won the 1957 national election and became the second person from the Angkinan family to successfully become a lawmaker.¹⁶ However, he served as a parliamentarian only once before returning to the municipality. In early 1968, he founded the local political "Phat group," under which he ran and was successfully reelected as Phetchaburi city mayor in a landslide.¹⁷ Unfortunately, he died after being in power for only six months. His unanticipated passing notwithstanding, his family's political influence remained strong as he had securely put his family members into significant political positions. Since early in his political career, he had enlisted his sons in his campaign to give them first-hand political experience and acquaint them with electioneering tactics, including dirty tricks. He had also introduced his sons to his circle of influential figures from the time they were young. And many times, he had taught them how to fight, survive and earn respect in the world of Phetchaburian local strong men. On one occasion, Phat had such a serious dispute with a provincial military officer that they challenged each other to a gun duel. Phat brought Yut, his teenage son, to the gun-duel site, an isolated spot in the forest. On the way there, he put a pistol in his son's hands, hinting at what he needed to do. In the end, their adversary did not show up, but Yut learnt a valuable lesson.¹⁸ Phat crafted every step of his son's political career, and used his connections to put both of his sons to work in Phetchaburi's major banks' local branches. In due course both of them moved up to bank manager, a powerful position allowing authorization of bank loans to businessmen and all sorts of clients. These positions were highly beneficial to their political careers.¹⁹

In 1967, with his father's support, Yut Angkinan (1936-) was elected to municipal council. Immediately after Phat's demise, the council unanimously voted for Yut to replace his father as the new mayor. Yut inherited a political fortune from his father and

¹⁵ See an account of the Angkinans' early political standing in "Yut Angkinan: Political Legend of Phetchaburi, episode 1" *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 28 (June 2003): 22-24; *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 29 (July 2003): 26-28.

¹⁶ Thongphun Angkinan, a half-brother of Phat, was the first lawmaker of the family elected in 1938, but ran only one time.

¹⁷ When Sarit Thanarat took power by staging a coup in 1958, his government decided to dissolve the municipality nationwide as part of the political scheme to centralize political power into his military-led administration. The system of municipality was resumed in 1967 when Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachon, a political heir of Sarit, made a facile attempt to reform his regime. See *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 31 (September 2003: 27).

¹⁸ "Yut Angkinan: Political Legend of Phetchaburi, episode 2- rowdy teenager life in Phetchaburi" *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 29 (July 2003): 28.

¹⁹ "Yut Angkinan: Political Legend of Phetchaburi, episode 5- permanent mayor of Phetchaburi" *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 32 (October 2003): 26-27.

has since gone on to lead the "Phat group" in dominating the city for decades. Piya Angkinan (1933-), the eldest son, was chosen by Phat to seek a position in the provincial council as an attempt to expand family power. Piya comfortably won his district election, when he first ran in 1957 at the age of just 24, becoming one of the youngest elected councilors in the country at that time. He was later elevated to president of the provincial council.²⁰

The 1970s to early 1980s was a period during which the Angkinan clan strove for monopoly power by extending their networks of influence, making new allies, and eliminating their opponents. The political terrain was clearly divided among family members: Yut was assigned to take care of the municipal area, while Piya was responsible for controlling the provincial council. The two brothers have quite different characteristics. Yut is soft-spoken, well-mannered, charming, charismatic, and perfectly composed and calm; a thinker type. He is the political strategist of the clan. Piya is the opposite. He is hot-tempered, loud-talking, aggressive, and possesses a macho posturing, non-caring image; a fighter type. In many respects, Piya's characteristics are typical Thai godfather-politician type. Piya is normally surrounded and by a group of intimidating tough guys clad in jeans, jacket and dark glasses. He is the political enforcer of the Angkinans.

Under Yut's leadership, the city municipality became a family stronghold. Oppositions or challenges rarely surfaced. The three other groups who had fought his father (comprised of a group of local businessmen, lawyers, teachers and civil servants) had gradually turned from foes to friends. Most of the time, Yut used his diplomatic skills to negotiate and persuade his opponents to join forces with offers of positions in the municipality or material benefits. Therefore, his administration had never faced serious conflict and was reelected repeatedly without much difficulty.²¹ Secure at home, Yut became increasingly involved in national politics. In 1977, he was appointed by coup leader Admiral Sa-ngat Chaloyu, his relative, to be a law maker responsible for drafting the constitution. Two years later, he was duly appointed to be a senator.²² Moreover, his municipal colleagues from other provinces nominated him to act as president of the National Municipal League of Thailand (NMT) from 1977-1979, a position to which he

²⁰ Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009.

²¹ "Yut Angkinan: Political Legend of Phetchaburi, episode 4- I am permanent mayor" *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 31 (September 2003): 26-28.

²² Sa-ngat Chaloyu married to Yut's aunt, Benjamat Angkinan (Natchanut 2000: 118).

was reelected another three times. Piya had likewise thrived in the provincial council's power domain.²³

Despite the family's success in local politics, their journey to Parliament was neither smooth nor straightforward. In 1969, Piya made his first attempt to be elected to the House, but lost to a long-time adversary of the family, Phanit Samphawakhup (1915-1992), by a very slight margin. Phanit was a famous lawyer and prominent businessman, a graduate from Thammasat University. His family came from Phetchaburi but he had been away from his hometown for a long time for higher education, and had spent most of his time in Bangkok after finishing his degree. He established a business law firm in Bangkok, which became highly successful over a short period of time because of his skill and connections. His firm had taken care of several eminent clients, such as the Kasikorn Thai Bank and some large agriculture trading firms. Besides his law firm, he and his wife ventured into the lucrative business of land development and real estate as he acquired a vast amount of land from certain clients for whom he had won cases. Since some of his clients were not able to pay lawyer fees, they paid him with land.²⁴ Another business venture Phanit pioneered was the mining industry, from which he made massive profits. The modus operandi was to have his company inspect land throughout the country to locate valuable minerals; once discovered, he used his political connections to obtain mining licenses from the government, then sold the licenses to leading industrial companies. Subsequently, his large real estate and mining enterprise revenue were used to finance his election campaigns. Furthermore, with the wide connections he had established through legal counseling and land development projects with national capitalist groups, such as Sahaviriya Group, Siam Motors Group and Kasikorn Bank, his campaign war chest was much larger than other contenders including the Angkinan clan members.²⁵ Phanit was basically the most affluent MP candidate for Phetchaburi from the 1950s to the early 1980s.

Conveniently, Phanit was elected the first time in February 1957 alongside his team mate from the government-backed Seri Manangkhasila Party. At that time Phetchaburi,

²³ "Yut Angkinan: Political Legend of Phetchaburi, episode 1," *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 28 (June 2003): 22-24.

²⁴ Natchanut 2000: 86; Phanit 1993.

²⁵ Sahaviriya Group is one of the leading Thailand's iron and steel firms. Siam Motors Group was founded in 1962 as a joint venture between the Phornprapha, a Thai leading business family, and Japanese Nissan company, importing hardware and Japanese Nissan automobiles (Pasuk and Chris 2002: 83, 126, 140). For a connection between Phanit and the leading business companies, see Natchanut 2000: 85-87; "Pongsak Samphawakhup: When He went up North," *Manager Monthly* (July 1988); Phanit 1993.

as a small province, had only two constituency seats. The Seri Manangkhasila Party was founded and led by Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram and the then national Police Chief Phao Sriyanond. The party used the state apparatus, including sub-district heads, village headmen, local bureaucrats and police officers, to gather votes for their candidates. Their candidates thus had the upper hand in most electoral competitions, and Phetchaburi was no exception. In Phetchaburi, Phao gave a direct order to his rogue police henchman in the provincial crime suppression division to work as chief vote brokers for the party's candidates. The local gangsters and big men were fearful of Phao's henchman as he was ruthless in handling criminals. In order to survive, they involuntarily worked as vote canvassers for Phao's party contenders by not only collecting votes for them but also intimidating their opponents. In the end, both candidates from Seri Manangkhasila Party, Phanit and his team mate, were easily elected because candidates from other parties withdrew from the competition to avoid confrontation with a potentially fatal Phao.²⁶ As discussed in Chapter 2 this was certainly a period in Thai politics in which archaic bureaucratic forces actively intervened in electoral processes.

In the following election of December 1957, Phanit had to run independently as the Sarit-led coup ousted the Phibun and Phao faction on 16 September 1957. This time he faced a formidable opponent: the Angkinan family. The campaign was more intense than any previous polls as both contenders were prominent provincial figures with solid power bases. Phat stood for MP for the first time and invested heavily in the campaign to guarantee his victory. Interestingly Phat's strong-arm electioneering tactics created an atmosphere that impacted on his rival's campaigning. Phanit employed a number of gunmen and local ruffians to guard him and his team.²⁷ This sent a message to Phat that he also had control over coercive resources. Eventually, Phanit created an inner circle of key vote brokers comprising tough guys whose jobs were to control the grassroots vote canvassers in each local precinct. Ultimately, both Phanit and Phat were elected. Bloodshed was avoided as there were no other potent contenders in the poll. Hence there was no reason for either side to attack against each other when they could share seats. Nevertheless, Phetchaburi politics became fiercely-contested from this point on, and the image of the "land of the ruthless" emerged.

²⁶ See Natchanut 2000: 82-84, for further information about the role of Phao's henchman in electioneering in Phetchaburi in the February 1957 poll.

²⁷ Natchanut 2000: 84-91.

In the 1969 election Piya competed and lost to Phanit, but a team mate of Piya, Chalerm Yaikwawong (1934-), who was a political scion of the powerful Yaikwawong family, was elected. The Yaikwawong family was a wealthy and influential Phetchaburi Chinese business clan whose empire encompassed a wide range of economic activities. They owned opium dens in several provinces throughout the central region including Phetchaburi, a monopolized operation for which they were the sole government-appointed contractor. Also, the family owned a number of gas stations, soft-drink factories, seafood retailers, fishing boats and sea ports. The family also controlled liquor trading, a profitable venture.²⁸ It was no surprise that the family patriarch, Thianlai Yaikwawong (1899-1968), was a respectable local notable with whom the provincial governor, police chief, and other top local bureaucrats wanted to establish contact. Officials sought his assistance to support government undertakings, such as building schools and hospitals, improving infrastructure, renovating temples, repairing broken bridges and patronizing local charities. Thianlai never disappointed them, and his long-time dedication to and support of charitable works earned him the prestigious, high-ranking royal insignia.²⁹ Be that as it may, he was much more than a philanthropist: in a similar fashion to the Angkinan clan and Phanit, Thianlai effectively controlled a corps of armed mobsters who could be seen alongside him patrolling the neighborhood in the west side of the province, a family stronghold.³⁰ Most of these mobsters were family henchmen whose normal jobs (outside the electoral season) were running opium dens, sea ports and other business enterprises, but then acting as vote canvassers during the election campaigns. The Yaikwawong clan was thus the ideal key vote broker every candidate was looking for; the family was extremely rich and had muscle over the local bureaucracy and local strongmen. Phanit asked Thianlai to collect votes in the western constituencies for him, and, with the help of Thianlai, Phanit won.

The two leading provincial bosses, Thianlai and Phat, passed away at about the same time in 1968. Shortly thereafter, the general election was held. There were three major contenders: Phanit, Piya and Chalerm. Yut Angkinan had a plan for his brother Piya. Knowing the Yaikwawong family's support was a key factor behind Phanit's victory in

²⁸See the oral history of Thianlai and his family collected by the Local Data Base Project, the Academic Resources and Information Technology Center, Phetchaburi Rajabhat University in "Thianlai Yaikwawong - Phetchaburi" (<http://gold.pbru.ac.th/rLocal/stories.php?story=02/07/04/8207942>); See also Thianlai 1971.

²⁹"Thianlai Yaikwawong - Phetchaburi?"

(<http://gold.pbru.ac.th/rLocal/stories.php?story=02/07/04/8207942>); Thianlai 1971.

³⁰Natchanut 2000: 87-88, 97-98.

the previous election, Yut isolated Phanit by asking Chalerm to abandon Phanit and run under the same team with Piya. Phanit and Chalerm were therefore political rivals in this election, and many of Phanit's vote canvassers were swayed to work for Chalerm. As it turned out, Chalerm came first and Phanit second; both of them entered the House. Piya came third with only 48 votes fewer than Phanit. The young candidate from the Angkinan clan learnt a hard lesson: never rely on another candidate's muscle. In addition, he attributed his defeat to his "irresoluteness" and the lack of physical "toughness" that would enable him to fight his competitors.³¹ He came back in the 1975 election with a forceful strategy.

Phetchaburi witnessed unruly and violent electoral contestations in January 1975 and the subsequent two general elections of 1976 and 1979. The province made newspaper headlines with several spectacular violent incidents. The riveting reports of dead bodies of candidates and canvassers, and tight security during polling campaigns with troops of police and military personnel, became regular occurrences in this small coastal province. The public and outsiders associated the province with the image of a "land of gunslingers" connected with the Wild West.³² In the 1976 poll, political observers identified Phetchaburi (along with Saraburi), as the most dangerous place in the country with electoral competition plagued by "goons and intimidation." Reportedly, unknown gunmen threatened and shot vote canvassers before polling day.³³

The most violent electoral contest in Phetchaburi's history occurred in the April 1979 general election. There were ten candidates from three parties competing for two coveted seats. The four front runners were Piya Angkinan, Phanit Samphawakhup, *kamnan* Chong Khlaikhlung, and Colonel Narong Kittikhachorn. All of them were political heavyweights and similarly notorious for their use of "dark influences" and forceful campaigning tactics. *Kamnan* Chong Khlaikhlung (1979-1944) was a politically ambitious young local teacher-turned-lawman who believed in the extra-legal methods of suppressing crime. Local residents in his district were fearful of him as much as the criminals. With his strong clout in Chongsakae sub district, he was asked by

³¹ Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009.

³² See, for example, the reports, "Campaign in Phetchaburi heated up: Firearms handed out to goons to threaten," *Prachachat Daily*, 4 January 1975: 3; "The Police were ordered to stay neutral: Tough situation in Phetchaburi- "land of gunmen," *Prachachat Daily*, 8 January 1975: 3; *Prachachat Daily*, 14 February 1976: 3.

³³ "Political assassination," *Prachachat Daily*, 24 February 1976: 3; "Dirty tricks in campaigning," *Prachachat Daily*, 23 March 1976: 3; "How many more will die?" *Prachachat Daily*, 29 March 1976: 3.

Chalerm and Piya to be their vote canvasser in the 1969 poll, which was his entry point to politics. A few years later, he resigned from his public servant duty and was elected as provincial councilor.³⁴ In this election, he sought the MP position by making an alliance with a powerful figure from Bangkok, Narong Kittikhachorn, who was the eldest son and the sole political successor of the former Prime Minister Thanom Kittikhachorn. His family fled the country in the aftermath of the October 1973 uprising, and had made several attempts to return—eventually succeeding in 1978. Shortly thereafter, they attempted to regain their lost wealth and power through parliamentary politics. Narong chose to run in Phetchaburi as he had known many leading godfathers in the province, including Piya who was his old schoolmate.³⁵ Another local strong man who helped Narong garner votes was Somchit Phuangmani, Narong's loyal friend and up-and-coming local mob leader who owned a business empire ranging from pineapple plantations, gas stations, truck companies, ice factories to fisheries. Somchit controlled a large sector of the underground economy and a gang of gunmen in the eastern bloc of the province. Several underworld figures fully supported Narong's campaign team. On top of this, Narong had brought in a troop of notorious hit men and ex-soldiers from outside Phetchaburi, with a stockpile of weapons.³⁶ What made the situation complicated was the fact that Somchit and Chong had actually been rivals. Inevitably, the political alliance between Narong and Chong was fraught with tension and mistrust.

As election campaigning started, the prospect of violence loomed large. The national Police Headquarters ordered the provincial governor of Phetchaburi to tighten security in both the pre- and post- polling periods. The governor, fearing political killings among opposing gangs, asked all gang leaders to meet up in the sacred local temple and made them swear before Buddha to harbor no grudges against each other and to refrain from using violence to win the election. It was the appropriation of a traditional ritual, hoping that religious belief could restrain their wayward behavior.³⁷ However, all of the

³⁴ See Chong 1981; the Local Data Base Project, the Academic Resources and Information Technology Center, Phetchaburi Rajabhat University, "Chong Khlaikhueng - Phetchaburi" (<http://gold.pbru.ac.th/r/Local/stories.php?story=04/06/18/6268977>).

³⁵ They studied together at the most prestigious male high school, Suankulap. The Angkinan family and the Kittikhachorn family were also very close since their fathers' generation (Phad and Thanom). As a result, after October 1973, Piya was hunted down by a military leader who was a main rival of the Thanom-Praphat faction as they believed Piya was the right-hand man of Narong. Fortunately, his precarious life was saved by the then Army Commander-in-Chief Krit Sivara. Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009.

³⁶ Interview, local journalist, Phetchaburi, 16 December 2009; former assistant district officer, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009.

³⁷ *Matichon*, 2 March 1979; Piak 2005: 74.

authorities' noble and other worldly efforts to stop the murderous violence were in vain. On 20 March 1979, Chong Khlaikhueng, a candidate from the Kitsangkhom Party, was brutally shot dead in his Volvo along with three of his henchmen in a night ambush after coming back from canvassing votes at the local temple. In the victim's car, the police found several rifles belonging to Chong's henchmen, one of whom was a lower ranking soldier suspended from duty (in Chonburi) and making a living as a hired gunman. Obviously the victims had prepared for a fight. The police also found 106 bullet shells at the crime scene, and the investigation concluded that a group of fifteen skilled shooters had carried out the attack. The scale and efficiency of the slaying signified that powerful mobsters were behind it.

Shortly after the murders, other candidates sought police protection as they feared they might be the next target. Somchit and Narong, in particular, were fearful of revenge attacks as Chong's family suspected they were the main culprits responsible for the murder of their boss.³⁸ Both of them firmly denied the accusation. Somchit gave an interview in exasperation,

When I knew Chong was shot, I ordered my assistants to lay a wreath at the funeral. I wanted to go to the funeral by myself, but with a rumor like this [that I killed Chong] I did not go... If the killing was indeed a politically motivated murder in order to win the election, there is no reason I killed Chong as we were associates. Would not it be more reasonable to murder other candidates from the opposing camps? It is true that I have a lot of followers, but I see no one who thinks I am a bad person.³⁹

The Angkinan family were also murder targets. According to Yut, a team of gunmen were hired to assassinate him but he narrowly escaped,

[S]omeone wanted to shoot me, not because I was contending with him. In fact, those guys wanted to get rid of Piya, but they knew that if they wanted to eliminate Piya, they needed to get me first because I was handling "backup force" for Piya's

³⁸ *Matichon*, 21 March 1979; Piak 2005: 77-79, 95-99.

³⁹ Somchit's interview to a group of journalists after the assassination of Chang, quoted in Piak 2005:77-78.

campaign. I still remember.... There were gunmen on motorcycles riding around my house a couple of times. So I was alert and well prepared.⁴⁰

The locals believed that the violence would not stop easily and bloody revenge would happen because “influential people” would not seek state justice but would sort things out themselves. Local residents did not trust the local authorities because they were aware that local officials were under the clout of the powerful bosses. This was why Chong’s brother and his wife asked the Phetchaburi governor to transfer the murder case from the local police to the central bureau as they believed that a couple of the involved investigators were closely connected to the gunmen who killed Chong.⁴¹ The slaying of Chong was startling and unprecedented; it was the first case of a candidate being a target in Phetchaburi. Prior to this incident, contenders’ henchmen and vote canvassers were the primary victims of the election-related violence. The escalation of violence was thus expected.⁴²

Confronted with the prospect of gangland warfare, Prem Tinsulanond, army-commander-in-chief and deputy interior minister, deployed a troop of police from the Crime Suppression Division to operate in Phetchaburi until vote counting was over. They arrested and imprisoned unauthorized state agents working for the candidates as personal bodyguards (the apprehension of six soldiers who were helping Narong’s campaign, was a prime example), and ordered the provincial governor to prepare to cancel voting instantly if the situation spun out of control.⁴³ In the end, polling went through with no chaos. Piya and Phanit were two of the winning candidates. However, a series of gruesome killings and retaliations between opposing political gangs occurred in the post-election period and lasted for almost a year. A score of gang members from each group lost their lives in a battle for their bosses’ attempt to secure a monopoly power. The most prominent case was the assassination of Somchit Phuangmani, one of the most prominent local gang masters. According to police investigations, the shooting might have been in reprisal for Chong’s death.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ “Yut Angkinan: Political Legend of Phetchaburi, episode 10- life in a den of ruffians,” *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 4: 37 (March 2004): 49-51.

⁴¹ “Phetchaburi: land of gunmen and brutality,” *Matichon*, 26 March 1979; “Phetchaburi: the twilight zone,” *Matichon*, 3 April 1979; Piak 2005: 82.

⁴² *Matichon*, 23 March 1979; 26 March 1979.

⁴³ *Matichon*, 25 March 1979; 28 March 1979: 1, 12; 21 April 1979.

⁴⁴ Somchit was brutally gunned down in the downtown area of the city while he was eating with his bodyguards in a popular local restaurant in front of the movie theatre. Two teams of skillful hired guns shot him with M16 rifles from afar. They escaped right away after getting their job done and have never

The rise to dominance of the Angkinan family

By the time the 1983 general election was announced, the post-1979 election mobster killing havoc had rearranged the balance of power in Phetchaburi. Two leading political figures, Chong and Somchit, had vanished (without capable successors), and Narong had withdrawn to seek his political entry to the House in another province.⁴⁵ The only two powerhouses left in the contest were Phanit's camp and the Angkinan family. A long-time MP, Phanit was critically weakened as after the last election his enemies had completely eliminated his key vote canvassers. Phanit's wealth remained strong but his rivals' violent tactics undermined his network of informal power. The many killings of his subordinates scared off other potential vote brokers and thus crippled his election campaign.⁴⁶ The Angkinans, on the other hand, had emerged from the battle with their manpower, wealth and political strength intact. Without serious contenders, the Angkinan family rose to the top. In the 1983 poll, Phetchaburi had one additional seat for MP due to a population increase in the province. The Angkinan family believed they had a promising chance of sweeping all available seats, so they fielded three family members as candidates. Piya, assigned leader of the team, sought reelection alongside two of his brothers: the younger brother Yut resigned as mayor to run for MP for the first time, and cousin brother Phimuk Angkinan (1925-) was added to the team.⁴⁷ Yut confessed that he stood for the election this time because, with the extra seat, he did not have to compete with his brother. Moreover, he pointed out the MP position would provide him with a considerably larger budget to spend in his constituency than as mayor.⁴⁸ The three brothers won the votes smoothly in a landslide victory. Besides, they made history: three MPs in a single province coming from the same family. The political

been caught. Interview, former assistant district officer, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009; Piak 2005: 95:98.

⁴⁵ Chong's brother was nominated by associates to succeed his brother as a leading of the gang, but finally he had to flee the province after knowing he was targeted. He and his family relocated to Chonburi to seek for protection from the eastern godfather Somchai Khunpluem, and spent time there for several years before returning to Phetchaburi (see, "Ratchasak Khlaikhlueng: Chong' nephew who wants to overcome a vicious circle of 'influential people'," *Maitichon*, 21 December 2004: 9). For Narong, he found that electoral contestation in Phetchaburi was overly difficult to win, so he moved to stand for the election in Ayutthaya (also not his home town) in the following elections and was duly elected as an MP there for several times. See the political life of Narong after 1973 in Bunchai 1990: 89-141.

⁴⁶ Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009.

⁴⁷ Phimuk was the son of Thongphun, MP for Phetchaburi from 1938 to 1946. He was elected as an MP for the first time in 1976, and ran again in 1979 but failed (Natchanut 2010: 110-113).

⁴⁸ He said that being a mayor, he was given only 300,000 baht a year for the local development budget, while the MP was being able to easily lobby the government for a project worth 10 to 100 million. This was, of course, the situation long before the decentralization process was implemented. See "Yut Angkinan: Political Legend of Phetchaburi, episode 6- seven times in the Lower House," *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 33 (November 2003): 114-115.

legend was then repeated in the 1988 general election with the same all three brothers elected.

For nearly a decade, from 1983 to 1992, the Angkinan dynasty dominated Phetchaburi politics. They controlled all political terrain from national assemblies to the municipality. Yut had his wife, Buppha Angkinan, replace him as city mayor. Generally, no opponents seriously challenged their grip on power. Piya said that during the 1980s,

I wandered around the province alone with my sole driver with no fear of being assassinated, compared to the past where I had to have three pickup trucks follow me around. Frankly, [I dare travel alone] because all my enemies were dead. The whole damn lot of them were blown away, and their children had no clue how and on whom to take revenge.⁴⁹

With its political power secured, the family's wealth was substantially enhanced. Yut's business in shrimp farming and salt panning expanded from small to large-scale. He had over 2,700 *rai* of land serving the province's largest salt panning business, which gave him on average 80 million baht a year. He was subsequently nominated to be president of the Phetchaburi Salt Panning Farmers Association. He further ventured into lucrative land speculation during the economic boom. Phetchaburi is a coastal province bordering Burma, a famous tourist spot with several serenely beautiful beaches and a connecting point between the central and the southern region, rendering it a paradise for land speculation. As an influential person, Yut accumulated vast tracts of lands by acquiring them through political connections or buying some of them from local residents and farmers for very low prices. He became a broker for land speculators from the capital and giant corporations from Bangkok who needed land in Phetchaburi for investment. In one case, he sold 3,000 *rai* of land (bought from the locals) to the Chonlaphrathan Cement Company to build a gigantic factory. The deal made him a "billionaire" overnight.⁵⁰ Additionally, his wife owned ice and drinking water factories.

⁴⁹ Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009.

