From the Street to the Ballot Box: The July 2011 Elections and the Rise of Social Movements in Thailand

Erik Martinez Kuhonta, McGill University
Aim Sinpeng, University of British Columbia

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From the Street to the Ballot Box: The July 2011 Elections and the Rise of Social Movements in Thailand

AIM SINPENG and ERIK MARTINEZ KUHONTA

The July 2011 parliamentary elections in Thailand were significant because they ushered politics away from street demonstrations and into the polling booth. Just about a year after the worst political violence in Bangkok since the 1992 Black May incident, these elections confirmed the dominance of Thaksin Shinawatra-aligned parties and the prominence of social movements in engaging the electoral process. Notable were the Red Shirts who moved from street battle to electoral contestation in supporting Phua Thai and the Yellow Shirts who campaigned against politicians and political parties. No election in Thai history has had such a high degree of social mobilization as that of the 2011 polls.

Keywords: elections, democracy, social movements, polarization, Thailand.

Since the September 2006 military coup shattered fourteen uninterrupted years of electoral democracy, Thailand has lurched from one crisis to the next. Recurrent street demonstrations, primarily in Bangkok but also in the provinces, further eroded any lingering sense that Thailand’s polity was relatively stable or limited to intra-

AIM SINPENG is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

ERIK MARTINEZ KUHONTA is Associate Professor of Political Science at McGill University, Montreal, Canada.
elite squabbling. With the deaths of 94 people and the injury of over 2,000 in the April–May 2010 crisis, Thailand appeared to have entered *terra incognita* with social forces deeply polarized.¹

In this context, the July 2011 parliamentary elections were significant for at least two reasons. First, they presented a crucial opportunity to pull politics out of the street and back into some controlled and manageable institutional framework. Elections allowed ordinary Thais to express their political views at the ballot box and thus test elites’ willingness to abide by those preferences. Second, the electoral campaign witnessed mass political participation on both sides of the political divide that was relatively unprecedented. The trend since Thaksin Shinawatra’s first electoral triumph in January 2001 has been greater social mobilization, but the extent and sophistication to which social forces engaged qua organization in the political process in these elections was unique. Social mobilization in the 2011 July election was especially notable in terms of the level of popular participation in politics by ordinary people. Thai voters mobilized on their own to ensure that their favoured candidates won, but they also participated actively to ensure a free and fair election. Even those advocating for a democratic roll-back sought to do so via social mobilization and through electoral procedures. Perhaps Thailand has achieved — although in a truly convoluted manner — something the 1997 Constitution was meant to bring about: a more vibrant, more engaged, and more politically aware populace.

What these elections demonstrated is that, after major setbacks, Thailand is again seemingly moving back towards a consolidation trajectory through a return to electoral politics. The Thai electorate is actively involved in the political system — but is also deeply divided. More than any other election, the 2011 polls witnessed social groups openly rallying for political parties. This mobilization of social groups has brought into the political system a real battle over programmes and ideas that are being waged both within the party system and within society. For the first time, social groups are now actively working with parties to champion their economic and political