⁵⁰ Besides the 2,700 *rai* of salt panning land, Yut possessed 1,000 *rai* of land near the famous Kaeng Krachan dam, 100 *rai* in Ta Yang district, 40 *rai* near the famous Cha-am beach, and 40 *rai* in the downtown area of the city, the most expensive location. One of his important clients was Charoen Siriwattanapakdi, one of the richest men in Thailand who is a liquor business tycoon (Mac Khong Whisky, Chang Beer, etc.), a luxury hotel empire owner and the "king of land speculation." See Yut's asset and business in "Yut Angkinan: Political Legend of Phetchaburi, episode 9- opening assets of Mayor Piak," *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 36 (February 2004): 28-33; "The Angkinan: Godfather," *Prachakhom*

As for Piya, the eldest brother in the family, he owned a range of profitable business mostly obtained and secured by political influence. For example, he operated gas stations throughout the province. In addition, he controlled the route and operation of the public and private buses from Phetchaburi down to the Deep South, on which he can stop any bus company from running busses if he so decided. Those who wanted to use these roads had to share their handsome profits with him. The provincial construction business was under his domination too. For any large development projects requiring bidding, Piya said "I could help my friends and associates win the tender. During those days I could tell other contenders [who wanted to compete with my friends] not to bid. Anyone wanted to bid, they would be dead."⁵¹ Although his family did not own a construction company, the way he assisted his associates win government contracts had earned his family deep respect, and helped foster a strong relationship between his family and the influential provincial business elites. Moreover, the fact that all available MPs seats belonged to the family, the Angkinans were strongly united and thus had more negotiating power over the MPs from other provinces in the fight for local development budget allocation. Consequently, they were able to bring a lot of infrastructure projects to the province (for example, irrigation system, dam, main roads and schools) during their terms.⁵² Therefore, it was not surprising that during this decade they successfully built and solidified a strong patronage network comprised of a group of local businessmen, civil servants, and local strong men. The patronage network of the family was, however, fundamentally buttressed by the force of coercion.

From 1983 to the present, the political contests in the "gunmen capital" or "land of the ruthless" have been remarkably peaceful. The earlier bloody struggle for a power monopoly paved the way for peaceful political order. Even though the Angkinan dynasty's power was eventually challenged in the mid 1990s, it did not lead to the spilling of any politicians' blood. The phenomenon of peace lay in the sociological underpinning of the province's political structure after the 1980s. It was intra-family connections that prevented competitive electoral contests from escalating into the deadly

Thongthin, 1: 6 (August-September 2001): 62-63; "Charoen Siriwattanapakdi: Liquor Tycoon Invaded Phetchaburi," *Prachachat Thurakit*, 29 October 2001: 1, 4.

⁵¹ Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009.

⁵² Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009; *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 3: 34 (December 2003): 113-114.

warfare. Since the 1990s, the Angkinans' political contenders for power were cousins, not business rivals, therefore attenuating the political competition.

Intra-family conflicts between the Angkinans, Polabutr and Supapangs: ties that bind and conflict with no bloodshed

The Angkinan brothers' dynastic power was challenged in the September 1992 general election. Both Piya and Phimuk were defeated, and Yut was the only Angkinan to enter parliament. The two brothers were beaten by a young candidate, Alongkorn Polabutr (1956-), their own cousin. Alongkorn ran for the Democrat Party and brought a new style of electioneering to the electorate. The most important factor, however, that gave him courage to run against the dominant clan was his awareness that, because he was family, his life would not be in real danger. After 1992, he won the election consecutively (except in 1996) and was able to get his brothers and allies elected along with him. His political success was built up at the expense of his Angkinan kin. After the mid 1990s, the Polabutr were a new political force in Petchaburi.

The Polabutr family

Alongkorn was heir to Phoemphon Polabutr, the family patriarch who ran under Phat in 1967 for position of municipal councilor and was elevated to the post of deputy mayor from 1976 to 1983. Phoemphon was close to Phat and Thongphun Angkinan as he was raised by these two uncles after his father passed away. He was their protégé, helping them in their legal practice. Phoemphon's mother was Phat's elder sister (see family tree below); the Polabutr and Angkinans are two branches of the same family. While the Angkinans had embarked on a successful political and business trajectory since the 1960s, the Polabutr family had remained in relative political and economic obscurity. Phoemphon lost a fair sum of money in business. His political career had also been in the shadow of the Angkinan dynasty. Apart from being the deputy mayor under Phat, Phoemphon never succeeded in national elections. To compensate, the Polabutr family made sure their children had good degrees.

Alongkorn Polabutr held two degrees from Thammasat and Chulalongkorn University, the two top universities in the country. After graduation, he helped his father briefly in the mining business, and then went on to be a journalist, an occupation which gave him fame and a public profile. He played an active role in creating a journalists' union to

protect the interests of media personnel, and in abolishing draconian laws that restricted media freedom. He founded his own private company to produce TV news programs and became the deputy chief director of an influential daily newspaper. He ran for MP the first time in March 1992 and failed, but was elected in the following polls in September 1992 and July 1995 on the Democrat Party ticket. After an unexpected loss in the 1996 elections, he made a strong comeback in 2001 and has not lost since.⁵³

Alongkorn brought a new style of politics to a province that had been long-dominated by bossism. As a neophyte with great public-speaking skills, a modern image, and good career record (as a journalist) of combating corrupt politicians, he was perceived by the voters as an alternative. His style of electioneering contrasted with the Angkinan's brothers who were terrible orators, inaccessible, and intimidating with the old-image of political mafia. After losing the first contest in March 1992, Alongkorn learnt that there was strong anti-boss sentiment among the middle class, entrepreneurs, and young voters but no one, including other candidates, dared speak up. He thus proposed to represent these electoral groups and capitalize on their discontent. He successfully translated these negative sentiments into votes for himself. In his September 1992 election campaign, he spoke against the "influential godfathers in Phetchaburi," saying that the province lacked progress and investment because business people were afraid of the violent tactics and dark power that had long characterized the province. Everyone knew that Alongkorn was referring to the Angkinans. His message that "influential bosses are the major obstacle to the development of the province" was emphasized in his every speech, and won him high praise from voters. The electorate thought he was brave to speak out.⁵⁴ It was ironic that the candidate who criticized clan politics fiercely and won because of his anti-clan campaign was part of the family himself.

With the rise of Alongkorn, the Angkinans gradually lost their grip on power at the national level. In the last six election battles from September 1996 to the December 2007 polls, Piya lost 5 out of 6 polls. Since 2001 there has been no Angkinan candidate who has won the constituency seats. The family head Piya admitted the situation had changed, "this day, you have to understand that voters do not like mafia-style politicians. People do not accept it. They have changed."⁵⁵ More importantly, even though the

⁵³ Natchanut 2000: 135-37; *Khao Sod*, 17 July 2000: 1, 9-11.

⁵⁴ Interview, local official, Phetchaburi, 17 April 2012; Natchanut 2000: 136, 141.

⁵⁵ Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009.

family had wished to employ forceful tactics to regain power, they were aware that violent methods were no longer viable as their opponents were now blood relatives. In a candid interview on how to win the election again, Piya answered,

If I say it frankly, I have to be *nakleng* (tough guy) again. They [my opponents] used vote-buying, I have to use guns. That is the way to win. Otherwise I do not know how I could fight with them... In Petchaburi, if you played politics like gentlemen, you have no chance to win. You have to be tough and forceful. The situation would get better after a few deaths. Phetchaburi has been like this for a long time.⁵⁶

Despite laying out these wild ideas, Piya admitted that violent tactics were impossible because the Polabutr were his cousins. Both Yut and Piya told stories in public and private about helping the Polabutr family raise their children, including Alongkorn, and supporting their education and other expenses.

I paid for Alongkorn's education, and when Alongkorn went to the United States to work, I bought a car for him. At his wedding, I asked Sutaraporn band [a famous singing band] to perform as a special treat.... I have always told voters that the Polabutr family members are my cousins. They attacked me a lot in their campaign, but I never got angry or held any grudges against them.⁵⁷

Also, Piya claimed that he saved Alongkorn's life several times,

Well... he [Alongkorn] is my cousin. Many times when he was a target of assassination he saved himself by saying that he was my nephew. By claiming that [families ties], the gunmen pulled back. Otherwise he would be dead a long time ago.⁵⁸

Unlike Yut, Piya harbored grudges against the Polabutr cousins for years, lamenting that his help was met with ingratitude and unkindness. But, he complained, "they are cousins.

⁵⁶ Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009.

⁵⁷ Interview, Yuth Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 21 April 2012.

⁵⁸ Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009.

We are related. What I can do!”⁵⁹ The importance of familial connection in preventing deadly conflicts was stressed by several veteran local observers. One local official close to both the Angkinan and Polabutr families said, “If Alongkorn was not Piya’s nephew, he would not be able to get himself elected and still be alive. He would be gotten rid of.” Another observer made a similar comment, “if other candidates attacked the Angkinans in their campaign as Alongkorn did, they would be surely dead.”⁶⁰

To make sense of the peaceful political competition between politicians in Phetchaburi after the 1990s, one needs to understand a phenomenon I call “clan politics in disguise.” For non-local observers and the media, Phetchaburi has been a voting hotspot for many reasons: its polarized political structure, the pervasive underground economy, and its large supply of hired gunmen. But its “polarized politics” has been, in fact, merely a perception. Since 1992 three families have dominated and controlled the province: the Angkinans, the Polabutr, and the Supapangs. All three families are closely related by blood and marriage. The Angkinans and the Polabutr are relatives, as mentioned. The Supapangs are related to the Angkinans by marriage. The family head, Lob Supapang, was a former city mayor (1943-1947) and deputy city mayor (1948-1956) under the Phat group. The family controlled a vast amount of land in the province, and later expanded to businesses of housing, estates, hotels, pubs and restaurants, and money-lending. As a powerful and affluent business family, the Supapangs were approached by other families for political support. Lob’s granddaughter married the eldest son of Yut Angkinan. Furthermore after 2001, Alongkorn asked two of Lob’s sons, Apichart and Kampol, to join the Democrat team in standing for national elections. Alongkorn’s move was timely and brilliant, as the Supapangs could have been the Polabutr’s formidable competitors, especially if the two Supapang brothers teamed up with the Angkinans.⁶¹

The electoral competitions between these three families were neither fierce nor uncompromising. There were backroom deals made in advance of each election. Even when deals were broken, they found ways to compromise. No blood was spilt and no one was hurt because, at the end of the day, these political competitors were related and belonged to the predominant political structure of a tripartite dynasty.

⁵⁹ Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009

⁶⁰ Interview, local official, Phetchaburi, 17 April 2012; interview, local scholar, Phetchaburi, 21 April 2012.

⁶¹ Interview, local scholar, Phetchaburi, 21 April 2012; interview, local journalist, Phetchaburi, 17 April 2012.

Yut Angkinan, seven time MP and two time cabinet member, as well as the most senior and charismatic figure in the tripartite dynasty, was accepted by all as dealmaker. Yut and Alongkorn made the crucial deal in the transitional period prior to the 2001 elections. With a new constitution restricting the rights of provincial politicians who lacked university degrees, Yut had dim career prospects as a lawmaker in the new system. He decided to return to a domain he used to dominate local politics. Decentralization empowering local administration made his decision easy. He was also compelled to run for mayor again because of a fight for control of the city municipality between his wife Buppha Angkinan, the then mayor, and the Polabutr. Buppha was elected as a municipal councilor in 1981 and became mayor two years later, when she was only 32, after her husband ran for an MP post.⁶² Her administration style created conflict between her and the Polabutr since she monopolized her position's power and perks without sharing them with the Polabutr. Discontent had been simmering for years until the Polabutr decided to challenge Buppha in the 2000 municipal poll. When Yut heard of the challenge, he feared the city municipality would be taken over by the Polabutr. The situation left him with no option but to negotiate with Alongkorn, offering to take the post back from Buppha and run it himself, appointing one of Alongkorn's brothers to be his deputy overseeing the lucrative portfolio of construction affairs. Yut also promised not to compete with his nephew in the House elections, a promise he has never broken. At the same time, the local political group led by Kampol Supapang, named "Phetchaburi Pattana" (Phetchaburi development), was convinced in a similar vein by Yut not to run but join his team.⁶³ The deal was struck, and the territory was divided between the three families. There was no contestation in the municipal voting of 2000 (and in the following poll of 2004); Yut was elected mayor without opposition. Within the Angkinan family, the area was divided between Yut and Piya, in which the former controlled the city municipality and the latter controlled the Provincial

⁶² Buppha was an agent for Singha Beer in Petchaburi, and was later an agent for other popular beverage companies. She also owned the ice factories in muang and two others districts in the province, and had a business of bird nest in Banlaem district. While being a mayor, she built a house valued 30 million baht; it is so extravagant that local people has called it a "palace." She was in power as a mayor of the city for 17 years. In the 2001 election, she ran for MP with the Thai Rak Thai Party, competing with her nephew Alongkorn and lost. See, *Matichon*, 10 July 2007: 3; and a detailed ethnographic study of Buppha's political life in Fishel 2001.

⁶³ Interview, Yuth Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 21 April 2012.

Administrative Office (PAO).⁶⁴ In this way, the three families effectively established the political order of the province.

However, political deals were sometimes broken by incidents of one family's territory being invaded by others. This sort of eruption of political conflict had created tensions between families; however, it did not lead to violence as family heads acted swiftly to resolve the situation. A number of cases are worth mentioning: the 2008 city municipal poll, and the 2004 and 2008 PAO elections. The mayoral poll of 2008 was a competition between Yut and Atiphon Polabutr, Alongkorn's elder brother. Atiphon was deputy mayor, appointed by Yut from 2000-2008. Ambitious to be the mayor himself, he competed against Yut in the 2008 mayoral election. He told voters that he was running against his uncle because his uncle's administration had failed to respond effectively to local people's needs. Yut, on the other hand, felt unhappy fighting with his nephew: "I had already planned that after fully serving two terms, I would promote Atiphon to replace me. But, unfortunately, Atiphon was too impetuous. Anyhow, I understand that sometimes a henchman wants to be a boss." In this intra-clan battle, nephew Atiphon lost to uncle Yut by a small margin.⁶⁵ After the poll, people still witnessed uncle and nephew talking to and greeting each other at many events. Atiphon was defeated by Yut again in the 2012 municipal election by an even larger margin. On election morning, Atiphon rushed to apologize to Yut for his crude verbal attacks against Yut during the campaign. According to Yut, it was Alongkorn who broke the promise, but he well understood that "it was politics," and "I always told people that the Polabutr are my cousin."⁶⁶

The PAO election in February 2004 also involved political infighting within the tripartite dynasty. The three main candidates in this electoral competition were Chaiya Angkinan (the eldest son of Piya), Yutthapol (Yut's son), and Kampol Supapang, and all of them were personally related. Chaiya and Yutthapol were cousin brothers, while Yutthapol and Kampol were father- and son-in-law. This was a mesmerizing election for outside observers. Some commentators viewed it as a political farce.⁶⁷ For local residents, this battle made sense. For tripartite members, the PAO chairman's position was dynasty

⁶⁴ Interview, Piya Angkinan, 17 December 2009; interview, local election commission official, 17 April 2012.

⁶⁵ *Matichon*, 26 February 2008: 8; *Matichon*, 11 March 2008: 8.

⁶⁶ Interview, Yut Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 21 April 2012.

⁶⁷ See comments in *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 2: 13 (16 March- 15 April 2002): 29-30.

“private property” and each candidate thought they were equally entitled to the post. In one respect it was a fight over budget allocations, but it would be misreading to underestimate candidates’ considerations of family dignity and sense of entitlement. Both political heirs on each side of the Angkinan family competed with each other since they were young, and they thought they deserved better positions than their kin. Piya’s sense of entitlement was clear when was asked about the PAO political battle “if it was not my son, I could not think of anyone else. But, you know, of course it has to be among the Angkinans.”⁶⁸ Given that every contender was competing for the same vote base, the campaign was genuinely competitive. The campaign involved verbal attacks, poster vandalism and billboard destruction. The aggressive contest notwithstanding, neither candidates nor vote canvassers experienced any physical violence. In the end, Chaiya Angkinan managed to beat his two cousins in a close competition.⁶⁹

In the next PAO chairman elections in April 2008, Chaiya was challenged by a new competitor, not a complete stranger to the administration or his family: Itthiphong Polabutr, another younger brother of Alongkorn and former provincial councilors. Kampol and Yutthapol withdrew as they both pursued other political avenues. Kampol ran for the House election in 2005 along with Alongkorn and his brother Apichart. Yutthapol worked with his father as the deputy mayor from 2005 to 2008, and prepared himself for national elections.⁷⁰ A family connection was manifest in the PAO chairman voting. It demonstrated lines of loyalty. Yutthapol teamed up with and offered strong support to his male cousin Chaiya to protect the stronghold of the Angkinan family against the encroachment of the Polabutrs. The Angkinan team demolished the Polabutr candidate by a great margin.⁷¹ Ultimately, it proved that the blood of the first cousins was thicker than blood of the second cousins.

⁶⁸ Interview, Piya Angkinan, 17 December 2009. See also a news report in *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 2: 13 (16 March- 15 April 2002): 29-30.

⁶⁹ Chaiya received 74,425 votes, Kampol 50,058, and Yutthapol 36,878. *Matichon*, 7 January 2004: 22; *Matichon*, 4 March 2004: 8.

⁷⁰ Kampol failed in the 2005 poll, but was eventually elected in the 2007 election. Yutthapol stood in the 2011 election as the party-list candidate ranking number 4 with the Chart Thai Pattana Party of Banham Silpa-archa, and was duly elected.

⁷¹ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 4 April 2008: 16.

Chart 10.1: The Angkinan Family (a selected genealogy)

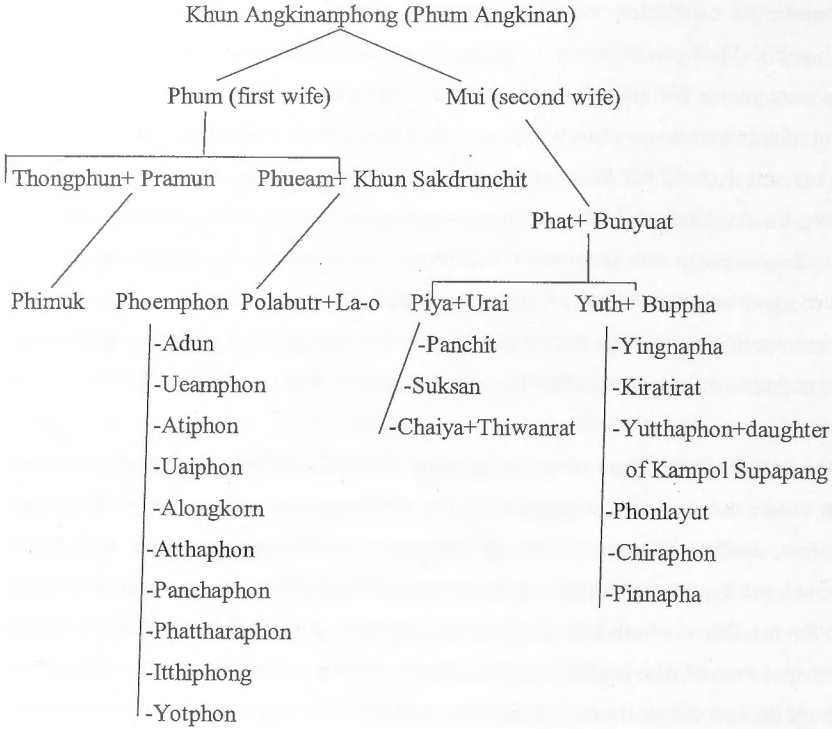


Table 10.1: the Angkinans and the Polabutr in Phetchaburi National Elections

1938	Thongphun Angkinan
1957	Phat Angkinan (Sahaphum Party)
1975	Piya Angkinan (Chart Thai Party)
1976	Phimuk Angkinan (Chart Thai Party) (Piya lost)
1979	Piya Angkinan (Chart Prachathippatai Party) (Phimuk lost)
1983	Phimuk Angkinan and Yut Angkinan (Chart Thai Party), Piya Angkinan (Chart Prachathippatai Party)
1986	Phimuk Angkinan and Yut Angkinan (Chart Thai Party) (Piya lost)
1988	Phimuk Angkinan, Yut Angkinan, and Piya Angkinan (Chart Thai Party)
1992/1	Piya Angkinan and Yut Angkinan (Chart Thai Party) (Phimuk lost, Alongkorn Polabutr ran first time with the Democrat Party and lost)
1992/2	Yut Angkinan (Chart Pattana Party), Alongkorn Polabutr (Democrat Party) (Phimuk and Piya lost)

1995 Yut Angkinan (Chart Pattana Party), Alongkorn Polabutr (Democrat Party) (Piya lost, Phimuk did not run)
1996 Piya Angkinan (Kitsangkhom Party), Yut Angkinan (Chart Pattana Party) (Alongkorn lost, Phimuk did not run)
2001 Alongkorn Polabutr (Democrat Party) (Piya lost, Buppha Angkinan lost, Yut and Phimuk did not run)
2005 Alongkorn Polabutr (Democrat Party) (Piya lost)
2007 Alongkorn Polabutr (Democrat Party), Atthaphon Polabutr (Democrat Party/party list) (Piya lost, Thiwanrat Angkinan lost)
2011 Alongkorn Polabutr (Democrat Party/ party list), Atthaphon Polabutr (Democrat Party), Yutthapol Angkinan (Chart Thai Pattana Party/party list) (no candidate from the Angkinan family running in constituency seats)

Table 10.2: the Angkinans and the Polabutr in Phetchaburi Local Elections

1948-1968 Phat Angkinan (city mayor)
1968-1983 Yut Angkinan (city mayor)
1967 Piya Angkinan (provincial council president)
1983-2000 Buppha (city mayor)
January 2000 Yut Angkinan (city mayor)
2000 Chaiya Angkinan (PAO chairman)
February 2004 Chaiya Angkinan (PAO chairman)
February 2004 Yut Angkinan (city mayor)
March 2008 Yut Angkinan (city mayor)
April 2008 Chaiya Angkinan (PAO chairman)
April 2012 Yut Angkinan (city mayor)

Clan domination and clan survival

Scholars often use Phetchaburi as an example of the predominance of godfathers in Thai politics.⁷² Yoshinori Nishizaki, examining the practice and ritual of power in Suphanburi, compared the political decline of the Angkinan of Petchaburi to the enduring power of Banharn in Suphanburi to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of violent tactics to win votes. He pointed to the fact that Piya and members of his family failed to

⁷² See, for example, Ockey 1992, Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994, Viengrat 1994.

be elected to parliament, thus demonstrating the limited explanatory power of other scholars' arguments of the significance of violence and intimidation in local elections.⁷³

Those studies do not explain the dynamic and complex relationships between violence and accumulation and preservation of power. The so-called "godfather" figures never employed or relied upon sheer terror to establish their power and win votes. As the Angkinan cases show, it was necessary to build reliable and strong networks of canvassers, to dispense goods and services to the electorate, and to form alliances with other elite provincial groups. In this sense the fact that Piya failed to get elected does not invalidate (or validate) the power of an explanation based on violence and intimidation. In fact, as noted above, since the mid 1990s the Angkinans had already restrained themselves from using force against their own rivals. The main reason was their opponents were family, in particular, cousins. It is therefore important to understand the conditions that compel and/or constrain any politician, including the non-mafia type, from employing coercive force as part of their political campaigns.

The political situation in Phetchaburi mirrored other Thai provinces that have influential clans controlling provincial politics and businesses. In these provinces, family was the most rudimentary and significant political asset for candidates wishing to assert and preserve political control over their districts. Family networks were more cohesive, reliable and durable than political parties, factions, and friends. Political succession took place primarily within the clan, and political coalitions were formed through marriage. Political clans' second or third generations had advantages over their opponents as they inherited a political base and an electoral machine put in place by their patriarchs. It was through family ties that candidates were trained and recruited for political office, and provided resources (money, patronage networks, electoral machines and public recognition) for elections. Kinship network were vital to both political expansion and wealth accumulation. In the provinces in which clans were remarkably strong, political parties' contributions to electoral success were minor or negligible. Even in the post-1997 political environment, in which party brands and policy packages had become influential for voters, both Thaksin's allied parties and the Democrat Party played marginal roles in Phetchaburi politics. In the 2001 Phetchaburi election, by recruiting party candidates from the notable local bosses, Thaksin requested Piya to run for the TRT party. According to Piya, Thaksin strongly believed that the TRT brand plus the

⁷³ Nishizaki 2004: 29.

Angkinan family reputation would ensure his victory. But Thaksin was wrong as Piya did not win the election. He ran again in the 2005 and 2007 elections under the allied parties of Thaksin, and lost again both times. Piya then came to realize that the party brand did not help him win seats as effectively as his family name. In the local election campaigns for PAO chairman, Piya and his son therefore avoided using the party logo and emphasized instead his family's long history of local services, and this strategy was highly successful.⁷⁴

The clan monopolies have created an uneven playing field, effectively discouraging and penalizing non-elite contenders. These political families prevent new and aspiring people, who do not belong to the socio-political class from which the traditional elite have been recruited, from winning elections. The domination of the Angkinans-Polabutrs-Supapangs is illustrative of how the traditional families, in collaboration, have successfully inhibited the emergence of "outsiders" in the local elections, and reserved positions exclusively for family members. Surviving throughout years of political crises, the Angkinan family is currently one of the oldest local political families in modern Thai politics. Decentralization processes have provided opportunities for the family to maintain its power through a new platform. By fielding and supporting family members at every level of local elections, the Angkinans have exercised political control not only over the province and municipality, but also right down to the sub-district level.⁷⁵

The lucrative business of hired gunmen has suffered in the relatively quiet and peaceful political life of Phetchaburi since the 1990s. The supply of violence has exceeded the demand for killing. By 2012, reports stated a total of 80 hit men across the province, operating under three different powerful bosses: a local politician, a provincial businessman, and an owner of the gambling dens, respectively.⁷⁶ As political-murder work had dried up in the province, these professional assassins were forced to find new ways or new places of making a living. Several of them received orders for jobs in other provinces in which political murders were still in demand, many of them switched to the

⁷⁴ Interview, Piya Angkinan, Phetchaburi, 17 December 2009; *Matichon*, 7 November 2007: 10.

⁷⁵ Interview, local election commission official, 17 April 2012; interview, local entrepreneur, 17 April 2012.

⁷⁶ Interview, two local police officers, Phetchaburi, 17 April 2012.

risky but money-spinning businesses of drug dealing and gambling, and some moved easily into the world of professional shooting sports.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Interview, two local police officers, Phetchaburi, 17 April 2012; interview, lawyer who had represented many Phetchaburi's gunmen, Phetchaburi, 18 April 2012.

Chapter 11

Buriram: Dynastic power, party machine, and ideological politics



Observers may puzzle over the categorization of the infamous province Buriram as “relatively peaceful,” given popular media portrayal of the province as the hotspot for dirty election campaigns and unruly voting patterns. Amid all the usual hyperbole, analysts have never seriously understood the political reality of the province. Certainly, the province has not been utterly calm throughout its history. Violent incidents in electoral contestation were witnessed briefly from 1995 to 2001, and the province gained notoriety from what happened during this tumultuous time. Since this period, however, this northeastern province located next to the Cambodian border has managed to have fairly competitive elections without violence. The framework set out in Chapter 1 explains that a violence-prone province is one that lacks a monopolized power structure and has many candidates whose main revenue comes from illegal activities and/or businesses that depend on government concession or licenses. This was the case with Buriram in the period 1995-2001 but throughout other periods there were the conditions for peace, namely the monopoly of power by one group and the absence of inter-boss struggle. Buriram’s electoral contests fell into a violent interlude when influential business-cum-political families attempted to monopolize provincial politics and found that their business rivals stood in their way. When they successfully took power, violence disappeared. The pattern was similar to that found in Phetchaburi from the

1970s to the mid 1980s, when the Angkinan family rose to power. However, a puzzle occurred in the 2007 and 2011 polls when clan power was challenged but the elections were peaceful. This chapter investigates Buriram province to understand the specific conditions that contribute to the lack of violence in the absence of a power monopoly.

If family ties were institutional factors contributing to peaceful electoral politics in Phetchaburi, it is changing modes of electoral conflict that explains the lack of violence in Buriram. Political and ideological contestation have shaped electoral politics in Buriram since 2006. New political developments helped break the cycle of violence, bypassing the personal conflicts among local bosses and directing the conflicts toward political ideas and platforms.

The struggle over one clan's monopoly

Similar to Suphanburi, often known as “Banharn-buri” after its most powerful patron, Buriram was called “Chidchob-buri,” clearly demonstrating which figure and family controlled this territory. Nevertheless the Chidchob family’s rise to power was achieved more quickly and in a less peaceful way than its counterpart in Suphanburi. In less than two decades, the family was successful in controlling the province from top to bottom, and from the city municipality to the outskirts. The Chidchob family applied all available strategies, old and new, legal and illegal, to win over their political and business rivals. Unlike old-style godfathers in other provinces (for example in Phetchaburi), Buriram’s godfather represented a new style of boss, highly adept at adapting himself to a changing political world. To understand the changing pattern of political violence in Buriram, we need to examine the Chidchob’s path to power.

For decades, on 4th April every year, more than 10,000 people in Buriram attend an extravagant birthday party for Chai Chidchod, the Chidchob family patriarch, at the city’s gigantic field, a family stronghold. The family provides thousands of tables, abundant free food, good movies and music all night long. The attendees who usually come to greet the host of the event vary from cabinet members, senior bureaucrats from Bangkok, provincial governor, the police chief, business elites from Bangkok, local entrepreneurs and merchants, the head of Chamber of Commerce, bank managers, local government officials, celebrities, low-ranking civil servants, local polices, local NGOs, heads of housewife associations, vote canvassers, and local tough guys. The prominence

of the invitees has increased over time, along with the family's political influence and fortunes. The event is regularly organized by Newin Chidchob, the fourth child, named by his father after the notorious Burmese General Ne Win. He meticulously plans every minor detail of the event to ensure it went smoothly. In 2010, the gathering was in full swing as Chai had become House Speaker and his beloved son Newin had more than 70 MPs under his control with the newly created Bhumjaitai Party, the country's third-largest political party. The gathering witnessed the attendance of not only the Buriram provincial governor but also his counterparts from ten other provinces, including high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Interior. All of them came from the capital to visit the Chidchob patron in the countryside.¹

Buriram is one of the north-eastern provinces of Thailand, which has borders with Sa Kaeo, Nakhon Ratchasima, Khon Kaen, Maha Sarakham and Surin. To the south-east the province borders Cambodia. The name Buriram means *Province of happiness*. The province is subdivided into 23 districts (*amphoe*), and the districts are further subdivided into 189 sub-districts (*tambon*) and 2,520 villages (*muban*). This province is large in terms of territory and population as it had 1,652,000 residents, according to the 2010 census, ranking number seven in the country. In terms of economic development, however, the province does not perform well. The province's wealth depends primarily on the agricultural sector: rice farming and cash cropping (corn, cassava, sugarcane, rubber tree, eucalyptus, etc). Official data from 2010 show 205,038 households and 556,309 laborers in the province's agricultural sector, accounting for about 70 percent of total labor in the province. Farming areas occupy 75 percent of total land.² Trading and industrial sectors are significantly small and contribute modestly to provincial prosperity. By 2010, the province had only 471 factories, together hiring only 12,481 workers and producing agricultural goods, food, wood, and textiles products.³ In 2010, the Gross Provincial Product (GPP) of the province was 60,090 million baht and its GPP per capita was 36,384 baht, a record low, locating the province in the country's bottom ten and the lowest of the six case studies.⁴ Despite its low level of economic development, Buriram has political significance from the sheer size of its population.

¹ Personal observation of the event, Buriram, 3-5 April 2010.

² Data from Buriram Provincial Extension Agricultural Office, "Basic Information on Provincial Agriculture 2010," <http://www.buriram.doae.go.th/information.htm>

³ Data from Buriram Provincial Industrial Office, "Factory Statistic," <http://www.industry.go.th/ops/pio/buriram/Page/statistic.aspx>

⁴ The population data is drawn from the National Statistic Office of Thailand 2008, and the GPP and GPP per capita numbers are from National Economic and Social Development Board 2008.

The province provides nine MP seats (equal to Nakhon Si Thammarat) when the average is three to four seats and is therefore a province of keen interest to national politicians.⁵ Be that as it may, Buriram's striking characteristic is that most politicians, including the Chidchob family, come from business elites who accumulated their wealth through the construction business and natural resource-extraction industries (see below). Gravel crushing is one of the most significant financial sources for business-cum-political elites in Buriram. Most of gravel crushing plants are in the city district, the Chidchob's backyard. Buriram stones are known for their high quality. There is a high demand for Buriram stones usually supplied to the construction business locally or to adjacent provinces.⁶ Normally, the licenses are obtained through competitive bidding, and the winning bidders command the strongest political influence.

Prior to the Chidchobs' rise in the late 1990s, elections in Buriram were not violent. There had been no political group or family ambitious enough to attempt to monopolize power in this vast territory. Each group was satisfied enough to control two or three seats in their bailiwicks. The Chidchobs were the first monopolizers. The chidchob's political ambitions, combined with the nature of the family business, in which its wealth came from the resource-extraction economy and the cut-throat construction business, made their power struggle fierce and uncompromising.

The Chidchobs made their first entry into parliament in 1969 as the family patriarch Chai Chidchob won as an independent (after failing twice as a Democrat). Chai was born in 1928 in Surin, a neighboring province, but moved to Buriram after finishing high school to look for work. He found his fortune in the gravel quarry business. He founded a company called "Silachai" in the city district that later on became his family political stronghold. At the same time, he was involved in local political affairs and elected as a sub-district head. Reportedly Chai was very keen on establishing friendly connections with his sub-district colleagues, and these connections contributed a great deal to his success standing for MP.⁷ Having an official position helped his family amass vast tracts of private and public lands through legal manipulation and loopholes.⁸ During this early

⁵ In the 2011 election, the number of seat was reduced to 9 because of the changing total number of lower House MP. Only Bangkok, Chiangmai, and Khonkaen have more available seats than Buriram.

⁶ Interview, member of Buriram Federal of Thai Industry, Buriram, 8 October 2010.

⁷ *Matichon Sudsapda*, 13: 655 (March 1993): 6.

⁸ A few cases of the land invasion and unlawful appropriation were in later period prosecuted and pending in court cases. See, Matichon, 18 November 2009; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 24 August 2011.

period his business and political careers did not proceed smoothly as he occasionally lost elections.

Another prominent sub-district head, Sawat Khotcha-seni, who also owned a gravel crushing plant and construction company, was also highly respected locally and, as a staunch anti-communist leader, overshadowed Chai. Locals viewed Chai and Sawat as rivals. In fact, they were friends who had gravel plants located next to each other and their children grew up together. They merely had different political styles and thus never stood on the same team.⁹ Sawat's power faded in the mid 1980s as he had no capable political heir. Late in his career he tried to bring together all Buriram politicians to run under the Chart Thai party. Sawat's negotiations with powerful provincial elites failed as there was no willingness to work together.¹⁰ Without Sawat, Anuwat Wattanaphongsiri, who owned several golf clubs and substantial real estate, and Pichit Thiraratchanon, whose main business was construction, dominated the province. Most of the time, Chai was running independently or for a different party from Anuwat and Pichit (who usually joined forces to build a vote base for the Chart Thai Party in Buriram).¹¹ Over the decades no faction strove for political monopoly. The substantial geographical size of the province was a major obstacle to any politicians moving beyond their constituency and campaigning in other districts.¹² Each politician enjoyed their own slice of pie in their districts. In this way, Buriram managed to have orderly elections for years.

The situation changed when the second generation of the Chidchob family came on the political scene. Chai's advantage over his local opponents was his five able sons and one daughter. His most politically potent son was his beloved Newin Chidchob (1958-) who first served as a Buriram provincial councilor and council president when he was only 27 (and the youngest council president in the country at that time). In 1988, Newin ran for the Lower House and won. And within a short time he was able to overpower his father's competitors, became head of a potent political faction, and was appointed to a coveted ministerial post. By the end of the 1990s, Newin had become a force to be reckoned with in national politics. Newin was more ambitious than his father and was

⁹ Interview, Sawat's daughter, Buriram, 12 October 2010.

¹⁰ Interview, Sawat's daughter, Buriram, 12 October 2010.

¹¹ Niran 2006: 19-20.

¹² Interview, former vote canvasser of Anuwat Wattanaphongsiri and current key vote canvasser of Chidchob family, Buriram, 13 October 2010.

able to achieve political success beyond that of his father. He was a political rising star who made his family wealthier and more powerful.

At Chai's request Anuwat supported Newin's first electoral win in 1988. Chai knew that his sub-district head position and limited war chest were not sufficient to obtain victory for both himself and his son against several strong candidates. He therefore asked Anuwat to mentor Newin, hoping Anuwat would provide Newin with all necessary electioneering tactics and political networks. In return, Chai convinced Anuwat that his son would do anything at all to assist his mentor. Chai's request was smart because Anuwat was well-known in Buriram as having initiated and developed a complex system of vote-canvassing and vote-buying for over a decade. As an astute businessman, Anuwat applied modern business management techniques to political electioneering by which the campaign team would calculate how many votes they had in their pocket and how many were needed in order to win over their opponents. The electorate was divided up into many sub-groups and each group was assigned a vote canvasser to buy votes. Team members were also responsible for keeping up-to-date accounts of money spent in vote-buying activities and vote-canvassers lists.¹³

Newin learnt a great deal from his mentor. Since Anuwat was occupied with his ministerial position in Bangkok, he trusted Newin as his proxy in the province. Hence, it was Newin who took care of the constituency, controlled vote brokers and the war chest, and was attentive to the voters' needs. Newin took the opportunity to build his own popularity in the district. His down-to-earth manner and attentiveness impressed villagers. He was accessible and helped those in need. Locals relied on him to solve their day-to-day troubles, and his networks dutifully delivered "goods and gifts" during election campaign time. As a result, local district people were grateful to Newin, not Anuwat. Moreover, Newin recruited a number of influential village-headmen and sub-district heads to work for him as vote canvassers, and he took very good care of them. This group of local officials would later become the most loyal and most effective vote gatherers for the Chidchob family.

The Chidchob family gradually took over Anuwat's political machine. In the 1995 poll, after three consecutive wins, Newin thought it was his time to be Buriram's political

¹³ Interview, family member of former vote canvasser of Anuwat Wattanaphongsiri and current key vote canvasser of the Chidchob family, Bangkok, 22 September 2010.

boss himself instead of working in Anuwat's shadow. He asked a group of vote canvassers to shift from Anuwat to his family, and almost all of them said yes.¹⁴ He formed his own team of candidates, competing with Anuwat and Pichit, and successfully beat both of them in the 1995 and 1996 general elections. In the 1996 poll, he assisted his wife, father, and close friend win seats. It meant that there were three Chidchob family members in the House: the first time that a political clan from an obscure province like Buriram had managed to establish a strong presence in the national assembly.

After getting rid of Anuwat and Pichit, the Chidchobs controlled half of the province's political terrain. Buriram started to experience violence in electoral campaigns in the 1995 and 1996 polls. Intimidation between opposing teams was prevalent. On all sides the vote canvassers were prime targets. They accused each other of intimidating vote brokers. There was one incident in which Newin's subordinates beat and injured two of Anuwat's vote canvassers. Newin and Chai faced assault charges.¹⁵ The election monitoring group reported violence in both polls on the night before voting day, popularly known as "a night of howling dog." Black-shirted thugs with weapons blocked roads to villages in too-close-to-call constituencies. Candidate's hired muscle visited villages at night to buy votes at the last minute and to block competitors from doing the same. Election monitoring teams had to solicit border patrol police and army to disperse the "threatening men in black." In some cases, thugs resisted dispersal resulting in minor injuries. Monitoring teams never asked provincial police for help because everyone knew the powerful clan controlled them. Local election observers noted candidates used forceful tactics for the first time in 1995 and 1996 and again in the 2001 elections.¹⁶

The interval between the 1992 and 1996 polls was turbulent for the now powerful, well-known Newin. On the evening of 18 November 1993, his house in Nonthaburi province, neighboring Bangkok, was bombed. Nobody was injured and the house was not seriously damaged. The incident happened only a few days after the House censure debate, in which Newin played a critical role as a key opposition member, criticizing

¹⁴ Interview, former vote canvasser of Chai Chidchob, Buriram, 10 October 2010; interview, former vote canvasser of Anuwat Wattanaphongsiri and current key vote canvasser of Chidchob family, Buriram, 13 October 2010.

¹⁵ Interview, lawyer of victims, Buriram, 11 October 2010; see also *Matichon*, 2 July 1995. For other incidents in the 1995 poll, see *Matichon*, 14 June 1995: 14. As for the 1996 election, see *Thai Rath*, 28 October 1996: 1, 17, 23.

¹⁶ Interview, local election monitor, Buriram, 7 October 2010; interview, former Buriram local election monitor, Nakorn Sawan, 7 September 2010. And see news report in *Matichon*, 3 July 1995.

corrupt government policy. However, police investigations revealed that the bombing had been carried out by the police officers close to Newin himself. His reputation was tarnished by this public scandal.¹⁷ One year later, he divorced his first wife and remarried Karuna Supha, the daughter of a construction billionaire from Chiangmai province. His father-in-law was regarded as one of the most prominent figures in the country's construction business due to his business empire and his wide-ranging connections. His remarriage was the talk of the town as both families were famous and the dowry was worth 40 million baht, including 8,888,888 baht in cash, 73 carats of diamonds, and gold jewelry.¹⁸ This well-publicized marriage definitely enhanced the Chidchob's social status and wealth. The high dowry, meanwhile, raised questions on the source of Newin's affluence. A few months later, his name came up in the scandal over bidding for a large dam construction project contracted by government. On the bidding day, a group of hooigans threatened and obstructed other bidders to bid for the project, and several witnesses identified Newin at the scene. Eventually, all companies withdrew and Newin's father-in-law's company won the contract without competition. Later the government nullified the contract after several complaints about the bidding process.¹⁹

Events surrounding the 1995 electoral campaign gave Newin more trouble. Two days before voting, a special police task force from Bangkok arrested two of his key vote canvassers on charges of electoral fraud. The police raided their homes and found piles of bank notes worth 11.4 million baht. The money was divided into 120 baht lots, and beside these piles were lists of registered voters and campaign posters of Newin and his team members. One of those arrested owned the house and was the sister of one of the member of Newin's team. She protested her innocence and said the money was not prepared for vote-buying but for land acquisition. Even though Newin was never charged or prosecuted, the media and general public judged him guilty.²⁰ The case damaged his public image further and earned him the nickname "Mr. 120."

All scandals notwithstanding, in the 1995 poll Newin won his home district seat decisively (with almost the highest vote margin in the country). Also victorious were the

¹⁷ *Matichon Sudsupda*, 14: 693 (3 December 1993): 14.

¹⁸ *Matichon Sudsupda*, 22-28 October 1996: 10-11.

¹⁹ *Manager Magazine* (September 1995); *Matichon Sudsupda*, 15: 784 (29 August 1995): 12.

²⁰ In 1998, the Supreme Court found the defendants guilty of the vote fraud and sentenced them to one year in prisons, and the amount of 11.4 million baht was confiscated. See the verdict and background of the case in *Matichon Sudsupda* (27 January- 2 February 1998): 16.

other six Chart Thai party candidates supervised by Newin. According to the unwritten quota system rule of Thai parliamentary politics, control over seven MPs ensured Newin a cabinet position. After many rounds of negotiation, Banharn Silpa-archa, head of the Chart Thai Party and then Prime Minister, agreed to give Newin the prestigious post of the Deputy Minister of Finance. This appointment caused public uproar, since the post was normally given to a capable technocrat. The business community, economists, the media, and the middle class in general viewed the appointment of a young boss from a backward province to a position controlling public money as completely unacceptable. Newin was criticized as inexperienced, incompetent and unqualified. The Banharn cabinet in general and Newin's appointment in particular was viewed as a political nightmare for the reformists, middle classes, and the traditional elites; it confirmed their belief that the House of Representative was manipulated and controlled by corrupt uneducated provincial godfathers.²¹ Institutional opinion polls confirmed that this perception was widely held. Newin topped every poll for being the most unacceptable and most unqualified minister in Banharn's cabinet.²² Banharn was under strong pressure to remove him. Newin's father defended him publicly, saying he was suitable for the position because he was a capable politician and had ample personal wealth to be the Minister of Finance given that he earned 12 million baht per month from family's gravel crushing plants. The head of the Chidchobs even told the media that one day "Newin would become the Thai prime minister."²³ Chai's reasoning perplexed the public because they did not see how the ability of managing a monopoly family business would necessarily make him suitable to manage the country's finances.

The Chidchobs firmly resisted Banharn's attempts to dismiss Newin from cabinet. They knew that the unstable government coalition needed their factional support, and they were aware that harsh criticism from middle class and media in metropolitan Bangkok had no effect on their popularity at home. Confident of this, Newin spoke to his supporters in Buriram,

I told the prime minister that if I was removed from the Finance Ministry position, then [he would have to] dissolve the House and call a new election.... I also told the prime minister that he has been prime

²¹ See the agenda and politics of the political reform movement in the 1990s that led to the constitutional reform in 1997 in McCargo 2002, and Callahan 2005.

²² See the results of the surveys in *Matichon Sudsapda*, 15, 779 (25 July 1995): 87-88.

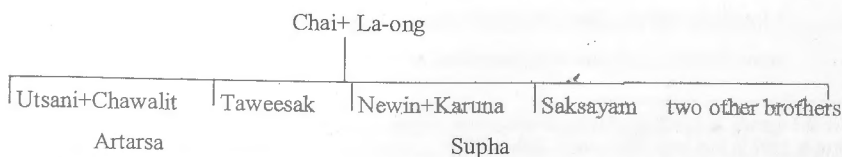
²³ *Matichon Sudsapda*, 15: 780 (1 August 1995): 11.

minister for 9-10 months and I also have been minister for 9-10 months. He can dissolve parliament. I am only 38. It is not that I am arrogant, but I believe that when the new election comes I will definitely come back as an MP again.²⁴

This speech, including other remarks by Newin that he would kick Banharn in the neck, made Banharn and other Chart Thai Party factions furious. In the end, Newin could not stand the pressure and resigned. Not long afterwards, the Banharn government collapsed, and a new general election was called. Newin had difficulty finding a new party to associate with as many parties saw him as a liability, particularly those parties with strong voter bases in Bangkok. Recruiting Newin to their party might mean a loss of urban popularity. Some members of Newin's team abandoned him to join other parties as they were afraid that he would not be able to run. After several weeks' struggle, and only a few days before the candidacy registration deadline, Newin and his allies were accepted by a small political party *Ekkaphap*, led by a fellow boss from Nakhon Pathom province.

Newin's faith in his constituency was warranted as his faction won four seats out of ten. In Newin's constituency, his vote tally was staggeringly high, showing clearly that his supporters were solidly behind him regardless of his party affiliation. In his hometown, he was popular and powerfully buttressed by a political machine that never failed to deliver votes during elections. By the end of the 1990s, half of the provincial territory was firmly governed by the Chidchob family. But it was equally clear that a local strongman like Newin was not welcome in the capital that was dominated and controlled by traditional bureaucratic elites and a presumptuous middle class. Newin was not deterred as he aimed to expand his family power to cover the whole territory. This unstoppable political ambition led to a fatal outcome in the next election.

Chart 11.1: The Chidchob Family (a selected genealogy)



²⁴ This speech was given in his bailiwick on 18 May 1996, see *Matichon*, 21 May 1996: 11.

Prelude to the 2001 poll: the violent path to clan predominance

The 2001 election in Buriram was the most unruly in the history of the province. It was also one of the bloodiest elections in the country conducted under the new constitution. Many voters called it the most fearful and bloody poll in the history of the province; involving intimidation, violent attacks enmeshing candidates and vote canvassers, and thugs patrolling the precinct prior to election day.²⁵ It was a critical battle between the Chidchob clan and their enemies. Up to this election, no party or family had ever dominated the province. For example, between 1996 and 2001, ten Buriram MPs belonged to four different political parties (Ekkaphap, Democrat, Chatphatthana, and New Aspiration Party). The Chidchob family was the most powerful political clique in the province followed by the Petchsawang group led by Sophon Petchsawang (1940-); the Thongsri group led by Songsak Thongsri, one of Newin's cousins working independently, and the Liangpongpan family represented by Panawat Liangpongpan (1958-), the Chidchob's key business and political competitors. Each group had their own vote bases in specific districts built through patronage and personal connections. Despite possessing more power than other political factions, the Chidchob family's power was limited to the city district and its adjacent areas. To achieve their desired monopoly, the family had to neutralize the political influence of the three other groups. Their task was made even more difficult, if not impossible, when a new player entered the competition in the 2001 poll—the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party of Thaksin, a newly founded but forceful and affluent party aiming to win some seats in this large province. TRT showed their seriousness by fielding strong candidates, some of whom were Newin's former opponents.

There was bloodshed relatively early in the campaign. On the night of December 18, 1999, the Democrat MP for Buriram Panawat Liangpongpan was shot four times at close range by gunmen outside his apartment in Bangkok on the way back from Parliament. Panawat survived but was seriously injured and taken to the nearby hospital. The gunmen fled the scene by motorcycle. Panawat's attempted murder made headlines in every major newspaper and television station as he was a well-known politician from the party of the current government. The fact that the assassination attempt occurred in the capital during the House session attracted great public attention and put high pressure on the police to solve the case. Police believed that the murder attempt was connected to

²⁵ *Matichon*, 30 January 2001: 18.

political or business conflicts that Panawat had in the province. But Panawat was convinced that it was purely politically motivated, to eliminate him before the next election.²⁶ The police were able to arrest a gunman within a week, which is unusually fast for a murder case in Thailand. The hit man was well-known in the Bangkok underworld. He confessed to the crime and told the police that he received orders from Taweesak Chidchob, Newin's elder brother, as he owed Taweesak for helping his ill mother receive treatment in hospital. He confessed to doing the job for free to show his gratitude to his boss. He also claimed he did not know Panawat personally and had no knowledge that Panawat was a parliamentarian. The only thing he knew was that Panawat was his boss's arch enemy.²⁷ As explained in Chapter 3, this gunman represented a type of assassin who conducts murders in order to pay a personal debt owed to political boss (i.e. clientelistic killing), rather than as a business deal.

The police had a warrant for Taweesak's arrest but they never succeeded in apprehending him. He is still at large as of early 2013. According to locals, Taweesak was Chai's rowdiest son and fled to Bangkok at a young age to make his fortune. He worked for a Bangkok underworld boss as a gambling racketeer and hoodlum commander. Panawat's would-be assassin was Taweesak's right hand man. Taweesak rarely appeared in his hometown except during elections, returning to assist his family's campaign with strong-arm tactics.²⁸ The involvement of a member of the Chidchob clan in the MP shooting critically damaged the Chidchob name. Newin and Chai held a press conference, saying they had had no involvement in the case nor direct contact with Taweesak for a very long time. They told the media that Taweesak alone was responsible for the attempted assassination. Nevertheless the public perceived the Chidchobs as ruthlessly power hungry and willing to employ violence to eliminate their adversaries. Everyone knew that Panawat was a major Chidchob family rival.

In fact, the Chidchobs and the Liangpongpanns were almost political identical twins. They had similar family backgrounds, accumulated wealth in the same ways in the same territories, and used exactly the same strategies to win votes. The national media portrayed Panawat's murder attempt as part of a saga between "good politicians" and "crook politicians," but for locals it was the usual but uncompromising conflict between

²⁶ *Siam Rath*, 19 December 1999: 1, 2; *Krungthep Thurakit*, 23 December 1999: 3.

²⁷ *Daily News*, 26 December 1999: 1, 14.

²⁸ Interview, family member of key vote canvasser of the Chidchob family, Bangkok, 22 September 2010. Also see a brief profile of Taweesak in *Matichon*, 27 December 1999: 19.

two forceful political clans competing for the control of the province.²⁹ The two families were political as well as business rivals. As we learnt from other provinces, political and business enmity was a perfect formula for electoral violence. Panawat Liangpongpan was elected for the first time in 1986, when he was only 26, with the support of his elder brother Sawaeng Liangpongpan, an old-fashioned but highly influential sub-district head feared by locals in Kumuang district. Panawat and Newin were the same generation of politician and, in fact, were political allies briefly. Panawat was affiliated with several parties: he first started with the Mualchon Party from 1986-1992, then moved to the Chart Thai Party in 1992, then switched to the Democrat Party in 1996. Before running for national elections, he was provincial councilor. He hit the headlines by winning more votes than Chai Chidchob in the 1996 national election.³⁰ His family controlled the Kumuang district; his elder brother was a long-standing sub-district head, and his younger brother and his sister-in-law were municipal councilors. In Panawat's constituency, no other political groups had ever beaten him, including the Chidchobs who lost to Panawat's team several times. The November 1999 PAO poll was another battle in which the Liangpongpan prevailed over the Chidchobs, embarrassing Chai who was confident that his family would win the district PAO councilor seat. Both families used intimidation and coercive force. On several occasions the police were employed to restore order.³¹ The Liangpongpan monopolized the profitable construction business in Kumuang. *Kamnan* Sawaeng was infamous for his toughness and connections to local thugs. Sawaeng also owned a cockfighting den popular with district gamblers and ruffians. Furthermore, the family nominated Panawat's wife to run for senator in Buriram in the 2000 senate election, in which she had to compete with Newin's sister.³²

In January 2000, after recovering from his operation, Panawat gave an interview saying "not everyone in Buriram is a godfather. There are only certain families destroying Buriram people's reputation." He continued saying that Buriram was more violent than other provinces because even government MPs, of whom he was one, were murder targets.³³ According to Panawat's "personal theory", he was led to believe that "no one

²⁹ Newin reportedly learnt several electioneering tactics from Panawat's brother when he began his political career. Interview, former political ally of Newin Chidchob, Buriram, 14 October 2010; local journalist, Buriram, 19 October 2010.

³⁰ *Khao Sod*, 22 December 1999: 4.

³¹ *Daily Manager*, 21 December 1999: 13; *Matichon*, 21 December 1999: 1, 21.

³² *Dokbia Thurakit*, 27 December 1999: 8.

³³ *Matichon*, 16 January 2000: 1, 19; *Thai Post*, 8 January 2000: 2.

dared kill a parliamentarian... but at the end my belief was proved wrong.”³⁴ In fact, Panawat was largely correct to assume MPs were off limits, as since the late 1980s MPs were less frequently targeted than vote canvassers (see chapter 4 and 6). His attempted assassination was quite unusual. In his 17 January 2000 criminal court testimony, he made an audacious move by implicating the Chidchob family. Panawat described seven potential motivations for the attempt on his life, pointing out they all involved the Chidchobs. Some of Panawat’s assassination motives concerned fierce competition between two families in local polls. Others related to his role in exposing the Chidchobs’ abuse of power in local politics. But Panawat said the primary motivation for his attempted murder was political conflict over the 2001 general election. He said this conflict was a matter of life and death because in the new electoral system (the FPTP), there could be only one winner per constituency. His and Chai’s overlapping vote bases forced a confrontation between them, Panawat noted; and he further told the judges that the Chidchob family wanted to control the province by winning all ten seats and he was their major obstacle. Panawat claimed that if he was killed, his rival would save 80 million baht because “if I were still alive, they have to spend that amount of money to win over me.”³⁵ Three days after Panawat’s testimony, the court delivered a guilty verdict and sentenced the gunman to life imprisonment for attempted murder. The police also charged Newin’s elder brother, who was on the run, for masterminding the murder plan.

Stories about Panawat’s attempted assassination ran for weeks in the media and damaged the Chidchob family’s political prospects. Initially, Newin and his family wanted to join the Democrat Party in the 2001 poll expecting the Democrat’s reputable image to rescue him from endless scandals. The Democrat leaders, at the same time, wanted Newin’s faction in their party since they were acutely aware that the Northeast region was their weakest spot. Since the 1980s the Democrats had completely failed to win the support of the Northeastern voters. With the inclusion of Newin’s political faction, party leaders saw prospects of winning a fair number of seats in the large impoverished region, enhancing the Party’s chances of forming a new government. But in the aftermath of Panawat’s shooting, the deal fell through. Several party members opposed Newin saying his disreputable image was going to ruin the party’s popularity among Bangkokian voters and urban voters in other provinces, particularly for Party-list

³⁴ *Thai Post*, 20 January 2000: 1, 2.

³⁵ See the full testimony of Panawat in *Khao Sod*, 20 January 2000: 1, 10.

votes. Even before the Panawat shooting incident, he was staunchly against the idea of having Newin in the Party as they both strove for the same constituency. Panawat said publicly many times he was not changing his constituency “whatever happens, I am going to stand in Kumuang district, my hometown.”³⁶ According to a major politician in the 2001 poll for Buriram, “Panawat’s enemy must have decided to use violence to eliminate him after negotiation on the issue of overlapping constituencies failed.”³⁷ After his attempted assassination, Panawat answered the question about the prospects of Newin joining the Democrat Party, saying “I believe party members [of the Democrats] have a heart... I have permanent scars caused by politics. It is definitely clear that I could not be Newin’s political ally.”³⁸

Again, in 2001, Newin and his faction had difficulty finding an established party to stand in the general election. Banharn, his former boss who expelled him from the party a few years earlier, welcomed him back to the Chart Thai Party and gave him a second chance. Banharn was not a benevolent or forgiving person, but he desperately needed Newin’s faction to add more seats to his party after losing many strong candidates to Thaksin’s affluent That Rak Thai Party. Banharn knew that Newin, regardless of his notoriety, was the leader of a large political faction and thus had the potential to win seven to ten seats. Apart from his hometown, Newin had expanded his political power to cover the constituencies in neighboring provinces in the lower northeast such as Sisaket, Sakon Nakhon, Ubon Ratchathani, Surin, and Kalasin.³⁹ Several candidates in these provinces were supported by the Chidchob family. Building up a large political faction beyond one’s own home province comes at a large cost. However, Newin’s wealth—accumulated while he was in politics in the 1990s—enabled him to build and expand his faction. Over the years, his family’s and his associates’ construction companies won many tenders for government megaprojects. By the end of the 1990s, Newin had become one of the top ten richest cabinet members with total assets worth 298.50 million baht. He owned vast tracts of high-priced land in Buriram, Bangkok, and Chiangmai, and his wife was even wealthier with a net worth 846.79 million baht (making her one of the

³⁶ See the reports of his earlier interviews in *Siam Rath*, 19 December 1999: 1, 2; *Matichon*, 20 December 1999: 4.

³⁷ *Thai Rath*, 19 December 1999: 19.

³⁸ *Thai Post*, 3 February 2000: 3.

³⁹ *Matichon Sudsapda*, 9-15 October 2000: 13.

richest cabinet ministers' spouses).⁴⁰ Such wealth and power indicated and also fulfilled his desire to be a regional boss, not merely a provincial one.

In the wake of Panawat's shocking failed assassination, local residents believed that the coming poll in Buriram would be violent, as one said, "politics in Buriram is tough, even a mountain can be toppled." Another local politician lamented the increase in recent violence, noting that in the past "politics in Buriram was intense but not overtly violent."

⁴¹ The attempted murder of a well-known MP put full blown violence on the horizon. Veteran politician Sophon Phetsawang, an MP for Buriram who had accumulated his personal wealth from the construction business like other politicians in Buriram, attempted to avert violent confrontation by persuading all powerful local faction leaders to negotiate. He proposed that every group compromise and try to reach a power-sharing agreement, in which all ten seats in the province be fairly allocated to each group to avoid bloodshed in the campaign. Sophon intended to ask for the mediation of a senior and charismatic politician from the Democrat Party who both Panawat and Newin respected.⁴² Nobody responded to Sophon's call for mediation, and thus the province was primed for bloody electoral warfare.

The 2001 poll: the clan, fierce rivalry, and the (party) dark horse

The 2001 poll in Buriram was a fierce three-way contest between the Chidchob family groupings (associated with the Chart Thai Party), the Liangpongpan family (Democrats), and Sophon Phetsawang and associates (Thai Rak Thai Party). Political observers had focused on the rivalry between Newin and Panawat. In the end, however, it was the newly formed TRT party who emerged as the surprise winner and gained the most from the competition. Buriram electoral results truly demonstrated a significant change in Thai electoral politics, particularly in the North and Northeast regions, showing that (populist) policy packages and party branding were increasingly significant in shaping voters' decisions. Clan networks remained important as long as they were able to control vital resources and delivered patronage to the local community, and were capable of using coercive force to ward off their enemies. The political clans who were not in a strong position were wiped out by the populist political party. Clans with robust enough

⁴⁰ See details of the construction business empire of his network in *Dokbia Thurakit*, 10 January 2000: 8; for Newin and his wife's total assets, see *Matichon Suddapda*, 20-26 January 1998: 15-16.

⁴¹ *Matichon*, 22 December 1999: 1, 21; *Thai Post*, 19 December 1999: 1, 10.

⁴² *Khao Sod*, 25 January 2000: 11.

powerbases were able to withstand the forceful party and not be completely eradicated. The Chidchob family of Buriram was located in the latter category. Moreover, when the Buriram Election Commission announced the official results the Chidchobs realized that their most formidable opponent was the massive new party, the TRT, not their local personal foes.

As everyone expected, the election was violent. Buriram was named one of the most violent provinces in 2001, the worst record in the province's history. The two most violent areas were the first and fifth constituencies. Record conflict levels in the fifth constituency were no surprise as it was the district in which Panawat competed with the Chidchobs. A key Chidchob family vote canvasser admitted that Panawat was their toughest opponent as his family had a strong clientelist network in the district. At that time Newin's team was not able to completely invade Panawat's territory, therefore they used all available tactics.⁴³ Newin decided to field his father Chai Chidchob for the top seat of the Chart Thai party list to ensure an easy track to parliament for his beloved father. By this move, it also avoided a direct confrontation between Chai and Panawat. He instead put one of his brothers to fight against Panawat in his constituency. As both sides employed coercive force, campaigning exploded with violence. The primary targets were vote canvassers, and candidates used hard-arm tactics to either command their own team's loyalty or to eliminate their opponent's key canvassers (see Chapter 3). Candidates approached key vote canvassers such as village headmen or sub-district heads, to work for them. Compared to others involved in the elections, the vote canvassers' lives were the most precarious. If they said "no" to one side and worked for others, they were eliminated by the candidate whom they refused. Some thus opted to stay neutral. Even as non-aligned they were not completely safe as they were suspected by both sides. Candidates and their coteries frequently threaten vote brokers to guarantee their neutrality: the case of the Khaen Charoen village headman (in the fifth constituency) who dares to refuse to work for both powerful contenders, is apposite: A few days before the election, he was shot by a gang of mysterious gunmen at home.⁴⁴

The first constituency had many violent incidents too. It is in a long-standing Chidchob family city district. The family had always won elections by a staggering margin in this district. However, Newin fielded his business associate, Prasit Tangsikiatkun to stand

⁴³ Interview, long-time key vote canvasser of Chidchob family, Buriram, 9 October 2010.

⁴⁴ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 4 January 2001: 17-18; *Matichon*, 4 January 2001: 14.

against the TRT candidate, Phanprapha Intharawithayanan (1950-), who had been born in Buriram but spent most of her life in Bangkok. Phanprapha was a high-profile businesswoman and socialite, married to a wealthy businessman-turned-politician. Her family networks were strong in the city district as some of her relatives held local administrative posts. She was head of the TRT candidates' team for Buriram, and the party expected her to make her mark in this hard-fought territory. TRT had a bountiful war chest, but they lacked a strong team of vote canvassers as they were newcomers to the area. Phanprapha's opponents used the fact that she had left Buriram and lived in Bangkok for a long time. Local observers and her competitors accused the TRT team of "dumping money" to create an ad hoc political machine. There was some truth in the accusation. The TRT invested heavily in influential local figures to work as their vote canvassers. Some of those figures were vote canvassers who formerly worked for Newin. This pattern of "buying" vote brokers disrupted the Chidchob's long-established political networks, thereby leading to violent tussles over vote controllers. A key Chidchob family henchman admitted that the family had lost a number of vote canvassers to the opposition. According to him, those who left were "bitter with us, or felt that they were not taken care of well enough, or thought they would be better off with the opposing team." However, he noted that only a minority defected.⁴⁵

In the pre-election period, some of those who defected had their lives threatened, were physically assaulted and/or assassinated. Many vote canvassers had to seek police protection because hooligans harassed them day and night and it was not safe to leave home and campaign. According to one of Phanprapha's key vote canvassers (a community leader and a former Newin broker) some TRT team vote brokers stopped working after local thugs constantly threatened them. A partisan village headman and some tough guys threatened her but she decided to continue for personal and political reasons, "I like TRT's policy package... and my mom was a good friend of Phanprapha's mom."⁴⁶ Since both sides felt they could not afford to lose, the first constituency abounded with intimidation, kidnappings, bomb threats, brawls, and car attacks. On the eve of voting day, the local election commission and election monitoring group needed to ask the army to escort them to the first and fifth constituency, on reports of impending clashes between opposing groups. When election observers and officers arrived at the scene they were caught between two gangs, but the gangs spared them as

⁴⁵ Interview, key political henchman of the Chidchobs, Buriram, 8 October 2010.

⁴⁶ Interview, key vote canvasser of Phanprapha, 6 and 14 October 2010.

they were considered “non-combatants.” Officials seized many weapons that night. One commented on his dreadful experience, “I was really scared... it was like they were going to war.”⁴⁷

When the results of first round of vote counting came out, they were met with angry mass voter protests organized by the losing candidates. The situation spiraled out of control to the point in which the local election commission had to call for extra help from the police and army. Aggrieved parties filed multiple complaints of electoral misconduct and irregularities at the national election commission in Bangkok, resulting in the commission invalidating the results in four constituencies, including the first and the fifth district. When the second “electoral war” was over, two victors emerged—the Chidchobs and Thaksin’s party. The Chidchobs grabbed four seats, including one in the first district, in which Newin’s close friend defeated Phanprapha by a very small margin. One of Newin’s younger brothers was elected MP for the first time in the family’s domain. The TRT, on the other hand, finished with a more impressive performance winning six seats, including the competitive one in the fifth constituency.⁴⁸ Surprisingly, in the fifth constituency, a new face candidate from the TRT, Peerapong Hengsawat, a wealthy local businessman who owned many factories in the area, was a political dark horse defeating the top contenders, Newin’s brother and Panawat. Peerapong puts his win down to Newin and Panawat underestimating him, and voters being attracted to and enthusiastically supporting TRT’s populist policies.⁴⁹

All winning candidates from both camps shared one feature, and that is that they all owned or were shareholders in construction companies.⁵⁰ Generally speaking, TRT candidates’ qualifications were weaker than those of the Chidchob family. Their victory owed a great deal to Thaksin’s popularity and the party’s populist policies. For Newin’s candidates, their victory depended first and foremost on the Chidchob family political machine as much as their own personal vote bases and clientelist networks. For the Chidchob team, the party brand contributed almost nothing to their campaign and electoral success. Some voters did not even pay attention to or were aware of the

⁴⁷ Interview, election observer, Buriram, 7 October 2010; interview, local election commissioner, 14 October 2010.

⁴⁸ The winning candidate in the ninth constituency was initially associated with a very small party called Seritham, which was a close ally of the TRT and was eventually integrated into the TRT after the election. For this reason, I regarded this candidate as a TRT candidate.

⁴⁹ Interview, Peerapong Hengsawat, Buriram, 16 October 2010.

⁵⁰ See occupational background of Buriram MPs in 2001 poll in Niran 2006: 34–35.

Chidchob candidates' party association. In every constituency, electoral results clearly demonstrated this mentioned pattern as the number of votes for a TRT's party-list ballot was higher than the number of votes for its constituency candidate. For Newin's Chart Thai, the pattern was totally opposite. For example, in the fifth constituency, the TRT had 25,812 votes for the constituency candidate and 31,113 votes for party-list, while the Chart Thai Party received 11,451 votes for the constituency (Newin's brother), and 11,213 for party list.⁵¹ The 2001 election was a competition between the party machines and family networks, or, put another way, between programmatic politics and particularistic politics. This election made clear for the Chidchobs that Panawat was not a major obstacle for their ambitious plan to monopolize political power in Buriram.

The 2005 poll: the political integration of clan networks and party machines

The 2001 election was the last violent election witnessed by Buriram residents. The three following general elections from 2001 onwards were peaceful and orderly. The absence of violence, particularly in the 2005 poll, was the result of political negotiation between two influential figures, Newin and Thaksin. Both were astute politicians who had learnt from the turbulent 2001 poll that it was too costly and damaging to have a head-on confrontation between a strong national party and a powerful local clan. They struck an important deal for the 2005 election so that both sides could avoid unnecessary collision. For Thaksin, the Buriram strategy was not unique. In Phrae, as discussed in Chapter 7, Thaksin attempted to broker a deal with the Supasiri family, but the attempt failed and violence erupted. In Nakhon Sawan, the Nirot family agreed to act as local power brokers for the TRT, and the province escaped brutal contestation once before returning to violence after the 2006 coup. In Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thaksin was not able to cut a political deal in the Democrat Party heartland. Therefore he supported the Ketchart family, a powerful clan and long-standing Democrat rival, spearheading TRT's campaign in toppling the Democrats. That campaign led to a violent political showdown (as already elaborated in Chapter 9). In Phetchaburi, the powerful local Angkinan clan was an obvious choice for Thaksin, but he did not succeed due to the politics of clan (as argued in Chapter 10). In Buriram, Thaksin had no option but to negotiate with the Chidchobs, undoubtedly the most formidable power bloc in the province.

⁵¹ *Krungthep Thurakit*, 18 January 2001: 2; and see the official election results of the 2001 poll in the Office of Election Commission of Thailand 2001.

Newin's faction decided to move to the TRT ahead of the 2005 election, and the TRT assigned him to lead the party campaign in Buriram. For Newin, the best option was working with Thaksin's party, thereby capitalizing on party popularity and material resources to consolidate his family's power at the expense of his enemies. Thaksin's popularity and the TRT populist policies combined with the Chidchob family political machine brought the TRT team a landslide victory. TRT's party list and constituency votes in the 2005 poll in Buriram were significantly higher than those they received in the 2001 poll.

Political success compelled TRT candidates who were former Chidchob family rivals to leave behind their past enmities. Sophon Phetsawang, who, since 1983, had been a Buriram legislator and leading TRT candidate in the 2001 election, agreed to work with Newin in the 2005 campaign.⁵² Like Panawat, Sophon blocked Newin's ambitions to monopolize power. For a long time, he had been a vocal opponent of the Chidchob family at both local and national levels. His financial base was no different from other major Buriram politicians, as his family owned a number of construction companies. Nangrong district was his political stronghold that even the Chidchobs could not invade. He solidified his local power base by fielding his son and wife in the district provincial councilor polls and both were duly elected. In the 2005 poll, Newin joined forces with Sophon under the TRT banner. When asked about Newin joining the TRT, Sophon said "I have no problem with Newin joining the Thai Rak Thai party... I am ready to work with him... If MPs in all ten districts can be united, that is going to be a good omen for Buriram people... and it is going to effectively reduce violent competition."⁵³ One of Sophon's key political aides said he had no choice but to work with Newin. Despite the fact that Sophon despised Newin, he could not afford to abandon Thaksin's party as he realized that the popularity of the TRT in Buriram was extremely strong.⁵⁴

In the process of selecting candidates, Sophon's and Newin's factions fielded their own former winning candidates (six from the TRT and four from the Chidchob family). Those members from both factions who lost the 2001 poll were forced to find a new party. As a result, TRT won all ten seats and all incumbents were reelected and Chai and

⁵² Sophon first ran for MP in 1979 under the Democrat Party but failed. He was then elected the first time in 1983, failed again in 1986 but succeeded in 1988 and again in September 1992, 1995, 1996, and 2001. He was a deputy House Speaker during the second Chuan government, but never received any ministerial post. See, *Matichon*, 20 February 2002: 3.

⁵³ *Khao Sod*, 28 July 2003: 1, 10, 11.

⁵⁴ Interview, former key political aide of Sophon, Buriram, 11 October 2010.

Newin entered the Parliament as TRT party-list candidates. The 2005 election went smoothly without any violent incident. The Chidchobs conducted closed-door negotiations prior to voting to pave the way for Newin's campaign to impress Thaksin with absolute victory. Reportedly, TRT approached two popular local candidates (both close to Newin) from the Democrat Party and the Mahachon Party, to withdraw in exchange for ten million baht each. The candidate from the Mahachon Party, who was expected to run in the same constituency as Sophon, withdrew without giving any explanation at the last minute.⁵⁵ One of Newin's key vote brokers conceded that Newin persuaded the Mahachon Party candidate to withdraw so that Sophon could win easily.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, other old opponents of the Chidchobs were in no position to compete with the family this time. Panawat Liangpongpan, who replaced Newin as a Chart Thai candidate, was embarrassingly defeated by the TRT candidate for the second time by an even greater margin.

After the 2005 election, the Chidchobs' political power reached its apex. It became one of the most successful political dynasties of the Thaksin era. The family dominated every level of political office in the province from MP to sub-district administration. Newin and his father, wife, and younger brother were in the House. His elder sister had been a senator since 2001. At the local level, Newin formed a political group called "Buriram Rak Thai," (Buriram loves Thai) a name that clearly linked and identified this local group with the Thai Rak Thai party. The Buriram boss exercised his political influence through this local group to assist his brother-in-law, Pol.Col. Chawalit Artarsa, elected as the Buriram PAO Chairman in 2003. Most newly elected provincial councilors owed the Chidchob family political machine their election victory. Chawalit was elected Buriram PAO Chairman despite having no political or public office experience nor ever having lived in the province. In the campaign, he changed his family name to Chidchob to emphasize his political belonging as his name was not known locally.⁵⁷ To cement the alliance between the Chidchobs and their former opponents, Sophon Phetsawang's son was appointed PAO deputy Chairman under Newin's brother-in-law. Most people knew Newin was a de facto PAO Chairman making all important

⁵⁵ This news was confirmed by one of the TRT candidates. He admitted that the negotiation indeed occurred but said there was no money offered. *Thai Rath*, 12 December 2005: 1, 9, 10, 19; *Matichon*, 19 January 2005: 11.

⁵⁶ Later on this candidate from Mahachon went to work with Newin. Interview with a key vote broker of the Chidchob family, Buriram, 13 October 2010.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the 2003 PAO election in Buriram, see Achakorn 2007. Also see, *Prachakom Thongthin*, 3: 32 (October 2003): 58-61; *Prachakom Thongthin*, 3: 35 (January 2004): 74-76.

decisions, including budget allocations. Before council meetings, Chidchob-aligned provincial councilors had to attend a briefing session at Newin's house to get instructions on how to vote. Whenever they had problem they went to consult with Newin. One former provincial councilor put it plainly, "Newin is everything of Buriram politics."⁵⁸

After the 2005 election, Newin was rewarded with a cabinet post and became one of Thaksin's most trusted political assistants. Thaksin assigned him difficult, risky and sometimes secretive tasks, especially when his government faced a legitimacy crisis during his second term. In the wake of the 2006 coup, coup leaders arrested and detained Newin for several days as they knew he had the strong potential to organize mass demonstrations against the coup. After he was released, he did not keep a low-profile but spoke out aggressively against the coup leaders. He was influential in the formation of the Red Shirt movement. He mobilized people from the Northeast, the political stronghold of the TRT, to organize rallies against the coup-installed government, and funded many radio stations and media outlets in attacking the army and Thaksin's enemies. Just after the Constitutional Court disbanded the Thai Rak Thai Party on charges of electoral malpractice in May 2007, Newin and other former party executives formed a new party called "Palang Prachachon Party" (People's Power Party or PPP). He effectively became a central figure of Thaksin's new allied party and a leader of the anti-coup movement, and these two high-profile positions undoubtedly made him a chief enemy of army leaders.⁵⁹

The 2007 poll: the emboldened clan, the struggling party, and the intervening army

The 2007 poll was held about a year after the coup and only a few months after the promulgation of the August 2007 constitution and the formation of several new parties. This post-coup election was conducted in a tense but relatively peaceful environment with only a few violent incidents. As discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, the army heavy interference in the campaigning inadvertently made the 2007 election relatively peaceful. Instead of electoral killings between opposing political bosses, Buriram, along with other provinces, witnessed the obsolete pattern of state interference and

⁵⁸ Interview; former Buriram provincial councilor, Buriram, 11 October 2010. Interview, senior Buriram PAO officer, Buriram, 14 October 2010.

⁵⁹ See a colorful account of Newin's political life in the aftermath of the coup in Itsarin and Chamnong 2009.

repression—a throwback to the 1950s and 1960s military dictatorial regimes. The military intimidated Thaksin's allied party's candidates and vote canvassers on the campaign trail. The situation in Buriram was worse than other provinces as army leaders regarded Newin as Thaksin's right-hand man and a central PPP Party figure. They strongly believed that by weakening Newin, they could prevent the PPP from winning the election. The strategy of the coup group, which, following the takeover, was transformed into the Council of National Security, was to send soldiers to interfere with Newin's electioneering in Buriram. The military aimed to paralyze Newin's movement, restricting his capacity to mobilize his political machine in Buriram and elsewhere in the northeast region. The coup leaders were able to enlist two (out of five) Buriram provincial election commissioners to help them topple the Chidchob dynasty. They worked closely together both before and after election day, employing both physical and legal force in an effort to achieve their self-described "noble" political mission.⁶⁰

Fearing military pressure, several former TRT candidates, including Sophon, abandoned Thaksin to run for other parties. In response, Newin recruited former opponents as PPP team members. The military kept all PPP vote canvassers under constant surveillance. They could not go out to campaign without their vehicles being thoroughly searched. Some managed to disguise themselves and escape state vigilance, and some mobilized votes remotely from home through mobile phones and other communication technologies. One of Newin's key canvassers commented, "it was like playing a game of cat and mouse."⁶¹ The military operation undoubtedly favored other parties. Unlike the PPP team, other parties' vote canvassers were free to campaign and even to buy votes without being apprehended by the police or election commission. Newin's political rivals admitted they were "indirectly helped by the army" because "a group of soldiers helped obstruct Newin's vote canvassers in the course of buying votes." Newin's opponents believed that was "the only way to beat Newin."⁶² A PPP candidate summed up the situation: "in the 2007 poll, we did not compete with opposing candidates, but we fought with a state apparatus controlled by a coup group."⁶³ Key leaders of the Council of National Security stayed in Buriram and commanded the "operation" by themselves.

⁶⁰ Interview, former Buriram election commissioner, Nan, 11 January 2010. Interview, Buriram election commission official, Buriram, 15 October 2010.

⁶¹ Interview, key vote canvasser of the Chidchobs, Buriram, 14 October 2010.

⁶² Interview, political opponent of Chidchob family, Buriram, 12 October 2010.

⁶³ Interview, People Power Party's MP candidate for Buriram in the 2007 election, Buriram, 9 October 2010.

They summoned village headmen and sub-district heads to stop campaigning for Newin, and instructed them to persuade villagers not to vote for the PPP party.⁶⁴

Despite every possible form of repression, the election results did not go as the army expected. Newin helped the PPP win all seats except one in Buriram. The Buriram election commission, however, immediately issued three red cards to PPP's winning candidates for several charges of vote fraud. They were thus prohibited from standing again. In the by-elections that followed, Newin asked his supporters to vote for minor party candidates to prevent those supported by the army from winning. He also wanted to embarrass the election commission and the army. His plan succeeded; three little-known candidates received 20,000 more votes than in the first round and won the by-elections.⁶⁵

Newin's resounding victory embarrassed the coup group and the Buriram election commission and proved how strong his political machine was. It was a win for Thaksin too because five out of nine winning candidates defeated incumbents who had abandoned Thaksin to join other parties. The results proved that the MPs who won in 2005 were successful because of TRT's popularity. Without TRT's support and the Chidchob's endorsement, their chances of being reelected were nil. Peerapong Hengsatat, one of the Thaksin defectors, conceded that he lost the 2007 election mainly because he switched parties and voters disapproved of his changing political affiliation. Villagers said to him "they still loved Thaksin and TRT policy so much."⁶⁶ Another former TRT MP who lost in 2007 similarly admitted that his personal standing could not compete with PPP's massive support.⁶⁷ In contrast, Newin gauged his home province voter sentiment accurately. He shaped the PPP campaign as a political battle to bring Thaksin back from exile and give "power back to the common people". Anti-coup messages dominated PPP's campaign in Buriram and elsewhere. For example, on a party stage on 25 September 2007, in a highly emotional speech in front of thousands of people in his hometown, Newin described his maltreatment in detention by coup leaders. He then talked about the failure of the coup,

⁶⁴ Interview, sub-district head in a rural constituency, Buriram, 17 October 2010; Chairman of Tambon Administrative Organization in a city district, 20 October 2010.

⁶⁵ Interview, key political henchman of Chidchob family, Buriram, 20 October 2010; *Khao Sod*, 23 January 2008: 3.

⁶⁶ Interview, Peerapong Hengsatat, 16 October 2010, Buriram, 2010.

⁶⁷ Interview, former Thai Rak Thai MP for Buriram, Buriram, 16 October 2010.

Today is the first anniversary since we lost democracy to the dictator. We also lost the most beloved elected Prime Minister. The coup [group] made so many accusations [against us]. But today it is already proved that who is crooked and who is good, and if Pol. Lt.Col. Thaksin was really a bad person, people would surely not miss him so much like this.⁶⁸

Newin framed the 2007 election as a political fight between the military and the populist party of ousted Thaksin. He told voters they had only two choices: a vote for the PPP was a vote against the coup; any other vote was for the coup.

The 2007 election results clearly demonstrated that state interference in the electoral competition was not effective and was, in fact, anachronistic. State repression might produce unintended consequence in reducing the degree of electoral violence, but could not shape voter decisions. Voters were not afraid of the military and did not vote as the army instructed. Most of them felt insulted by state authorities when they were asked to vote for candidates who had never done anything for the province. By contrast, Thaksin's allied party and the Chidchob family, who the army and the traditional elite painted as a "pure evil," provided jobs for their family, found schools for their children, helped the elderly on medical care, etc. There was no reason to vote otherwise.⁶⁹ Military electoral interference completely backfired. The army did not realize that Thai electoral politics had changed dramatically since 1997 as a result of a set of parallel changes: the implementation of the 1997 constitution, the decentralization process, and the emergence of new type of political party and its populist policy. State coercive force was no longer effective in determining voter preferences or weakening popular politicians.

After the Chidchob family monopolized provincial power, violent methods became less necessary. The family created a far-reaching patron-client network to maintain power, disburse various kinds of material resources, and support their election campaigns.⁷⁰ They turned from bosses into patrons. They gave government projects, public funds, and

⁶⁸ See Newin's full speech in *Matichon*, 26 September 2007.

⁶⁹ Interview, a group of voters, Buriram, 22 October 2010; Buriram Red Shirt leader, Buriram, 18 October 2010; a group of shopkeepers in city market, Buriram, 19 October 2010.

⁷⁰ Following information was gathered from several interviews with friends and followers of the Chidchob family in September and October 2010.

local administrative jobs to campaign workers, vote canvassers, business associates, and relatives. Newin's Cabinet positions and his father's seat on the House Budget Committee made it possible for the family to channel public resources to fund their political networks. Also, the Chidchobs adeptly utilized Thaksin's popularity and TRT and PPP resources for their own personal advantage. Since the late 1990s, when they were elected, many family associates were able to secure income from government construction projects, mainly from the Department of Highways, the Marine Department, the Department of Public Works and Town and Country Planning, and the Airport of Thailand Public Company Limited. The clan-controlled Buriram Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) was another major source of patronage flow. Normally, the PAO allocated each Chidchob-aligned provincial councilor a large sum of budget for jobs and local development projects in their constituencies. As supreme boss, Newin was never involved in small local construction projects and never asked for commission from friends and followers for the jobs and projects he had provided. In this way, he seemed generous and was able to command respect and loyalty. One follower said "Newin said to me that he had enough money already, so I do not have to give him any money. Just work for him."⁷¹

Newin treated those in his network rather fairly. He promoted bureaucrats and assisted local politicians in winning elections. They, in return, mobilized votes for him (if they were local politicians or bureaucrats) or turned a blind eye to illegality or provided him an unfair advantage over his opponents during elections (if they were government agencies). Therefore it was mutually beneficial for both sides. The Chidchob's absolute control over the local bureaucracy made violent methods unnecessary. Uniformed men facilitated and protected illegal electioneering. Many officials were cogs in the family's political machine. In a clan-controlled province, the power relationship between bureaucrats and elected politicians was clearly imbalanced. In December 2009 a Buriram governor stated publicly that he has no fear working in Buriram. In fact, it was a lot easier than working in other provinces since almost all of the national and local politicians in Buriram belonged to Newin's network. He continued,

It was an honor to be appointed provincial governor of Buriram. Frankly speaking, I was picked by Mr. Newin [Chidchob] to work in Buriram. I dare say this since I am straightforward... You can ban someone from

⁷¹ Interview, key henchman, 20 October 2010.

having a political position but you could not forbid local people having faith in someone.... This is called charisma... which *than* Newin has. So he can select anyone he wanted to be in Buriram because it is his homeland.⁷²

It was this kind of political influence over the local state apparatus that put the Chidchobs at a distinct advantage at every stage of the election process from voter registration, campaign conduct, ballot counting to election complaint adjudication. It was an unlevel playing field. A senior Buriram police officer commented, "since 2005, election contests [in Buriram] have been completely controlled by one network. There has been no competition between equally strong candidates. There has been only a competition between a very strong side and a very weak one. Under these circumstances, the strong side did not need to use violence."⁷³

Even though the Chidchob's political machine was very solid, Newin still demanded a lot from politicians and his vote canvassers. They had to visit their constituencies every weekend and attend to voter needs. Newin dismissed those who failed these tasks, and recruited more capable people to the network.⁷⁴ Newin carefully selected all candidates for MPs and other important positions (such as PAO Chairman). No one in his network was entitled to the posts without scrutiny. Sometimes, he offered strong opponents a place in his team to avoid fierce competition. He used strong-arm tactics against those who betrayed him or were recalcitrant. And those outside his network faced difficulty gaining access to local resources or winning seats in elections. Even if outsiders managed to be elected, Newin pressed them to work for the Chidchob family, otherwise they would have difficulties in undertaking their duties.⁷⁵ Eventually, almost all of independent candidates or former Chidchob family opponents ended up joining the clan. Former outsiders had learnt that it was the most direct and safest way to secure access to local wealth and power. For example, one Chidchob family opponent was requested by his vote canvassers to join the clan so that he could be elected. His vote canvassers did not want to compete with the Chidchob family as it was "too dangerous and exhausting."

⁷² See the full interview of the Buriram governor in *Matichon*, 30 December 2009: 8. The word *than* used when someone want to call another in a highly respectable way. It is common to find civil servants use this word when they refer to powerful politicians.

⁷³ Interview, senior local police officer, Buriram, 22 October 2010.

⁷⁴ Interview, local politician in the Chidchob faction, Buriram, 15 October 2010; former political henchman of Newin Chidchob, 14 October 2010.

⁷⁵ Interview, independent Tambon Administrative Organization's councilor, Buriram, 10 October 2010.

After agreeing to befriend the clan, he won consecutive provincial council elections with no competitors.⁷⁶ There were many similar cases of former Chidchob enemies joining the clan for political reasons.

Locals called the Chidchob family “bann yai” (big house or house of the big man), and it was popularly said “all roads in the province lead to the Chidchob family,” as the family has controlled nearly 90 percent of provincial elective posts. Only five to ten were not associated with the family, and this group of so called “independent figures” had to undertake low-profile political activity.⁷⁷ The Chidchobs certainly had a fair number of enemies in the province but no one had the audacity to challenge their power overtly—until the 2011 general election when a challenge came from a political figure more charismatic and powerful than Newin.

The 2011 election: battle between Newin and Thaksin

The general political backdrop of the 2011 poll was complex. After the 2007 elections, Thaksin’s allied party PPP was able to form two coalition governments. However, Yellow Shirt protestors paralyzed both governments. Two Prime Ministers from the PPP party had been forced to step down as a consequence of controversial rulings by the Constitution Court in September and December 2008 respectively. Like its predecessor Thai Rak Thai, the PPP party was dissolved by the Court and all executive members of the party were banned from any involvement in political affairs for five years. Newin decided to abandon the PPP for his political survival. After anti-Thaksin demonstrators forced the airport closedown in late November 2008, Newin realized he needed to break away from Thaksin to save himself and his family. As Thaksin’s right-hand man and a key figure behind the Red Shirts, Newin was under severe pressure by the army. Before he left Thaksin, Newin said to a group of his key allies,

there is no way we [Newin’s political networks] can fight traditional elites. It is a war that we will never win. The establishment will not permit Thaksin to rule the country. As

⁷⁶ Interview, former competitor of the Chidchob family, Buriram, 14 October 2010.

⁷⁷ Interview, Buriram election commission official, Buriram, 22 October 2010; local journalist, Buriram, 19 October 2010.

long as we support Thaksin, the army will put a harsh pressure on us.⁷⁸

Soon afterwards, Newin formed a new political party named Bhumjaitai, and switched his support to the opposition Democrat Party's leader, Abhisit Vejjajiva. Nearly forty PPP MPs also defected and joined Newin's Bhumjaitai Party. Without Newin's support, the political maneuver of the traditional elites in thwarting Thaksin's power and elevating Abhisit to the post of prime minister would never been successful. Newin played a role of kingmaker and he became an indispensable figure in the Abhisit government's survival. Abhisit rewarded him with seven lucrative and highly powerful ministerial posts in five ministries (i.e. Interior, Transportation, Commerce, Agriculture and Cooperatives, and Public Health).⁷⁹

It was ironic that, in an attempt to destroy the Thaksin dynasty, the army and other traditional force were willing to collaborate with a provincial boss like Newin, as they had considered him one of the most unscrupulous politicians for years. Indeed the establishment put their whole faith in Newin's ad hoc party, believing that the Bhumjaitai Party would defeat the PPP in many constituencies, particularly in the northeast. Therefore, in the 2011 election, the country witnessed a very strange combination of bedfellows: national bureaucratic forces and local bosses. In essence, the 2006 coup and the 2007 constitution revitalized faction leaders and factional politics in order to subdue national populist leader and party politics.

The Chidchob's party-switching put Buriram voters in a difficult position. They wavered between voting for the local patron, Newin, or the national populist Thaksin. Many simply said they loved both, "Thaksin is a great leader and I like his party's populist policies," but "Newin is good as well. His followers visit the constituency regularly. Newin is kind and generous. He has always given us whatever we have asked for."⁸⁰ But if forced to choose, voters seemed to choose the one who provided them immediate benefits. As one noted,

⁷⁸ Interview, political henchmen of the Chidchobs, Bangkok and Buriram, 30 September and 20 October 2010.

⁷⁹ *Matichon Sudsapda*, 16-22 January 2009: 11.

⁸⁰ Interview, a group of shopkeepers in the city market, Buriram, 19 October 2010.

most local people struggle to make a living daily. Now Thaksin is gone. He is not even in Thailand and he has no power. But Newin still has power and he is here with us. If we vote for Newin, Buriram is going to be developed. So even though we still love Thaksin, we have no choice but to vote for Newin.⁸¹

However, not every Buriram voter shared this practical mode of thinking, particularly staunch Red Shirt supporters. One Red Shirt leader said “I dislike Newin and Bhumjaitai because they betrayed Thaksin. They were not grateful to Thaksin.” She strongly believed Red Shirt members would not vote for Newin. “But we could not express our political ideas openly. Buriram was under the control of Newin. If you were a zealous enemy of him, you would get yourself in serious trouble... so most of Red Shirts were silent and waited for election day to punish Newin.”⁸²

In the 2011 Buriram election, the Thaksin-allied Pheu Thai Party was the only serious challenge to the Chidchobs since other parties were too weak to compete with the clan. However, the Pheu Thai Party did not spend much of its resources in Buriram as the party executives thought it was too costly to fight with Newin in his political stronghold. They believed it was more rational to channel resources at their disposal into other provinces rather than wasting them in Buriram. Several Pheu Thai candidates complained bitterly that their own party did not support them.⁸³ Pheu Thai expected to win only two or three seats maximum in Buriram. In some constituencies, especially Newin’s hometown, the Pheu Thai Party had difficulty fielding qualified candidates because nobody wanted a direct confrontation with the Chidchobs. Buriram’s political situation was a stark contrast with situation in other northeast provinces in which the Party had too many strong contenders. Every northeastern politician wanted to run with the Pheu Thai, knowing that the party banner was a guarantee of electoral success. In Buriram, the only Pheu Thai strength was that which it received from the Red Shirt’s steadfast supporters. Even though the Red Shirts were not satisfied with the quality of the candidates fielded

⁸¹ Interview, a group of shopkeepers in the city market, Buriram, 19 October 2010.

⁸² Interview, Red Shirt movement’s leader, Buriram, 18 October 2010.

⁸³ Interview, three Pheu Thai candidates for Buriram MPs, Buriram, 30 September, 14 October and 23 October 2010.

by the Pheu Thai Party, they still strongly supported Thaksin and the policies of the party.⁸⁴

In 2011, in Buriram and elsewhere, the Red Shirt supporters replaced the old-style network of vote canvassers. They were better campaigners: more committed, less-corrupt, and volunteering to work for free. In Buriram, in the run-up to the election, Red Shirts dutifully organized meetings, knocked on doors, and distributed campaign pamphlets. In each small meeting, they invited candidates to speak to hundreds of voters about policy and the political situation. A recurring theme in the meeting was Newin's betrayal. The boss of the Chidchob family was attacked vehemently by Pheu Thai candidates, saying his unforgivable betrayal had damaged Thaksin and the Red Shirt movement. Moreover, Red Shirts believed Newin was involved in the crackdown on Red Shirt demonstrators in Bangkok in 2009 and 2010. The Pheu Thai Party used these highly emotive issues to mobilize votes from anti-Newin (or pro-Thaksin) voters.⁸⁵ Just before the election, Yingluck Shinawatra and other leading Pheu Thai leaders, went to campaign in Buriram. They emphatically announced the Bhumjaitai Party was the arch enemy of the Pheu Thai Party and Thaksin. They told voters that if Pheu Thai received enough votes to form a coalition government, they would definitely not invite Newin's Bhumjaitai Party to join the coalition. This announcement illustrated a new political phenomenon in Thai politics. The Pheu Thai party realized the Red Shirt movement (whose organization formed the backbone of the party's vote base) would lose faith in the party if they did not take a tough stance on Newin. The mass Red Shirt movement significantly shaped the party's choice of coalition partner. Previously, political parties were not differentiated in terms of political ideology and/or policy platform and thus willing to form a coalition with others if they successfully negotiated cabinet seats quotas and vested interests. In the past, personal enmities among party or faction leaders could be easily forgotten or trumped by political expediency. Therefore, the overt and unwavering antagonism between the Pheu Thai and the Bhumjaitai parties witnessed in the 2011 election marked a watershed in Thai politics. The closer and more meaningful relationship between the political mass movement and the political party was a key factor in recent changes in the nature of party and electoral politics.

⁸⁴ Interview, Red Shirt movement's leader, Buriram, 18 October 2010; Red Shirt movement's member, Buriram, 18 October 2010.

⁸⁵ Personal observations of Pheu Thai Party's election campaigns, Buriram, 8 October 2010, 14 October 2010, 23 October 2010, and 28 and 29 June 2011.

The 2011 Buriram election was peaceful and one in which the province had witnessed a new pattern of political competition. Rather than a group of local factions or families vying with each other for electoral seats, Buriram experienced a political battle of mass mobilization and ideology between two formidable figures, namely Newin and Thaksin. Color-coded politics and ideological conflicts between Abhisit government and the Red Shirt protestors dominated the 2011 general election. National-level political conflicts overrode family feuds at the local level. The ideological contestation between a mass-movement supported party and a local political dynasty was not conducive to deadly conflicts. The challenge for both sides was primarily to win voters' hearts and minds, rather than eliminate their opponents. With this changing mode of conflict, the service of gunmen was not in demand as the assassination of individual candidates could not substantially alter election results. For these reasons, the 2011 Buriram election was undisturbed.

The electoral results demonstrated that, in Buriram, the family's political machine remained strong. The Bhumjaitai party secured seven seats and the Pheu Thai party managed to obtain two. Party-list votes, on the other hand, signaled that Thaksin's allied party was still highly popular among the Buriram electorate as Pheu Thai received 329,568 votes in comparison to Bhumjaitai's 226,741 votes.⁸⁶ It simply meant that a large numbers of voters cast their ballots for Newin's candidates but did not support his Bhumjaitai party: a political manifestation of divided loyalty. Nevertheless, given that the Pheu Thai party swept 104 seats out of 126 seats in the northeast region, the seven seats Newin and his family secured in his home province was an outstanding success. No other political clan in other parts of the country, except in the South, was able to withstand the immense popularity of Thaksin and Pheu Thai party as well as the Chidchobs. To be more precise, the Chidchobs were one of the very few political clans who managed to survive and maintain power in the midst of the political storm of deeply polarized politics that country witnessed since the 2006 coup. In electoral politics elsewhere, the political polarization had clearly worked in favor of two major contending parties—Thaksin's allied party and the Democrat Party—and was detrimental to minor political factions and families.

Apart from the Banharn's Silapa-archa family in Suphanburi, which actually, to their complete shock, lost one seat to a Pheu Thai candidate in 2011, and Newin's Chidchob

⁸⁶ For the official results of votes, see the Office of the Election Commission of Thailand 2011: 6.

family, there was only one other political dynasty that has been able to sustain their family power: the legendary Thienthong family of Sa Kaeo province, to whom we now turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 12

Sa Kaeo: Monopoly of one clan



Sa Kaeo province is an exemplary case, demonstrating that the existence of a power monopoly is a key contributing factor to orderly and peaceful elections. At the same time, this border province contains several crucial factors that usually contribute to electoral violence, namely a frontier, illicit economy, and the direct involvement of politicians in the illegal and rent-seeking business enterprises. As this analysis will show, the fundamental political condition that one political dynasty has ruled the province over a long period of time overrides these potentially violent factors. In Sa Kaeo, the Thienthong clan has enjoyed three decades of monopolistic control of the province since the early period of the transition to parliamentary democracy in the 1980s. This level of success is unusual among Thai provinces, where the more common story is polarized or fragmented power structures (as previously demonstrated on violent case studies in Chapters 7, 8, and 9).

In 2012, Sa Kaeo was subdivided into 9 districts (*amphoe*). The districts were further subdivided into 59 sub districts (*tambon*) and 619 villages (*muban*). It is not a small province in terms of area (ranked 28th), but it is one of the least populated provinces in the country (ranked 65th). With a population of 550,000 residents, the province has been

apportioned only three seats for MPs.¹ This sparsely populated rural province, located on the eastern border of Thailand, faces the Banteay Meanchey and Battambang districts of Cambodia. Neighboring Thai provinces are Chanthaburi, Chachoengsao, Prachin Buri, Nakhon Ratchasima and Buriram. It used to be a large district under Prachinburi Province, but in December 1993 it was upgraded to a province when six Prachinburi districts (Sa Kaeo, Khlong Hat, Wang Nam Yen, Aranya Prathet, Ta Phraya and Watthana Nakhon) were integrated. It was one of three newly established provinces alongside Amnat Charoen and Nong Bua Lamphu.

The north of the province is covered with the large forested mountains of the Dong Phraya Yen range. To the south are foothill plains, which are mostly deforested. Most locals work in the agricultural sector. The 2009/2010 statistics show 52,783 households working in farming.² The main agricultural products are rice, corn, cassava, and sugarcane. Industrial investment has been limited and has not contributed significantly to the economic development of the province. By 2012, there were only 361 factories in the province and, combined, they hired merely 6,203 workers (3,741 male and 2,462 female). Most industrial laborers, therefore, have had to migrate to find jobs in neighboring provinces or in Bangkok.³ The small provincial industrial sector is divided into two types of enterprise: the agricultural products' industry and the lucrative construction material industry. Both industries provide enormous income for powerful provincial business politicians.⁴ The province's long-winded slogan, "The Frontier of the East, Beautiful Forests and Splendid Waterfalls, Plenty of Ancient Civilizations and the Commercial Venue between Thailand and Cambodia," incorporates its frontier nature as well as its well-known and distinctive features. The province has benefited a great deal from lively cross-border trade with Cambodia and has acted as a significant trading post between the two countries. As discussed in Chapter 1 and 3, the border and frontier economy is vital to facilitating the emergence (and sustenance) of provincial bosses and extra-legal activities.

¹ According to 2006 statistics, drawn from Sa Kaeo's Provincial Statistical Office, "Sa Kaeo Province," <http://sakaeo.nso.go.th/sakaeo/cwdweb/sakaeo.doc>

² Sa Kaeo Provincial Agricultural Office, "2009/2010 Agricultural Statistics," <http://www.sakaeo.doe.go.th/statistic%2052.pdf>

³ Data from Sa Kaeo Provincial Industrial Office, "Factory Statistic," <http://www.sakaeo.go.th/spoc/DATA/Industry/Factory.htm>

⁴ See a full list of factories in Sa Kaeo with names of the owners and their capital in Sa Kaeo Provincial Industrial Office, "List of Factories," <http://www.sakaeo.go.th/spoc/DATA/Industry/FactoryName.htm>

Like Buriram, Sa Kaeo is a relatively poor province by national standards. By 2010, the Gross Provincial Product (GPP) of Sa Kaeo was 26,506 million baht and GPP per capita was 48,206 baht, which make the province among the country's fifteen poorest.⁵ Its GPP per capita was only slightly higher than its neighboring province, Buriram. Considering all basic information, it is not difficult to see that the characteristics and structure of Buriram's and Sa Kaeo's provincial economies are strikingly similar. Therefore they provide an excellent pair for comparison regarding the occurrence of electoral violence. The key difference between these two provinces— which share a similar economic structure—was the degree of monopoly of political power. The Chidchobs only recently succeeded in monopolizing power since several rivals had stood in their way, and Buriram experienced peaceful elections after the clan achieved its political mission in the mid 2000s (see Chapter 11). The Thienthong family power, by comparison, has not been interrupted or challenged since the early 1980s. This prevailing political condition significantly contributed to the longer lasting peace witnessed in Sa Kaeo's electoral competitions.

The Thienthong family: from boss to patron

The most prominent and powerful figure in the province is Sanoh Thienthong (1934-), supreme patriarch of the Thienthong dynasty. It is no exaggeration that he and his family completely control the province. Sanoh, dubbed by media as the “jao pho Wang Nam Yen” (godfather of Wang Nam Yen),⁶ has been generally known as kingmaker of Thai politics since the 1990s. Though his role as a power broker has been declining under the current political crisis, he is still well regarded as one of the most experienced and well-connected politicians in Thailand. He first ran for MP for Prachinburi province in 1976 (before Sa Kaeo became a province) and won the seat under the Chart Thai party, receiving the highest number of votes in the province. In that election, he was the only Chart Thai party member who won the elections in Prachinburi. Once Sanoh became an MP he expanded his power and popularity in the provincial territory and was able to assist several of his family members enter Parliament. In the 1988 national election, he succeeded in having every member of his faction elected in six provincial constituencies. When the Chart Thai Party formed coalition government, Sanoh, as a

⁵ Sa Kaeo's Provincial Statistical Office, “Sa Kaeo Province,” <http://sakaeo.nso.go.th/sakaeo/cwdweb/sakaeo.doc>

⁶ Wang Nam Yen is one of the districts in which his family had important business investments. It is a frontier area particularly well known for its lawlessness.

leader of the largest political faction within the Party, was rewarded with the highly coveted position of Deputy Minister of Interior.⁷ Since his election to this very powerful position, the boss from Sa Kaeo has never been out of the political limelight and has played a critical role in national power plays at every turn.

Perhaps no one better exemplifies the post-1973 rise of provincial elites to the national political scene than Sanoh Thienthong. His business and political career is an exemplar of the success stories after the dramatic political changes brought about by the 1973 student uprising. It turns out that local notables from the margins of the Thai polity, notably represented by Sanoh, were those who gained the greatest benefits from the political upheaval in the capital city—an event in which they remotely involved (see Chapter 3 for the rise of provincial bosses). Sanoh was the son of an affluent family, whose father had relocated from Chachoengsao to Prachinburi after the Second World War and married the daughter of a wealthy Chinese family. In the early period, his family accumulated capital from selling market goods, running a cattle farm, growing rice, and bidding for logging contracts from the Railways Department. Later on Sanoh's father expanded the family business to include the highly profitable opium dens (for which he obtained government licenses legitimately). With considerable manpower in his vast business empire, Sanoh's father became a respectable figure in the local community and someone to whom people looked for help in times of trouble. The provincial governor thus appointed him sub-district head to oversee village local affairs. Sanoh's father was well-known as a charismatic and resolute local leader who applied strong-arm methods to keep social order. Whenever suspected criminals were caught in the community, Sanoh's father would not send them to the police; instead, they would be detained and interrogated by him. On many occasions, the investigation lasted almost a week and involved whippings until the person confessed. Sanoh's father considered his interrogation methods an effective deterrent against criminal activities and unruly behavior in his community. According to Sanoh, local residents were more afraid of his father than they were of the police.⁸

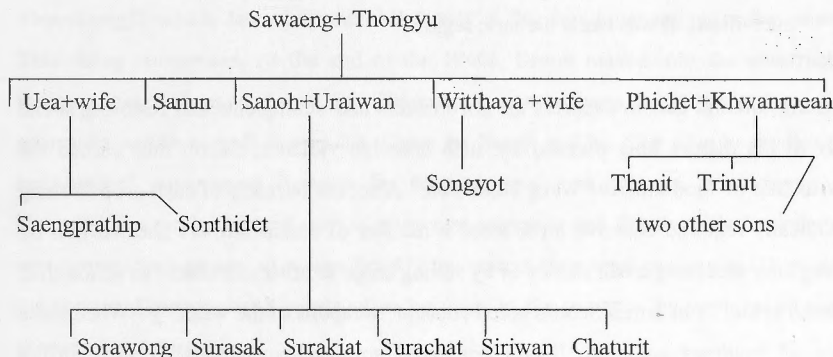
With the sudden death of his influential father in 1946, Sanoh had to step up and take over the family business empire. Sanoh inherited from his father a vast amount (6,000 rai) of farming land covering the province with 500 tenant farmer families who rented

⁷ Philat 2001: 85.

⁸ Wathana 1995: 11-12.

land from his family to cultivate rice. The clientelist relationship, in its classic form and definition, between Sanoh and the group of villagers who were his tenants were strongly built, and later these vital relations were mobilized for political purposes when Sanoh ran for the elective post.⁹ By the age of 19, Sanoh was already called by villagers *sia* (a word used to refer to a very wealthy Chinese businessman). Within a short period of time he replaced his father as a charismatic and respectable community leader. He was kind and generous to his friends, followers, and tenants, but to those who were insubordinate or trouble makers Sanoh provided them with no kindness or sympathy at all.

Chart 12.1: The Thienthong Family (a selected genealogy)



Prior to the 1980s, Sa Kaeo was known as Thailand's "wild wild west" due to its frontier nature and thick rainforest covering large areas of the province and its proximity to the long-term deadly civil war in Cambodia. Local infrastructure was poor, and there was no main road connecting all districts. Some areas were only accessible by foot and public officials were often unwilling to accept post in this underdeveloped province.¹⁰ Nevertheless, with vast tracts of unoccupied land and rich natural resources, the province attracted a large flock of migrants from other provinces, who came to find a better opportunity for their lives. Conflicts related to land occupations were endemic and many resulted in gruesome murders.

⁹ For a classic definition of clientelism, see Scott 1972 and Lande 1966.

¹⁰ Interview, village headman, Sa Kaeo, 9 April 2012.

By the time Sanoh started to build his business fortune, the situation had deteriorated to widespread killing and lawlessness. It was Sanoh who decided to intervene and (forcefully) establish law and order in the area in which state authority was very weak; he truly was a law enforcer in a lawless territory. Sanoh recalled the situation:

The cases of [people] committing murder to take over land were common. Sometimes criminals killed the husband and harassed his wife. All sorts of tactics [were used]. I was aware of these incidents because my corn farm workers told me. So I told them if those felons were defiant, I would not let my people die for nothing. I will give them justice... Other folks could not deal with these matters, I was able to. When the villagers had problems, they came to see me instead of going to see the police, especially in the Wang Nam Yen district because it was uncivilized. It was like a barbaric region.¹¹

By using forceful acts to suppress all lawbreakers and delinquents and restoring social order to the district long plagued by such anarchic violence, Sanoh thus earned the famous title of “godfather of Wang Nam Yen.” Also, his business of cash-crop farming periodically required coercive force since a number of tenant farmers cheated him by fleeing after receiving credit money or by selling crops to other merchant (an action that, in broad sense, fit in James Scott’s noted concept “weapons of the weak.”)¹² When these types of incidents occurred, Sanoh employed strong-arm methods to stop further cheating.¹³ The Wang Nam Yen boss made sure that the weapons of the weak were always confronted with the forceful weapons of the powerful. Sanoh put it plainly, he delivered protection and jobs to people and they, in turn, gave him love and respect. He was proud of the social stature the local community gave him and was satisfied with his ability to bring social order to his homeland. He once commented “if the country has no resolute figure or one who can act as a respectable chief, the country would never have peace.”¹⁴ At the beginning of his career, it was clear that Sanoh simultaneously assumed the roles of munificent patron and resolute boss. These dual roles did not conflict with each other since the situation in Sa Kaeo required him to have a capacity to fill both roles if he aspired to command authoritative power. Later, when he had secured a

¹¹ See a full interview of Sanoh Thienthong in Nopparat 2010: 156-67. The quotation is extracted from pages 159-60.

¹² Scott 1987.

¹³ Philat 2001: 264-66.

¹⁴ Sanoh Thienthong’s interview in Nopparat 2010: 160.

monopoly of power and completely subdued his opponents, he dropped the role of feared boss as it was no longer necessary. Acting as a patron bestowed a better image upon him and it was sufficient for the maintenance of his dynastic power.

Also, the boss of Wang Nam Yen was more ambitious than his predecessors. In the early 1960s, he expanded the family business to cover the highly profitable liquor franchise. In order to make the business succeed and prosper, he had to deal with the local moonshine business, which was at that time, controlled by local tough guys. As was Sanoh's way, he used both forceful and soft tactics to take over the liquor franchise. Sanoh visited moonshine distillers and asked them to stop their business. For those who were willing to stop distilling and had no other occupation, he gave them land for farming.¹⁵ At this point, he and his brothers founded a business company called "S. Thienthong," which later became the family's flagship company covering several Thienthong enterprises. At the end of the 1960s, Sanoh moved into the construction business, gas stations, and quarries. The construction business, in particular, generated enormous wealth as well as a political base for Sanoh and his clan. Due to the fact that he obtained government licenses for logging, gas, and quarries, his construction company was well equipped with construction materials and thereby able to undertake any construction project at a significantly lower cost than rival companies. Over time, his company monopolized construction business in the province by winning all major government contracts.

After gaining control of the provincial level, Sanoh stepped up his bids for large-scale contracts from the national government and succeeded. The national-level Department of Highways and the Department of Public Works and Town and Country Planning were two major clients of S. Thienthong Company. Most of the highways and government buildings in the northeast region were built by his company, including the small airport in Sa Kaeo district that his company subcontracted from the army. Through his business activities, in the midst of efforts by the communist insurgents to capture control of key areas, he gradually built close rapport with army generals in the northeast region. The army sought help from his company, asking for construction materials and equipment for use in security and military affairs. He commonly lent the company's tractors to the army for several months without charge. Sometimes Sanoh's trucks also delivered massive food supplies to military compounds as an expression of his generosity. Sanoh

¹⁵ Wattana 1995: 17-18.

never denied army requests. During the 1960s-1970s, senior army officials put great trust in him, as a highly respected provincial notable, and asked him for intelligence on the counterinsurgency operations.¹⁶

It was common for Sanoh and his family to dispense a range of goods and services to officials, the poor and the local community in general. For example, he and his family usually donated a large sum of money to 60-70 temples every year. Furthermore, large numbers of stones from his quarries were freely contributed to build temples in all twelve provincial districts. Besides this, his family supplied stones to local people who lacked money for materials to build their houses. These acts of generosity were returned with votes at election time, as one of his uncles commented,

[Sanoh] never failed in the elections because he used stones as his base.

Stones were ground and sold for money. But they were also donated to

temples and villagers. By doing that he received extra votes. His

[political base] is as solid as stone. No one can topple him.¹⁷

With enormous wealth and influence, many political parties tried to persuade Sanoh to run for MP in the early 1960s. But he turned down all offers until after 1973, when his family business was relatively secure and MP positions carried more influence. The Chart Thai party, a major political party representing the right-wing force in post-1973 politics, sent the army general who was close with Sanoh to ask Sanoh to lead the Chart Thai team in Prachinburi. Sanoh agreed to stand in the 1976 election and won with overwhelming votes. He effectively utilized and mobilized the expansive clientelist network of his family for electoral purposes. One of Sanoh's most effective campaigns was promising a debt moratorium to a large group of his tenant farmers just before the election.¹⁸

Since the 1976 poll, Sanoh stood in every election and never failed. With his impressive record of being a thirteen-time MP, Sanoh, at the age of 78, is one of the longest serving MPs in the current Parliament (2011-). From 1976 to 2012, several other members of the Thienthong clan came to the House with his guidance and assistance. Currently, the

¹⁶ Nopparat 2010: 158.

¹⁷ Philat 2001: 58.

¹⁸ Wattana 1995: 31; Philat 2001: 50.

Thienthong family is the strongest clan in the Lower House with five MPs (Sanoh, two of his sons, a nephew and a niece). In every poll, the Thienthong MPs have not only defeated their opponents by a gigantic margin, but also received the highest number of votes in the country. The apex of the family's popularity was reached in the 1996 election when Sanoh received the highest number of votes in the country, followed by his nephew coming second and his brother, third. In that poll, they defeated the opposing team from the Democrat Party by a tenfold margin of votes.¹⁹ At the local level, the family power was equally strong as one of his nephews was elected as the PAO Chairman and another became the Mayor of Wattana Nakhon District.²⁰ In the sub-district, municipal and provincial level elections, most of the candidates who were supported by or connected with the Thienthongs won easily, their rivals suffering humiliating losses. The few who ran independently and happened to win had to pledge allegiance to the Thienthongs to be able to undertake their duties without pressure. All local politicians associated with the Thienthong family were responsible for canvassing votes for the clan during the national elections.²¹ The situation in Sa Kaeo is the best manifestation of a local authoritarian enclave.

There were two additional factors contributing to the Thienthong dynasty's power monopoly. First and foremost, they had a number of family members who were capable and had a keen interest in political affairs. Many other provincial political families were struggling hard to sustain their power over a long period of time because they lacked competent political heirs and/or tensions emerged in the families. The cases in point were the Ketcharts in Nakhon Si Thammarat, the Supasiris in Phrae, the Nirots and Khamprakops in Nakhon Sawan, as well as the rival families of the Angkinans and Chidchobs in Phetchaburi and Buriram respectively. The Thienthongs, in contrast, had ample politically skillful manpower. Sanoh has three brothers and one sister. His wife, Uraiwan, a capable politician, assumed several cabinet posts from Thaksin Shinawatra to Somchai Wongsawat administration (2001-2008). Two of Sanoh's sons followed in his footsteps as parliamentarians, one in Sa Kaeo and another in Bangkok. Sanoh's younger brother, Witthaya, was elected as MP from 1983 to 2001. In April 2006, he was elected as Sa Kaeo senator along with his-sister-in-law. Witthaya has two sons involved in local

¹⁹ Thawatchai 1998: 114.

²⁰ *Post Today*, 1 November 2011.

²¹ Interview, Sanoh Thienthong's cousin, Sa Kaeo, 10 April 2012.

politics; one has assumed the position of PAO Chairman since 2004 and another was elected city mayor of Sa Kaeo from 2000 to 2008.

The family has allocated differing tasks to each family member: some clan members were positioned to take care of family businesses while others in the clan were actively involved in politics. Sanoh, as family patriarch, assigned his youngest brother, Pichet, to manage family welfare. For several decades, Pichet was in charge of the Theinthong's large business empire and looked after constituencies in Sa Kaeo while Sanoh was in Bangkok, constantly occupied in the national political affairs. Given Pichet's hard work and commitment to the family, Sanoh promised his children MP positions.²² Sanoh supported his brother's two political heirs, Thanit and Trinut, to become lawmakers and they both excelled at extending and sustaining power for the Thienthong dynasty. At the age of merely 42, Thanit currently sits in the Yingluck cabinet as a deputy minister of interior. He admitted that being born into the Thienthong clan bestowed upon him many privileges, opportunities and advantages over his peers. At an early age, he was accustomed to his family's election campaign and helped by canvassing votes. More importantly, even before becoming an MP, he was well acquainted with the senior police, military officers and high-ranking civil servants from several ministries at both local and national level as he had met them socially, when they came to the house parties hosted by Sanoh and his father. After being appointed a Deputy Minister, he denied accusations that his family used a so-called "system of mafia's patronage" to control bureaucrats. To him, "dining together is like siblings spending time chatting about daily events with each other. For me, it is a family effort to understand the problems of the local area and to know the demands placed on public officials rather than to control them."²³ The Thienthong clan members were clearly privileged and had greater political capital than other groups in Sa Kaeo; in addition, they were astute in utilizing the resources at their disposal.

Apart from political resources, the second factor facilitating the Thienthong's complete control of power was the administrative restructure in 1993 which saw the Prachinburi province divided in two: the old Prachinburi and the newly-created Sa Kaeo. As the Thienthong's political stronghold and its business investment were concentrated in the

²² *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 5 (16 July – 15 August 2001): 63-64.

²³ *Thai Post*, 1 November 2011. See also an interview of Thanit Thienthong when he was first-time MP in 1996 in *Thawatchai* 1998: 114.

districts that were located in Sa Kaeo, Sanoh and his clan thereby decided to put their political future in the new province by running for MPs in Sa Kaeo. With a smaller territory, it was easier for the clan to establish and retain its monopoly of power. In the 1995 election, the first election for Sa Kaeo, Sanoh and his team won the three seats effortlessly. They have never lost since then; in fact, every election competition in Sa Kaeo turned out to be a non-event. There has never been a potent candidate who seriously challenged the Thienthong dynasty. Usually, election results are entirely predictable.

In order to illustrate clearly how dominant the Thienthong clan has been, one might need to simply consider the list of Sa Kaeo MPs. Since 1996 every single MP for Sa Kaeo exclusively belonged to the Thienthong clan. Only one of 18 MPs, as shown here, came from outside the family.²⁴

Table 12.1: List of MPs for Sa Kaeo province, 1995-2011

Election Date	List of MPs for Sa Kaeo province
2 July 1995	Sanoh Thienthong, Withaya Thienthong, Burin Hiranburana
17 November 1996	Sanoh Thienthong, Withaya Thienthong, Thanit Thienthong
6 January 2001 ²⁵	Withaya Thienthong, Thanit Thienthong, Trinut Thienthong
6 February 2005	Thanit Thienthong, Trinut Thienthong, Sorawong Thienthong
23 December 2007	Thanit Thienthong, Trinut Thienthong, Sorawong Thienthong
3 July 2012	Thanit Thienthong, Trinut Thienthong, Sorawong Thienthong

Source: Nopparat 2010: 187-89; Office of the Election Commission of Thailand 2011

Sanoh's absolute monopoly of power has prohibited new political players from entering the competition. Wealthy business elites, who possessed plenty of financial resources and potential to stand in the election, have chosen to stay away from electoral competitions. They do not want their business activities to be impaired by their political involvement. Some businessmen in Sa Kaeo who had once tried running in the local elections explained that,

competing with the Big House [Thienthong family] is tough because they controlled all sub-district and village heads. Their political network is like

²⁴ Burin Hiranburana, who was elected in 1995, is an old business ally of the Thienthong family.

²⁵ Since 2001, Sanoh has been elected to the House as national party-list MP, so his name does not appear in the table.

a brick wall... They are the big men who have been taking care of this province for a long time... If you want to fight with them, you have to patiently build your own political vote base. It takes too long and is not worth doing... For business families, lives are more pleasant if you are not involved in politics.²⁶

Since the 2001 election, many political parties who competed against the Thienthongs in Sa Kaeo continued fielding their candidates but had no expectation of winning. They only expected to secure votes in the nationwide district of the party-list system.

The Thienthongs secured electoral victory without major recourse to either violence or vote buying. Many voters, journalists and local officials alike noted that distribution of money was hardly seen in the province elections. They said it has been unnecessary for the “Big House” to give cash directly to voters since various kinds of patronage have been channeled to constituencies over the years. When money was dispensed, it was at lower levels than that which was given out in other provinces. In the 2011 poll, for example, Sa Kaeo voters reportedly received only 50-100 baht per head for their vote-selling, while voters in neighboring provinces were paid 200 baht. Also, the village headmen and sub-district heads who worked for the clan earned a meager 1,000 and 2,000 baht each, respectively, for their vote-canvassing jobs. Elsewhere, it is common for them to be paid 10,000 to 30,000 baht.²⁷ The Thienthong opposition were not spending their money on a competition they knew they had no chance of winning.²⁸ Another reason for the absence of vote-buying in Sa Kaeo was that the clan had absolute control over the local state apparatus. Why would they need to intricate themselves in illegal and costly (and sometimes ineffective) conduct of vote-buying when they controlled the provincial governor, the police chief, the district chief officers, the provincial election commissioners, and all local officials who were responsible for vote-counting at polling stations.²⁹

²⁶ Interview, local businessman, Sa Kaeo, 8 April 2012.

²⁷ Interview, two senior ETC officers, Bangkok, 8 June 2011; interview, local journalist, Phetchaburi, 17 April 2012.

²⁸ Interview, local journalist, Sa Kaeo, 10 April 2012; interview, village headman, Sa Kaeo, 9 April 2012.

²⁹ A village head, a long-time vote canvasser for the Thienthong, told me about his experience as a local committee member overseeing the election process at polling station that he was given “green light” by the governor and the police to “do whatever I need to do.” Interview, village headman, Sa Kaeo, 10 April 2012.

It was conceivable that even without the creation of Sa Kao as a new province in 1993 Sanoh may still have been able to achieve political control in Prachinburi in the same way as he did in Sa Kao. The fact that Sanoh assisted the Chart Thai Party's candidates to win every seat in Prachinburi since 1998 elections attests to the enormous power he wielded within the province. Nonetheless, it was less daunting to control a smaller area comprised of only three MP constituencies. In Prachinburi, there were six seats available. To achieve power there he had to exercise his muscle and extend his clientelist network to terrain not in his main stronghold. He needed to strike several bargains with his non-clan allies to solve conflicts. A few times negotiations failed and led to tensions within his team. In 1992, there was one family, formerly allied with Sanoh, that wanted to assert its power and no longer be overshadowed by the Thienthongs. The family switched to join another party in opposition to the Chart Thai team of candidates led by Sanoh. Prachinburi witnessed a few violent incidents during the September 1992 election campaign.³⁰ Though Sanoh was able to defeat his disloyal ally and took all six seats in the province, circumstances compelled him to put more energy and muscle into winning. In Sa Kao, with fewer seats up for grabs, his clan was able to dominate the province with less money, manpower, and political maneuvering.³¹

Sanoh's political roles at both the national and local levels strongly reinforced each other. His clan domination in the province served as a springboard to his successful political career in the national government. In turn, by having secured several prominent cabinet posts throughout his long career, he gained access to extensive government resources (budget, concessions, licenses, goods, appointments, projects, etc) which enabled him to fund his clientelist network and strengthen his power grip on his hometown. His political connections and influence buttressed his family business empire. In the 1990s his major family business activities, particularly construction, were growing constantly and expanded to real estate, land development, transport, service industries, and cement production.³² Sanoh's sister-in-law, who was in charge of the S. Thienthong Company, admitted that even though she was operating her business legally,

³⁰ See the news reports about these incidents in *Thai Rath*, 31 July 1992: 17; *Thai Rath*, 10 August 1992: 1, 7; *Thai Rath*, 13 September 1992: 1, 22, 25.

³¹ The contrasting development in Prachinburi and Sa Kao after separation clearly demonstrates the peaceful effect of the monopoly of power. Electoral contests in Prachinburi in both national and local levels were more turbulent and bloody than Sa Kao. Without the Thienthong's presence, no single political family or faction had been powerful enough to achieve complete control in Prachinburi. The province's power structure remained fragmented up until the 2011 poll, in which some shooting incidents occurred and people were injured. See Prajak 2012.

³² Wattana 1995: 33-44; "Networks and Business of the Thienthong Family," *Nation Suddapda* 4 (14- 20 July 1995): 13.

Sanoh's political connections clearly worked in favor of the family business: "it has provided protection to our family business. No one dared harass us. It was a contributing factor as to why our business has never been in disarray."³³

The Thienthong family was among the few political dynasties who survived the new post-1997 political environment with their power intact. However, the influence of Sanoh Thienthong in national politics was not as strong as it used to be pre-1997.

The survival of a political dynasty in the new political landscape: the Thientongs after 1997

Sanoh's political career developed hand in hand with factional politics as they evolved during the pre-1997 period. This type of politics is well known for its very weak political parties comprised of several vying factions tied together largely by personal and patronage networks.³⁴ Factions can move from one party to another if the leaders believe that by doing so they will enhance their chances of winning elections and then joining coalition governments. In general, factions led by influential provincial bosses constituted the core elements of Thai political parties, and their political defections could have serious consequences on the survival of the government. The withdrawal of political support of any large political faction frequently led to the government's demise. Sanoh's infamous Wang Nam Yen faction was the largest and most influential faction in the 1990s.

Throughout his career he had gradually built a political faction that came to dominate several provinces in the central, eastern, and northeastern regions. A large number of MPs had been induced to work under his patronage. Interestingly, instead of creating a political party of his own, Sanoh preferred to play the role of dealmaker by shifting his powerful faction from one party to another. After 1992 his faction moved to the Chart Thai Party, which went on to win the most seats in the Parliament in the 1995 election. Without Sanoh's support, Banharn Silapa-acha, a Chart Thai Party's leader, would not have been able to assume the prime ministership. Sanoh's association with the Chart Thai Party was terminated in 1996 because he was extremely upset with Banharn, who denied him the highly influential position of Minister of Interior.³⁵ Sanoh and his faction

³³ Philat 2001: 58.

³⁴ See useful discussion on this issue in Hicken 2006; Ockey 2004.

³⁵ As discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, being the minister of interior is one of the most desirable positions for Thai politicians because it enables control of the regional and local governments, the land department, the

then decided to defect from Banharn and join the New Aspiration Party (NAP) of General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth in the 1996 poll. With the critical inclusion of Sanoh's powerful faction, NAP was able to obtain the most seats in the election and General Chavalit became the prime minister. Chavalit rewarded Sanoh with a position he long coveted: Minister of the Interior.

However, with the New Aspiration Party's fortunes waning after it was forced out of power in 1997, Sanoh and his faction switched parties again in the 2001 election. His Wang Nam Yen faction moved to join the newly-founded Thai Rak Thai party of Thaksin. By the time Sanoh's faction moved to TRT, he had around seventy MPs under his control, the largest faction ever to exist in the Thai political party system.³⁶ Thaksin was more than willing to use Sanoh's political service, as he had done with other influential provincial bosses, to fulfill his aspiration to power. The TRT won the election in a landslide, and Thaksin became the third prime minister that Sanoh had supported. After the government was formed, Thaksin appointed Sanoh to three highly prominent positions: prime minister's chief advisor, the TRT Party's chief advisor, and the chief whip of the coalition parties.³⁷

Over time, however, Thaksin sidelined Sanoh's faction since he did not want any faction to assume too much control over party members. As the supreme leader, Thaksin played the classic maneuvering game of divide and rule by pitting factions within his party against each other. The faction led by Thaksin's sister slowly became larger and more powerful than Sanoh's faction. As a result, Sanoh felt disgruntled at the way he had been treated by Thaksin and became one of Thaksin's most vocal critics within the Party. After the 2005 election, with a landslide victory and 375 seats won by the TRT, Thaksin could see that his party's electoral victory had been decided much more by his personal popularity and policy platform than by the delivery of votes by such provincial bosses as Sanoh. Therefore he formed his cabinet in a way that paid no attention to the old quota system through which cabinet seats were given to faction leaders who had won a large number of seats for the party. Sanoh's faction was completely disregarded and his role in the party was significantly diminished; only his wife was appointed to the insignificant post of Cultural Minister. Feeling humiliated, he started to attack Thaksin openly in

security units, and gives responsibility for administrating and overseeing the election (prior to the 1997 constitution, which replaced the Minister of Interior with the Office of Election Commission).

³⁶ His faction thus counted for one seventh of the parliament, as the 2001 Lower House has 500 MPs.

³⁷ *Prachakhom Thongthin*, 5 (16 July – 15 August 2001): 62-64.

public. When the anti-Thaksin movement was starting to develop in 2005, Sanoh decided to join the bandwagon and eventually went onto the People Alliance of Democracy (PAD) stage to criticize Thaksin as a dictatorial leader. According to Sanoh, "the prime minister's thoughts run faster than the constitution, so it might be necessary to change the law to keep up with him. He is a commander who moves faster than his army."³⁸

The declining power of Sanoh and his faction in determining the government's survival and in shaping electoral contests during the Thaksin era demonstrates the larger structural and institutional changes that transpired after 1997, as discussed in Chapter 5. It was the result of a combination of crucial factors: the 1997 economic crisis, the 1997 constitution, and the attempt of Thaksin's administration to reduce the role of provincial bosses and their factions. First of all, the economic crisis decreased the wealth of several bosses, especially the ones whose economic empires were based on real estate and construction. The Thienthong family was no exception. Moreover, cabinet positions were preferably allocated to party list MPs, technocrats, or close aides of Thaksin rather than given to the godfather-style politicians. Without cabinet posts, provincial politicians had fewer resources to support their followers and maintain their power bases. The 1997 constitution introduced a new rule requiring that politicians be a member of a political party for at least 90 days before voting day; this inhibited the old practice of party-hopping prior to the elections. Finally, the Thaksin's highly popular campaign against "dark influences" seriously hurt many mafia-style politicians or any politicians who associated with bosses (as discussed in Chapter 5).

By February 2006, Sanoh commanded the loyalty of only 37 MPs. He and his wife resigned from the TRT in February 2006 to establish a new party, the Pracharaj Party. It was the first time in his long political career that Sanoh assumed responsibility as the leader of political party. Things have not gone well, as his party has been through many unforeseen difficulties and intra-party conflicts since the beginning, and some of the founding members resigned shortly afterwards because they believed that the party had no chance of performing well in the election. Importantly, most of his Wang Nam Yen faction members remained with the TRT instead of following Sanoh and joining his new party. Only his family members and a few steadfast followers decided to continue

³⁸ *Bangkok Post*, 2 October 2007.

working with Sanoh. Most politicians, especially in the northeast, knew very well that Thaksin and his policy platforms were still highly popular among voters. If the faction members switched and joined Sanoh's new party, they would face difficulty campaigning against the Palang Prachachon Party (PPP). Their chances of winning were almost zero. Several technocrats and leading businessmen, initially persuaded by Sanoh to be party executive members, turned down the offer for similar reasons. In addition, some commented that the old-fashioned and parochial image portrayed by Sanoh and his clan was not a selling point in the new era of post-1997 electoral politics.³⁹ The heyday of local strongmen had gone with the premiership of Banharn, the last provincial boss who managed to reach the apex of national power.

The rise and fall of Sanoh's political influence in national politics is reflected in the dramatic change in numbers of his faction's members from 1996 to 2007. In 1996, when his faction moved to the NAP of Chavalit, there were about 60 MPs. It increased up to around 70 in 2001 when the faction joined the TRT, and shrunk to the size of 30 in 2006 when Sanoh had his falling out with Thaksin. By 2007, only nine MPs remained under the control of the Wang Nam Yen boss.

Although his role in shaping politics at the national level has been in decline, Sanoh's political control over his own province is still as strong and absolute as ever. The striking fact is that four out of nine of his party's MPs were from Sa Kaeo, and all of them were Thienthong family members. The media mocked his political party as "Sa Kaeo party", a remark that made him furious.⁴⁰ In one interview given a few weeks leading up to the polling day in December 2007, Sanoh said he never had any doubt that the candidates from the Thienthong family would win seats. He strongly believed that they would defeat their opponents as they always had. His only concern was that they might win by a margin of less than 100,000 votes, a victory he would consider a failure. He said, "even if I do not come to campaign here, just walk by, I strongly believe that we are still going to win in this election because my family has done all good things [for the province]."⁴¹

³⁹ See comments in *Manager Weekly*, 24 April 2006: A1-A4; *Khao Sod*, October 2007: 1, 10.

⁴⁰ *Matichon*, 2 August 2007: 11.

⁴¹ *Matichon*, 10 December 2007.

During the peak of Thaksin's and his party's popularity, the best strategy for survival for provincial politicians was to join the Thai Rak Thai party. Party became much stronger than faction. Political party banners had greater significance as demonstrated in the 2001 and 2005 elections. Many influential political families who lacked political endorsement from Thaksin's party simply lost. The only political family who still managed to win all available seats in their own province was the Thienthong family of Sa Kaeo. Even though he had already joined the TRT in those two elections, he ran the campaign by depending largely on his own political machine, and did not ask the party for help. The strength of his machine was proved clearly in the 2007 poll when Sanoh defected from Thaksin and his family still won all seats—defeating opposing candidates from the PPP party of Thaksin by large margins. This fact demonstrated that Sa Kaeo was first and foremost the Thienthong's unchallengeable political turf, over which they had no problem sustaining a long-lasting monopoly of power throughout the period of turbulent political crisis (2006-2011).

At present, it is clear that Sanoh's power is geographically limited to only the specific location of his home province. The failure of his son's campaign for Bangkok MP in the 2007 poll under the Pracharaj Party indicated the limits of his power. In an interview given to the media prior to voting, Surachart Thienthong, the second son of Sanoh, said that he did not want people to think that the Thienthong clan members "could win an MP seat only in Sa Kaeo province."⁴² His background was totally different from his father's. He spent ten years living abroad, earning both Bachelor's and Master's degrees from universities in the US. When he came back to Thailand, he worked in the private sector with one of the biggest companies in Thailand for seven years, before turning to politics. He lived in Bangkok since he came back from America. For this reason he wanted to be a Bangkok representative, despite his father's stern efforts to have him contest in Sa Kaeo. It turned out that he failed to get elected to the parliament, losing to the Democrat candidates by a large margin. Clearly, the Thienthong family's power produced no effect in the capital city. Four years later, in 2011, Surachart's political dream finally came true when his family joined forces with Thaksin. He ran in the same constituency, and the popularity of Thaksin and the Pheu Thai Party vote base enabled him to defeat his former opponent from the Democrat party and win a seat for Bangkok.⁴³

⁴² *Matichon*, 15 November 2007: 11.

⁴³ See Surachart's long interview about his election victory in *Matichon*, 7 September 2011.

The Thienthong family's political decision to join Thaksin's side in the July 2011 election revealed a striking development in electoral politics as well as a change in the pattern of political violence in Thailand. The street violence and state repression that paralyzed the country from 2006 to 2011 came as a rude awakening to the dominant clan from Sa Kaeo. After the occupation of government buildings and airports, and violent clashes between protesters and government forces, Sanoh and his family realized that the elimination of Thaksin had created many unintended and undesirable consequences for the whole political system, including their clan. Veteran politician Sanoh perceived the dissolution of political parties by the Constitutional Court and the army intervention in politics as a political nightmare. According to Sanoh, the political maneuvering of traditional elites was out of control and made politics completely chaotic and highly unstable. This was unacceptable for a political boss who came from an utterly peaceful and orderly province. In May 2011, soon after Abhisit called for a general election, Sanoh gave an interview, "I want to convey the message to every Thai person that if we let our country fall to this low level, we will regret it later. I live in a border province. I have seen the disunity before... the crisis that has been going on for the last five years is very worrying."⁴⁴ Unlike Newin Chidchob who was highly skilled at mobilizing the masses, the Wang Nam Yen boss was uncomfortable with mass movement politics and street confrontation.

In the 2011 poll, Sanoh changed his political stance and decided to collaborate with Thaksin to bring back political stability and order. His small Pracharaj Party was dissolved and integrated into the Pheu Thai Party. He traveled around the Northeast region campaigning very hard for the Pheu Thai Party and Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra. During a long, tiring campaign, the old big boss from Sa Kaeo gave many rounds of incendiary speeches lambasting the army, the judges, the Yellow Shirts, the Democrat Party, and Newin. In one emotional speech, he told voters

our country is falling down. I could not let it fall further. I prayed every night asking all sacred spirits to solve all troubles the country is facing and to rescue our country from bad people who are

⁴⁴ *Thai Rath*, 13 May 2011. The quote was extracted from a speech given by Sanoh on the day that he publicly announced his decision to join the Pheu Thai Party.

governing our country at the moment, not letting them rule the country any longer.⁴⁵

He then proceeded to explain that the reason he could not retire from politics, even though he was already 78, was because Thaksin had asked him to help the country one more time.⁴⁶ On another occasion, he said, “this election is the most important election. Politics has been so chaotic in the past couple of years, full of grave accusations. Some even dared to accuse their opponents of disloyalty to the king.” He then denounced the army for “stealing the people’s power, toppling the democratically elected government” and intervening in the formation of a coalition government that unfairly made Abhisit prime minister.⁴⁷

In the aftermath of the 2011 election, Sanoh and his clan had returned to the center of power once again. He was appointed a chief advisor of the Pheu Thai Party, his beloved nephew Thanit was awarded the powerful position of Deputy Minister of Interior, and three additional members from his family entered parliament as lawmakers. With a clear majority for the Pheu Thai Party, and the smooth transition of power from Abhisit to Yingluck in the wake of July 2011 election, the main streets in the capital Bangkok were, at least temporarily, clear of violent protests and clashes. The army provisionally withdrew to their barracks. Meanwhile, back in Sa Kaeo, everything remained as calm and peaceful as ever.

⁴⁵ Personal observation, Sanoh Thienthong’s speech on Pheu Thai’s stage, Kabinburi District, Prachinburi, 28 June 2011.

⁴⁶ Personal observation, Sanoh Thienthong’s speech on Pheu Thai’s stage, Kabinburi District, Prachinburi, 28 June 2011.

⁴⁷ Personal observation, Sanoh Thienthong’s speech on Pheu Thai’s stage, Soengsang District, Nakhon Ratchasima, 31 May 2011.

Part IV: Conclusion

Chapter 13

Wealth, power, and trajectories of electoral violence in Thailand

The primary motivation for this research was to understand the relationship between political violence and democratic structures in modern Thailand—a crucial topic that has broad implications for the political development of the country but hitherto has been given little scholarly attention. Focusing specifically on election-related violence, this study set forth to identify the primary factors and political processes that cause or instigate violence in elections and to explain the variation in Thai electoral violence across time and space. In regard to change over time, a major part of the answer can be found in the national political structure and institutional settings. With respect to geographical variation, the explanatory factors are located at the subnational level: provincial political economic conditions and the provincial elite power structure. This concluding chapter summarizes the argument and the evidence presented in the previous chapters and discusses the comparative insights offered by Thailand's experience. It concludes with a broad assessment of trajectories of electoral violence and the possible dynamics of political contestation in Thailand in the near future.

Elections worth killing for: instrumental violence under the patrimonial state

Electoral violence poses a major threat to democracy building and consolidation around the world. It not only does damage to a large number of people's lives, but also destroys the legitimacy of democracy at its roots. Electoral processes and institutions become a source of conflict, rather than being a source of peaceful solutions to conflict.¹ Intimidation as well as outright forms of violence deprive citizens of their right to participate in the electoral process without inhibition. Candidates who become victims, quite obviously, lose their right to contest.

Prior to 1973, as discussed in Chapter 2, election campaigns were peaceful for two major reasons: elective posts possessed no real power and electoral processes were heavily

¹ Sisk 2008; Snyder 2000.

controlled by authoritarian rulers. First, under a series of patrimonial administrative states, elections were held as a mere political ritual to give legitimacy to the incumbent power holders. Elections had no real significance because elective offices had limited power and privilege; the policy-making process, budget allocation, and rent-distribution were instead controlled by non-elected, bureaucratic elites. With no real power over either administrative or legislative activities, enfeebled MP posts offered no incentive for oligarchs, national or local, to engage in electoral politics. In essence, elections were not worth killing for. Second, elections were largely free of bloodshed because they were not competitive. Authoritarian bureaucratic elites used many exclusionary tactics to prohibit opposition forces from participating in elections: extra-judicial killings, imprisonment, detention, forced disappearance, and several draconian laws. In addition, military leaders rigged or stole elections by committing electoral fraud. These coercive and manipulative tactics of autocratic rulers made elections in the 1932-1973 period unfree and unfair, but calm and peaceful.

Thailand's long, sustained experience of electoral violence began with the 1973 student uprising and the process of democratization. The pattern and intensity of violence have changed over time—albeit not in a linear fashion—in connection with the reconfiguration of state structure, changes in electoral and party systems, and evolving modes of political struggle.

In the wake of the 1973 collapse of Thanom Kittikhachorn's authoritarian regime and the decay of the patrimonial administrative state, electoral violence emerged in Thailand in the 1975 and 1976 elections. The motivations behind and character of violence during these two elections were unique and different from the general pattern that emerged after the 1980s. The primary cause of violence was the political vulnerability felt by the royal-military elites that was caused by the changes in state structure and new institutional settings wrought by the events of 14 October 1973. After 1973, these old elites lost their capacity to control and manipulate electoral processes; exclusionary tactics and poll rigging were no longer an option. Therefore, royal-military elites were compelled to resort to coercive force to eliminate political threats and to dictate electoral results. The main pattern of electoral violence during 1975 and 1976 was state-sponsored violence targeting socialist parties. Violent incidents occurred mostly during the pre-election period and on election day. State agents and state-backed paramilitary groups were the chief perpetrators as they used assassination, bombing, and other forms of violence to

terrorize left-leaning parties and their supporters. Spectacular violence in elections was part of a larger campaign of the royal-military alliance against a range of progressive forces, who struggled for radical change during this period. Electoral and non-electoral violence were both driven by ideological struggle and thus interconnected. In this sense, electoral violence from 1975 to 1976 was an extension of state violence to eliminate the enemies of the state.

After 1976, when political and economic structures at both the national and local levels changed dramatically, there were significant changes in the pattern, logic, and methods of electoral violence as well. State-sponsored electoral violence began to disappear and was replaced by private killings perpetrated by provincial business politicians. Under the emerging oligarchic patrimonial state and parliamentary democracy of the late 1970s, elective posts became a major source of patronage, protection and high rents. They thus provided incentives for provincial business elites to enter electoral competition. Provincial bosses face higher stakes in elections than do other types of candidates since their wealth is mainly based on rent-seeking and trade in the illegal economy, which requires political connections. Their political involvement made election campaigns fierce and uncompromising. Political bosses, popularly called *jao pho* or godfathers, primarily used secretive, violent methods, mostly assassination, to eliminate rival candidates, vote canvassers for their rivals, and disloyal vote canvassers who betrayed them. They refrained from using indiscriminate or spectacular methods because they wanted to avoid police and media attention. The aim of the use of force by *jao pho* was not to terrorize the general population or to advance any political ideas or beliefs, but to weaken their threatening politico-business enemies and to consolidate their own power. The pattern of violence revealed that coercive forces served not only the immediate goal of winning elections, but also the long-term objective of maintaining authority. In the post-1976 period, electoral violence became privatized, decentralized, less spectacular, and non-ideological. In essence, electoral violence became instrumental and profane. There was, and has been, nothing symbolic or sacred at stake in election-related violence in post-1976 Thailand.²

Whereas electoral violence from 1975 to 1976 was part of a national, ideological battle between the leftists and the rightists, electoral violence in the post-1976 period has

² For the distinction among instrumental, symbolic and sacred violence, I draw on Girard 1977; Kalyvas 2006; and Krishna 2010.

become part of the struggle to control wealth and power in provincial areas. Therefore, it needs to be situated and understood within the broad context of local power struggles and economic structures. Fundamentally, electoral violence in the 1980s and 1990s was private violence in the realm of electoral democracy; it targeted individual election-related actors, not the electoral process or institutions. Electoral democracy under patrimonial oligarchic rule largely benefited the provincial political lords. They clearly had no desire to mobilize mass-scale violence to overhaul or to directly challenge the prevailing political order. Within their territory, local elites used their power to contain any types of chaotic violence that had the potential to disrupt or dismantle the extant electoral institutions that genuinely served the accumulation of their power.

Even though electoral violence in the post-1976 period is violence *of* provincial bosses and violence *for* provincial bosses, it is carried out by another group of people. Bosses use their material resources to hire violence specialists (*muepuen* or gunmen) to undertake violent acts. Since the 1980s, the market for political killings has expanded in line with rapid economic development and personalistic political struggles. In Thailand, the supply of violence is abundant, inexpensive, and highly mobile. Precisely due to the factors, the supply side—guns and gunmen—did not determine the frequency and location of violence within Thailand. Electoral violence occurred in accordance with the demand side. Demand mostly came from political bosses who invested heavily in high-risk, high return businesses and were desperate to enter political office to safeguard these businesses. As long as the structural and institutional incentives generated from elective posts remain unchanged, and there are no structural or institutional impediments to the market for gunmen, the demand for violence will exist and supply will follow. The degree of electoral violence was relatively constant from 1979 to 1996. There were ebbs and flows, but the total number of violent incidents remained relatively constant. The lack of sharp fluctuation in the degree of violence stemmed from the fact there were no major structural and institutional changes in the period between 1979 and 1996, in the patrimonial state structure, central-local relations, or the electoral and party system.

After 1997, a series of major political, social, and economic changes took place which led to the significant fluctuation and the emergence of new forms of violence. In the 2001 and 2005 elections, there was a sharp rise in the number of violent incidents and casualties. Violent protests erupted in several constituencies after elections, which delayed the announcement of results. The new pattern of collective violence in electoral

process highlighted the greater degree of participation of voters in political contestation. In 2007 and 2011, by contrast, elections turned relatively more peaceful. Four national-level factors explain the fluctuation in violence: 1) the 1997 constitution and its newly designed electoral system; 2) the implementation of decentralization and its empowerment of local elective posts; 3) the rise of a strong populist party and Thaksin Shinawatra; and 4) the 2006 military coup and the rise of ideological politics. The first three factors increased the levels of violence as, they, collectively, destabilized the existing local political order by making the provincial power structure more fragmented and upsetting the power balance among local elites. Competing bosses fought fiercely to maintain their realm of power and ward off encroaching enemies. In contrast, the coup and the development of ideological contestation each separately decreased the levels of violence in elections. The post-1997 shift in democratic structures facilitated the rise of stronger political parties. The subsequent rise of Thaksin, in 2001, brought in a populist government with monopolizing goals. This became a threat to the traditional, unelected elites and the 2006 military coup was carried out with the intention of stemming this threat by directly interfering in the electoral process. In the aftermath of the coup, the royal-military elites intervened heavily in politics by suppressing electoral politics and stifling political competition among political bosses. This made the 2007 election unfree but relatively peaceful. The intense ideological conflicts in Thai society since the 2006 coup have also brought about a decline in violence. Ideological conflict reshaped political struggle and redirected conflicts toward political ideas and platforms, which therefore bypassed the personal conflicts among local bosses. New political developments altered the direction and degree of violence. From 2006 to 2011, the terrain of political contestation moved from the electoral arenas to the streets, and state and street violence overshadowed electoral violence.

The violent path to monopoly of power: bosses, bullets, and ballots

Broadly speaking, the Thai political system is highly centralized. With a centralized bureaucratic structure and state apparatus, power is primarily located in Bangkok. Even though the decentralization process implemented after 1997 brought about certain important changes, it did not radically transform central-local relations (as noted in Chapter 5). The capital is still the political and economic center of gravity and the most vital source of wealth and power in the country. Under these circumstances, every politician dreams of capturing a slice of power by entering national parliament and/or

cabinet. Therefore Bangkok is a desired, final political destination for all bosses. The primary sites of political battle, however, are provincial towns. To obtain national power, ambitious political bosses first need to acquire power at home. Controlling the province is the key to unbridled financial, social and political power at the local level. The desired political endgame of every local oligarch is the monopoly of provincial power, as holding a political monopoly leads to securing dominant control over economic resources, natural assets, patronage distribution, and bureaucratic structure. When bosses monopolize their province and completely subdue their opponents, they acquire the ability to play the role of benevolent patron and can drop the "dirty" and coercive tactics that they formerly used to buttress their power. Acting as a patron bestows a better image upon them and is sufficient for the maintenance of their power. Violence becomes less necessary for bosses enjoying a monopoly of local power. Nevertheless, many provincial elites simultaneously assume the roles of munificent patron and fearful boss. These dual roles do not conflict with each other since competitive and volatile provincial politics require them to have the capacity to fill both roles if they aspire to command authoritative power.

Fighting among bosses to secure the monopoly of power has become a major source of violent conflicts in provincial areas. These conflicts are most heightened during election times because elections decide who has legitimate control of political office. Typically, Thai candidates deploy various tactics to win electoral competitions, including direct vote-buying, pork and patronage dispensing to constituents, reliance on personal fame and party branding, and coercive methods. Violence is not universally used by every candidate as a primary strategy to win elections. Even boss-type candidates try to refrain from resorting to intimidation or killing because these violent tactics at best bring complications and at worst may backfire. When boss-type candidates face non-boss opponents, the bosses do not need to deploy strong-arm tactics, as they can handily defeat their competitors with stronger vote-canvassing networks and a deeper war chest. Violence is necessary only under specific circumstances, specifically, when confronted with a rival boss in the battle for provincial dominance. Political bosses typically possess similar power and wealth and use the same (dirty) electioneering style. The only option for an embattled boss to ensure victory is to eliminate his or her opponents by force. When boss-style candidates are confronted with each other in an electoral campaign in which there is a power monopoly at stake, elections are most prone to violence because business and political conflict became inseparable. Business enemies turn into political

rivals, and elections become a war of domination and survival. The six case studies examined show that when the logic of war governs elections, it effectively changes the dynamics and mode of competition. Friends and enemies are clearly, and rigidly, defined, shutting down the possibility for compromise.³ The opposing candidate and key vote canvassers were the main casualties of “electoral war,” and a small number of activists, journalists, election commissioners, and local officials were caught between the two sides.

Electoral violence in Thailand is associated with and carried out by individual candidates, rather than parties. My research found no correlation between political parties and the frequency of electoral violence. Put another way, there is no clear difference between political parties with regards to the use of violent tactics. All parties have a record of their candidates or supporters engaging in the use of force during campaigning, including the Democrat Party, which had been portrayed by certain political observers and journalists as the “reformist, non-boss” party. Studies of three violent provinces, namely Phrae, Nakhon Sawan, and Nakhon Si Thammarat, provided ample evidence of the involvement of the Democrats in violent electoral conflicts. Intra-party conflict among the Democrats in Nakhon Si Thammarat was as fierce and bloody as inter-party conflicts in other provinces.

To reiterate my argument, violence is a tool mainly used by candidates, whose wealth and power are based primarily on rent-seeking and illegal activities, when they are confronted with strong rivals. This type of candidate can be found in every political party and every region in Thailand. This leads to the question of geography of violence: if boss-type candidates—the protagonists of violence—are located almost everywhere, why do we witness violent electoral competition in certain provinces but not in others?

My research found that many subnational factors widely mentioned by scholars as explanatory variables for political violence fail to explain electoral violence in provincial Thailand. Specifically, the variables of regional location, level of economic development and poverty, homicide rate, everyday culture of violence, size of province, and number of elective positions do not help explain patterns of electoral violence in Thailand.

³ Several studies on political violence explained powerfully the linkages between the logic and “discourse of war” and the facilitation and acceleration of violence in civil conflicts. See Straus 2008; Browning 1993.

Instead, my case studies identify two determining factors that account for the variation in the timing and location of violence: the political economy of elite competition and the provincial power structure. The economic base of the political elite is more significant than the general political economic character of the province in explaining the presence or absence of violence, as electoral violence in Thailand is primarily a quite selective business involving powerful elites rather than collective violence involving mass-mobilization. Most important is the provincial power structure. The provinces that harbor the combination of the two deadly factors—personalistic fighting between rival bosses and an absence of a monopoly of power—are the most prone to electoral violence.

The balance of power in Thai provincial politics takes three fundamental forms: *monopoly, polarization, and fragmentation*. Monopoly is rare as it is difficult to achieve and maintain. Only a few bosses or clans manage to secure complete control over their province. Sanoh Thienthong of Sa Kaeo and Banharn Silpa-archa of Suphanburi are two prime examples. The more common situation is polarization (two rival factions which compete with one another), and fragmentation (multiple groups which compete against one another). My research found that polarized and fragmented power landscapes are conducive to violent electoral conflict. Without a monopoly of power, the provincial elites are unable to fully secure needed protection and support from the local bureaucracy; they also have difficulty in manipulating electoral processes and outcomes. Furthermore, their business rackets are at risk of being encroached upon by enemies, and their followers may be enticed by better offers to switch loyalty. Political bosses have to struggle fiercely to protect their enclaves and personal networks of power. The frequent use of coercive force thus reflects the vulnerability, not the strength, of the local elites. A precarious and unstable situation forces them to have recourse to the use of force. People who stand in the way of their domination were targeted for intimidation and/or murder. The path to obtaining a monopoly of power is tainted with bloodshed. The paradox of this political phenomenon is that violence paves the way for the emergence of an “orderly” provincial political order.

As I argued in the introductory chapter, my studies of six provinces, while not representative of Thailand as a whole, can illuminate the configuration of political power and pattern of violence in other provinces throughout Thailand. I would like to briefly discuss other provinces not examined in this thesis. With regards to provinces afflicted

by violence during elections, a list of high-risk provinces includes: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Lampang (in the northern region); Nakhon Ratchasima and Khon Kaen (in the northeastern region); Kanchanaburi, Ayutthaya, Lopburi, Nakhon Pathom, Pichit, Samut Prakarn, Chonburi, Saraburi, Prachinburi, and Ang Thong (in the central region); and Yala, Narathiwat, and Songkhla (in the southern region). With respect to location, these high-risk provinces are scattered around the country. They also vary in terms of the level of economic development and per capita income. Only some are notorious for having a high murder rate (Songkhla, Chonburi, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Chiang Mai) and/or being a hub of hired guns (such as Kanchanaburi, Lopburi, and Songkhla).⁴ The size of population (and the number of MP seats at stake) of these provinces ranges from small to medium to very large. For example, tiny Ang Thong has two MP seats and Pichit and Yala have three, while the medium-sized Kanchanaburi, Ayutthaya, and Nakhon Pathom all have five seats for competition. Large provinces like Chiang Mai and Nakhon Ratchasima provide ten and fifteen available seats up for grabs, respectively.⁵ Being different in many important aspects, these violence-prone provinces, however, share in common the deadly elements: the active involvement of political bosses in electoral campaigns accompanied with a polarized or fragmented structure.

Like Phrae, the following provinces—Pichit, Kanchanaburi, Lampang, Saraburi, Prachinburi, and Angthong—typify the polarized power landscape of Thai provincial politics. All of them have long suffered from hostile and cut-throat rivalries between two local factions whose economic base is narrow and overlapping. At times, one boss or family managed to assert a temporary upper hand over its enemies but neither of them succeeded in keeping their opponents completely at bay, leaving provincial politics volatile and bloody. Kanchanaburi, a province located in the western central region of the country, for example, can be characterized as a political twin of Phrae. The province has been witness to two rival bosses fighting for control of natural resource extraction (namely minerals and timber) and construction businesses as well as the control of elective positions.⁶

⁴ The Research and Development Division of the Royal Thai Police Department 2004: Appendix *ko*.

⁵ Nakhon Ratchasima is the second most populous province of Thailand, surpassed only by Bangkok.

⁶ I referred to the situation in Kanchanaburi briefly in Chapter 5 when discussing the “war on influential people” of the Thaksin government. More details on Kanchanaburi can be found in Sanyalak 2003; “Heated battle between two famous *kamnan*: Electoral wars in Kanchanaburi,” *Khom Chat Luek*, 2 June 2011; *Matichon*, 8 July 2003: 13; *Matichon*, 5 March 2012.

Another set of violent provinces share a similar composition of elites and power structure with that observed in Nakhon Sawan and Nakhon Si Thammarat. That is, they have a highly-fragmented landscape of power. These high-risk provinces include Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Nakhon Ratchasima, Khon Kaen, Ayutthaya, Lopburi, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Prakarn, Chonburi, and Songkhla. In these provinces, multiple factions and clans compete in a hostile environment as they strive to subdue formidable opponents, who possess roughly matching material resources and an equal capacity to resort to violent force. The end result of this inter-elite fierce contention was the presence of rampant killings. For example, consider the central province of Lopburi, which has five prominent clans—Khlengpha, Worapanya, Tharaphum, Chiraphanwanit, Kiatwinaisakun—vying for provincial domination. These “five great families,” as they are locally dubbed, are all heavily invested in the same type of business, with all of them direct owners of or otherwise involved in construction. Each of them has fielded their family members and assistants in both national elections and local polling contests. After decades, no family was able to achieve a power monopoly. In the July 2001 election, while many other provinces started to see a decline in private killings among bosses, Lopburi remained a province in the grip of violence and bloodshed. The Lopburi PAO Chairman Suban Chiraphanwanit, who fielded his younger sister in the election, was shot dead in the middle of campaign. Moreover, since 1997, local election competitions in Lopburi have been among the bloodiest in the country as all five families have attempted to assert local control in order to bolster their standing in national election campaign.⁷

The analytical framework set forth in the introduction and the findings from the three peaceful provinces (Phetchaburi, Buriram, and Sa Kaeo) can help us explain the peaceful situation in provinces such as Mae Hong Son, Maha Sarakham, Nong Bua Lamphu, Sakhon Nakhon, Roi Et, Trat, Ranong, Samut Songkhram, Phuket, Phang Nga, Yasothorn, Tak, Amnat Charoen. From this list, six provinces, including Mae Hong Son, Phang Nga, Ranong, Trat, Phuket, and Samut Songkhram, were under the dominant control of a single faction or family. These are small-sized provinces which have one or

⁷ I discussed Suban's assassination briefly in Chapter 6. For further details on Lopburi politics, see “Open Talk with Natthaphon Kiatwinaisakun: ‘My father’s death was the motivation I stood in elections,’” *Matichon*, 22 January 2001: 102; Thawon Senniam, “Evolving character of Thai society: Case studies of Lopburi candidates,” *Matichon*, 14 February 2002: 7; “Suban Chiraphanwanit: The province will prosper and I am working for Lopburi,” *Phunam Thongthin*, 4:43 (September 2004): 49, 52-53; “Lopburi politics under fire: TAO head was attacked with explosive bombs three times,” *Naew Na*, 28 December 2012.

two seats for grab. Nevertheless, it is not the size per se that accounts for the lack of violence, as some small provinces, such as Ang Thong, suffered badly during hotly-contested elections. Rather, what is more important is the way the small territory indirectly eases the elite's attempt at power monopolization.

Apart from those small-sized provinces, many other peaceful provinces (namely, Maha Sarakham, Nong Bua Lamphu, Sakhon Nakhon, and Yasothorn) are either medium or relatively large, with an allocation of four to eight MP seats. Clearly, the population size does not even play an incidental role here. In fact, there is an absence of monopoly in these provinces. The orderly and peaceful nature of elections in these provinces stems from the fact that their election contests were not marred by aggressive confrontation between political bosses. Most of their MP candidates had occupational backgrounds as teachers, lawyers, university lecturers, professionals, community leaders, activists, NGOs, retired officials, or small-scale entrepreneurs. Sakhon Nakhon is a prime example of this argument. The province is relatively large with seven MPs, but it has not been witness to violent incidents or casualties since 1975. Their current seven MPs had diverse backgrounds before launching into politics but none were positioned as a political boss.⁸ In some provinces, such as Maha Sarakham, provincial business elites or political bosses were engaged in elections, competing with non-boss opponents, and won handily by relying simply on an ample war chest and a strong network of vote canvassers. Without a threat from rival bosses, they did not need to deploy violent tactics to win the race.⁹ In a nutshell, different kinds of threats demand different types of responses. My findings about electoral violence in Thailand is in line with the general argument put forth by Jeffrey Winters, whose study of oligarchy across the world in various historical period found that oligarchic rulers employ varying strategies in handling different types of political threats.¹⁰

The presence of a peaceful political order under the thumb of local patrimonial lords is surely not an optimal outcome. The monopolized province is orderly and untroubled by rampant politically-motivated killings, but not necessarily prosperous or greatly-

⁸ Among seven of them, there are two local civil servants, a merchant, a teacher, an independent scholar, a school director, and a red-shirt leader. The information is drawn from *Thai Post*, 24 October 2012; Thai Parliament's MP database (http://mp.parliament.go.th/map2554/map_esan.htm).

⁹ Wichian and Natthaphong 2010. See also the interview of Mahasarakham leading businessman-turned-MP, whose family owned one of the largest rice mills in the province, about electoral competition in Maha Sarakham in *Matichon*, 5 November 2012: 7.

¹⁰ Winters 2011: 32-39.

developed. Sa Kaeo and Suphanburi, two peaceful provinces under boss control, are relatively underdeveloped and their economic development and people's well-being lag behind several other provinces. The domination of bosses has created an unlevel-playing field, preventing young, energetic, or reformist forces from thriving in the political realm. The absolute control of bosses has also put in place a stumbling block to any substantive socio-economic advancement in the province which they deem detrimental to their patrimonial rule.¹¹ Undoubtedly, the situations in Sa Kaeo and Suphanburi are better than what occurred in Phrae, which has long been stricken by poverty and violent clan feuding. Local residents and political actors in Sa Kaeo and Suphanburi do not have to worry that they will become the target of harassment, intimidation or attack by warring factions. Political life is safe and predictable. For those in volatile Phrae, in contrast, they live in distress and do not dare to actively participate in political affairs as they fear becoming the victims of fierce, unstable politics. The challenge for both concerned scholars and policy-makers is to find ways to make Thai provinces free from boss rule, and, at the same time, manage to put in place peacefully competitive elections with a progressive reform agenda. Further research is clearly needed to facilitate an attempt at fostering a new pattern of "progress without murder" in provincial Thailand.¹²

Unsafe democracy in Thailand and beyond: challenges and strategies for mitigation

Since the late 1990s, many academics and practitioners have advocated the building of strong civil society and social capital as the foundation of functioning democracies. "Making democracy work" has become a buzz phrase and led the list of priorities for research and policy agendas.¹³ In the past decade, however, democracy has suffered a major setback in many parts of the world, as democratic processes and its institutions have been weakened, derailed or dismantled by violent conflicts in various guises. Democracy was seen to be at risk, and election-related violence presented itself as a distinctive form of imminent threat; some observers viewed it as the newest trend of

¹¹ Once they achieved monopolistic control over their areas, Thai provincial bosses effectively act as local patrimonial rulers, who, in keeping with Max Weber's description of "patrimonial local lords," moved toward "the hereditary appropriation of the political office by a family, legally or in fact, or at least by a monopolistic group of local *honorarios*" (Weber 1978, vol. 2: 1058).

¹² Comparative studies of political and economic development and democratic governance at the subnational level provide a guiding analytical framework and constructive debate in relation to this question. See, for example, Trounstein 2008; Pasotti 2009; Eric, Kogan and MacKenzie 2011.

¹³ The most important work is Putnam 1994; see also other related works including Barber 1998; Couto and Guthrie 1999; Norris 2012.

violence in developing countries.¹⁴ I agree with some of these scholars that before we can make democracy work, we first need to make democracy safe. The danger of electoral violence lies not merely in the way it poses an imminent threat to the life and liberty of the people. The further danger is in the way that it endangers the exercise of democracy and destroys the legitimacy of democratic process as a peaceful mechanism for the transfer of power.¹⁵ To discount the harmful effects of electoral violence by considering only the actual numbers of dead bodies badly misjudges all that is at stake.

In recent decades, electoral violence has manifested itself in dissimilar forms in different countries. National-level factors, namely state structures, electoral and party systems, patterns of central-local relations, and types of social cleavages, shaped the pattern and degree of violence. There is no unified characterization of the eruption of violence in relation to elections, and therefore no universal solution for the mitigation of violence. In order to formulate a tangible mechanism and policy platform for electoral peace, one needs to, first and foremost, acknowledge cross-national variation. Fundamentally, the rise or persistence of electoral violence is a symptom of a deeper problem (or problems) faced by a given country. In the broadest sense, as explained in Chapter 3, a state that exhibits strong patrimonial features, whether democratic or non-democratic, is more prone to witness uncompromising and violent electoral competitions than non-patrimonial states. Patrimonial structures create high perks for elective posts and thus high stakes for electoral winnings. Consequently, elections have become a space of intense conflict—a theater of war—in which power hungry, avaricious elites heavily invest and fight. Patrimonialism, personalistic politics, and electoral violence are inextricably interwoven in countries such as Thailand, the Philippines, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe and Kenya.

More thorough and systematic research is needed, however, to understand why those troubled countries have had different levels of intensity and distinct patterns of electoral violence. With an eye to comparison, I turn to briefly discuss the experience of electoral violence in the Philippines and Kenya in order to highlight certain significant points. In the Philippines, Thailand's fellow Southeast Asian middle-income country, electoral competition has long been marred by violence in many forms, with over one hundred

¹⁴ Abimanyi 2009; see also Colliers 2009 for the penetrating analysis of voting and violence in Africa.

¹⁵ Alston 2010.

killed in each recent election. The methods of violence used by perpetrators include shooting, explosion, arson, harassment, kidnapping, ambush, clashes, ballot snatching and destruction of property. According to nationwide statistics collected by the Philippine National Police (PNP), there were 249 election-related violent incidents with 468 casualties in the 2004 general elections, and 229 incidents resulting in 297 casualties in the 2007 polls. In the May 10, 2010 elections, which the PNP and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) declared as “the most peaceful electoral exercise” in the country’s recent history, officials still counted as many as 180 electoral violence incidents and the 155 casualties during the whole five-month election period.¹⁶ Much of the bloodshed has been perpetrated by partisan armed groups (comprised of retired and active duty policemen, soldiers and paramilitary personnel) controlled by powerful regional politicians. In some areas, communist rebels or Muslim secessionists have also been responsible for election-related murders and instances of intimidation.¹⁷ Even with repeated efforts of several administrations to rid the country of private armies, police records showed that, as of April 2010, 107 private armies still operated across the country.¹⁸ Politically powerful families, writes Luz R. Rimban, “employ violence routinely to stay in power, eliminate opponents, grab land, conduct illegal activity and generally instill fear in the population.”¹⁹ These powerful clans normally follow the same pattern of fielding their family members in several elective contests, both nationally and locally (including senator, legislator, provincial governor, mayor, town councilor) to strengthen their political clout and purportedly sustain their dynastic predominance. Studies show that the groups of people prone to be victims of violence in the polls in the Philippines are political candidates and their supporters, government officials, uniformed personnel and civilians.²⁰

The pattern of electoral violence which exists in the Philippines is similar to that in Thailand: private, targeted killings and intimidation during the election campaign by armed men in connection with rivalries among local bosses. The degree of violence in Philippine polling contests has been, however, greater than that in Thailand. The relatively high level of violence, I would argue, could be attributed to the fact that

¹⁶ Data cited in Chua and Rimban 2011: 3. Of the 155 casualties, 58 were in the November 2009 “Ampatuan” massacre in Maguindanao province—the worst case of election-related violence the country has seen (see Arguillas 2011: 17-42).

¹⁷ Gutierrez 2003.

¹⁸ Rimban 2011: 8.

¹⁹ Rimban 2011: 2.

²⁰ Patino and Velasco 2004, 2006.

Philippine patrimonial oligarchy and bossism have been much more long-lasting and deeply entrenched. They have thus created greater opportunities and motivation for winning elections with illegal and violent tactics in the Philippines. Electoral violence is primarily caused by personal struggle between competing bosses who want to capture political office for personal material gain.²¹ The Ateneo School of Government, in its studies on electoral violence in the Philippines's "polling hotspots" found that "political competition, more than the monopoly of a single powerful clan," characterizes violent dynamics in every hotspot.²² "The emergence of private armies in the country's political scene," a study notes, "is a phenomenon that traces its origin in the grim reality of the politicians' struggle for dominance in their respective jurisdictions... without the politicians who nurture them, no private armies could ever exist."²³ This finding is in line with the lesson that we learned from Thailand, in which the demand of violence largely came from local bosses who placed high stakes on elections, and thus their violent demands generated and determined the supply of "violence specialists." The only difference is, in the Philippines, violence specialists were drawn mostly from local goons working directly for their bosses, rather than hired gunmen operating independently in the market. The symptom of widespread politically-motivated killings reflects the enduring character of the patrimonial state, the highly factionalized political party system, and the predatory oligarchy present in the Philippine polity.

In the mid 1990s, some Philippine scholars compared Thailand and the Philippines as "political twins," arguing that, with several parallel developments, Thailand had been moving from its old-style structure of bureaucratic polity to Philippine-style bossism.²⁴ Nevertheless, after 1997, these "twins" appeared to diverge.²⁵ As mentioned in the historical chapters (Chapters 2-6), since 1997 Thailand underwent several major economic, social, and political changes which deeply transformed the political configuration and landscape of power. The rise of programmatic and ideological politics have significantly replaced particularistic politics and undermined the political standing

²¹ For analysis of the historical roots of the Philippine patrimonial oligarchic state, see Hutchcroft 1998. On bossism and clan power, see Sidel 1999; McCoy 1993; Lacaba 1995. The way in which Philippine leading political families dominate the congress is documented and discussed in Guitierrez, Torrente and Narca 1992; Guitierrez 1994; Coronel et al. 2004.

²² Ateneo School of Government, "Cause and Effect Study on Abra's and Nueva Ecija's Electoral Violence," cited in Rimban 2011: 9.

²³ The conclusion of the Independent Commission Against Private Armies (created by the Arroyo administration) led by Monina Zearosa, cited in Rimban 2011: 9.

²⁴ Sidel 1996: 56-63; cf. Hutchcroft 1999 for similar observation.

²⁵ Hutchcroft 1999 noted the impacts of the 1997 economic crisis and constitutional reform as two important factors that steered Thailand onto a different path from that of the Philippines.

of provincial bosses nationwide. Consequently, the number of violent incidents and casualties during elections recently dropped. In contrast, the Philippines has undergone a less dramatic transformation in the character of the state, the electoral system, and party-boss relations. The strength and power of provincial oligarchs has remained largely intact and inter-boss conflict over territorial control still prevails, explaining the persistently high level of electoral violence.

Patterns and dynamics of violence in Kenya's elections differ from those in both Thailand and the Philippines. Election-related violence has been involved in and connected to mass-mobilization and communal, ethnic conflict. In the wake of the December 2007 presidential elections and sparked by disputes over electoral results, the country witnessed the worst inter-ethnic violence in its recent history. Several prominent Kenyan politicians were accused of inciting the violence for the purpose of manipulating and rejecting the outcome of the election. More than 1,400 Kenyans were killed and over 600,000 people forcibly displaced as a result of post-election riots, bringing the country to the brink of civil war.²⁶ Election-related violence is, however, not a new phenomenon in Kenya, as violence has sporadically occurred since the restoration of multi-party politics in the early 1990s. Violent fighting in previous polls, however, caused a much lower number of casualties and mainly took place in the pre-election period with the objectives of dislocating and disenfranchising opponents' voters.²⁷

The power-sharing government comprised of conflicting parties was created through a peace agreement negotiated by UN secretary General Kofi Anan as an effort to avert further deadly confrontation. Several institutional changes and reforms have been implemented since then in hope of restoring the country's stability and making the new presidential election (in March 2013) orderly and peaceful. Despite some progressive reforms, the risk for polling violence still runs high. From January 2012 to February 2013, reports show that 495 Kenyans were killed, 346 injured, and 116,074 displaced in connection to inter-communal conflict involving struggle between rival politicians.²⁸

²⁶ "Q&A: Kenya poll violence," *BBC*, 1 November 2008 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/7165962.stm>); "Orphaned by Kenya poll violence," *BBC*, 29 December 2008 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7792818.stm>).

²⁷ Kasara 2010; Mwagiru 2001: 18-20.

²⁸ "Kenya: No Ordinary Election—Conflict Map," *IRINNEWS* 2013, (http://www.irinnews.org/Kenya2013/infographic_map.html).

Nevertheless, scholars argue, it is misguided to explain the eruption of electoral violence in Kenya as being directly caused by the deep animosity between different tribes or ethnic groups—the barbaric tribal warfare explanation. Regional or ethnic divisions provide some grounds for grievance, but violence actually broke out when ethnic tensions were exploited and politicized by politicians for political gains.²⁹ The planning and organization of violence primarily stemmed from the actions of rival political bosses—the funders and masterminds of violence—who are mostly the heirs of powerful political families or wealthy businessmen.³⁰ Most violent acts were carried out by criminal gangs, delinquent youth, and militias associated with politicians. Many of them were paid to maim and kill opponent groups, while some perpetrated violent acts on the order of their bosses. Similar to Thailand and the Philippines, there was an uneven distribution of violence across the country when riots broke out in 2007-2008 in Kenya; eight areas were identified as hotbeds of killings.³¹ The patrimonial character of the Kenyan state offered high incentives for oligarchic elites to employ all necessary means to win elective posts, including aggressive and antagonistic mobilization of support. Controlling political office leads to rapid accumulation of wealth, strong foundations of patronage, and the ability to consolidate control over vast amount of public resources. The resilient character of neopatrimonialism in several African democracies, including Kenya, has been thoroughly examined and explained by many scholars. Under neopatrimonial rule, the state is a resource in itself, in which incumbents are fiercely determined to hang on to power as long as possible and ambitious opposition candidates fervently aspire to have their turn to “eat.” The politics of plundering state resource, ethnic mobilization, and violent electoral competition are closely connected.³² Viewed in this light, the problem of electoral violence in Kenya, and some other African countries, is probably not entirely different than those in Thailand and the Philippines. The common features found in these countries are the overarching patrimonial state structures and personal boss rules combined with weak party organizations that intensify the stakes in elections. The motivation behind the use of violence in elections is

²⁹ Klopp 2001.

³⁰ For example, the two main candidates for the Presidential election in 2013 came from Kenya’s leading political dynasties: Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta is the founding president’s son and has featured in *Forbes* magazine as one of the richest Africans, and Raila Amollo Odinga, currently prime minister, is the son of the country’s first vice-president (“Kenya’s 2013 Elections,” *BBC*, 22 February 2013 (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21478869)).

³¹ Klopp 2001; “Q&A: Kenya poll violence,” *BBC*, 1 November 2008 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/7165962.stm>).

³² On Kenya’s oligarchy, see Wrong 2010; on neopatrimonial rule in Africa, see Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 61-82; Hyden 2005: 50-116. The linkages between patrimonial rule, political bosses, and electoral violence in Africa are discussed in Basedau, Erdmann and Mehler 2007; Omotola 2007, 2011.

eminently political. It is merely the linkage between ethnic cleavage and political mobilization that has made Kenya's pattern of electoral violence different from those found in Thailand and the Philippines.

To mitigate election-related violence that has appeared around the world, many scholars and institutional bodies have proposed a long list of recommendations, including the provision of effective conflict management systems, the strong capacity and independence of the electoral management bodies (EMBs), a strong and nonpartisan security sector, political dialogue and negotiation between competing parties, strict law enforcement on gun control and criminal gangs, a more active role for civil society and international organizations in election observation and monitoring, and media sector reform.³³ In the context of Thailand, one might suggest some concerted campaigns or policy tools aiming to subdue the power of political bosses. The necessary actions might include, for example, diversifying the local economy which will consequently destroy the narrow economic base (and thus the political influence) of local bosses and at the same time facilitate the emergence of a new type of business entrepreneur who will invest more in productive economic activities that depend less on government connections and protection. Another effort should focus on strengthening the political party system and programmatic politics. The lessons from Thailand show that when strong party and programmatic politics came into effect, it reduced the political standing of local strongmen and weakened personalistic, candidate-center campaigns; electoral competition was directed more toward articulating the differences over policy platform and party branding rather than cultivating personal clientelistic networks. Last but not least, ideological politics is good for democracy and help diminish the use of private electoral killings. As we have seen in Thailand since the 2006 coup, people have been motivated to fight, more than ever before, over real substantive issues. These currently include the role of the monarchy and the army in politics, the legitimacy of the military coup, and the social and political inequalities between the urban and the rural as well as between the elites (*ammat*) and common people (*phrai*). In effect, the ideological conflict has overridden or trumped the local personal feud between political clans. What we need is thus more, not less, programmatic and ideological struggle. The challenge is how to institutionalize ideological politics—relocating it as much as possible from street

³³ The list is drawn from UNDP 2009; Ajayeoba 2009; Sisk 2008; Høglund 2009; Fischer 2002; Alston 2010.

arena to parliamentary debates and ballot boxes in order to avoid the harmful effects of unruly confrontation.

Undoubtedly, these prescribed measures are important as short- or medium-term solutions that might be able to alleviate or minimize the risk of violence. Also, tighter security during the election period and strong political will from the government and civil society to tackle election-related violent incidents are significant in preventing the violence. Still it is insufficient to fully eradicate the problem. This is because these suggestions do not tackle the heart of the problem directly, and leave the nature of the state and the political economy of violent competition untouched. Without fixing the prevailing patrimonial structure and eliminating the government spoils that emanate from political offices, the motivation for winning political competition or power through violence will stay as high as ever. In sum, there are therefore limits to the efficacy of specific policy measures as long as the nature of the state remains the same.

Thailand in a state of fragile transition

After considering the experience of the Philippines and Kenya, I want to conclude by addressing Thailand's political future. Fundamentally, the country is in a state of fragile transition. The lack of consensus around basic "rules of the game" among key power elites as well as among civil societal groups renders the country highly volatile and unstable. The relatively stable pre-1997 political order, in which the provincial elites, the national capitalists and the royal-military leaders shared power under a weak parliamentary system, has long collapsed and is unlikely to be revived. The post-1997 order, facilitated by the economic crisis and constitution, which paved the way for the strong rule of a populist prime minister and his party machine, was derailed by the 2006 coup. Since then, the country has been torn apart by various forms of civil strife and political violence and yet is still far from being able to reach a new arrangement of political order that would be deemed legitimate and acceptable by all conflicting entities. Be that as it may, the vast array of political and social transformations that have transpired dramatically since 1997 have changed the configuration of power among three groups of Thai elites: the royal-military potentates, the national-level oligarchs, and the provincial bosses.

Unlike their opponents, business tycoons like Thaksin and his allies have been more adept in connecting themselves to the vast majority of people in rural areas, who have long been neglected by an unresponsive bureaucracy and/or subdued by local strongmen. With the aim of monopolizing the electoral market, Thaksin's populist party and its policy program mobilized state resources to address the social grievances and political aspirations of the "awakened" rural electorate, who have clearly become an emergent vital social force since the late 1990s. As several studies show, these emerging voters in the provincial areas are more "urbanized," "cosmopolitan," and "politically active."³⁴ They can no longer be viewed as a mass of passive, destitute, and uneducated country people, incapable of exercising their voting rights and meaningfully participating in the democratic process, as has long been portrayed by Thai conservative elites and pundits.³⁵ After the 2006 coup, a large number of them have joined the political movement mobilized by the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), or so-called the "red shirts," to oppose the coup-installed government and the illegitimate political influence of the army in politics. Thaksin's allied parties and the red shirt movement have, until now, mutually supported and relied on each other in their political struggle against the old establishment. Their decisive and consecutive successes in electoral battles in 2007 and 2011 came at the expense of traditional elite groups as well as local bosses. The current turmoil has not yet revealed to us the clear winner, but within the electoral rules of the game—the only legitimate game accepted by the international community—*jao* and *ammatt* (monarchy and aristocratic leaders) and *jao pho* are gradually losing. The traditional elites are losing because they are not willing to play within the democratic rules of the game. The local godfathers, on the other hand, have been tamed, weakened, co-opted, and made less relevant with the rise of programmatic and ideological struggle (as discussed in Chapter 5). Functioning as political dynasties, both groups of elites are also inevitably faced with the issue of succession and the sustenance of their familial power. At the highest level, His Majesty the King, the world's longest-serving monarch, is currently frail at the age of 84.³⁶ At the local level,

³⁴ Scholars have deployed many different terms to identify this emergent group, including "middle-income peasants/political peasants" (Walker 2012); "cosmopolitan villagers" (Keyes 2012); "urbanized villagers" (Naruemon and McCargo 2011). Setting aside terminological difference, these terms denote the new identity and new characteristics of Thai population living in the provincial areas.

³⁵ I offered an elaborate critique of this conservative perception in Prajak 2009: 140-155.

³⁶ King Bhumibol Adulyadej has shown sign of fatigue and has been hospitalized since 2009. The royal succession has become one of the most critical issues of concern for all Thais and is closely connected to the current crisis. After the 2006 coup, the status and the role of the monarchy under the constitutional, democratic framework has emerged as one of the most hotly-contested topics. However, it still cannot be publicly discussed or debated freely because of the draconian *lése-majesté* law (Thitinan 2012; Streckfuss 2011).

the power of many prominent political families is in decline. Some prominent bosses have been arrested and prosecuted, some have died from natural causes, and others have failed to adapt to the rapidly changing political and economic environment.³⁷ Several clans that lost their patriarchs are facing difficulties in keeping their power intact, as their younger generation are often proving themselves to be incompetent and inexperienced, and lacking in charisma and leadership skills.

Thai electoral politics and its pattern of violence are currently in a state of transition. Some new elements have emerged, but they have not yet completely replaced the old ones. The exercise of privatized coercive forces by the provincial bosses was a remnant of the political and economic order that was established in the 1980s. This unsettling phenomenon will not entirely disappear until the patrimonial structure of the state is radically transformed and personalistic fighting over the government spoils and re-distribution are substantially reduced. Until then, if the current situation continues (and presuming there will not be a substantial unexpected intervention of internal or external factors), we should see no increase in violence in the next national elections (in 2015). The country will then move even further in a different direction from its former twin, the Philippines. On the contrary, if royal-military-bureaucratic alliance still wants a return to the old model of “bureaucratic polity” in which the bureaucracy and military dominate politics under the auspices of the monarchy, Thailand will continue to face uncertainty and (violent) instability in years to come. This conservative elite group is tiny but powerful, as they still control critical parts of the state apparatus, such as the army, courts and some parts of the bureaucracy. Consequently, it still has the capacity to destabilize elected government; a coup or some other form of non-electoral (violent) intervention from these potentates cannot be ruled out. The worst-case scenario for Thailand would be if the royal-military alliance chooses to unseat the popularly-elected government, prevent the next general election from happening, and subvert parliamentary democracy through extra-legal means in order to bring back their supreme dominance. In that case, Thailand will definitely be plunged into chaos. It is highly

³⁷ Within the first two months of 2013, Thai society witnessed the fall of many provincial bosses. On 30 January 2013, after six years on the run, the 75-year-old boss of Chonburi, Somchai Khunpluem, aka *Kamnan* Poh, was arrested by a team of police on his way back from the hospital and was immediately put in jail, where he is currently serving 30-year sentence. On 21 January 2013, Suphanburi boss Banham Silpa-archa lost his younger brother, Chumpol, who died of heart failure at the age of 73, while holding the offices of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism and Sports. Chumpol also helped Banham carry on the party after Banham was banned from politics. Lastly, political boss of Pichit Sanan Kachonprasart, former deputy prime minister in the cabinet of Abhisit, died of emphysema on 15 February 2013 at the age of 77 (see, *Thairath*, 21 January 2013: 1; *Maticchon*, 30 January 2013: 1; *Maticchon*, 15 February 2013: 1).

likely that the country will re-experience the sort of mass-mobilization angry protests, large-scale violence, and civil strife which occurred in the streets of Bangkok during the turbulent years of 2009-2010. While the July 2011 election brought the country out of a protracted deadly crisis, the risk of democratic breakdown and violent confrontation continues. The electoral violence chronicled in this thesis would thus be replaced not by a stronger democracy but by a different type of political strife.

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Siam Rat
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Thai Rath
Thai weekly
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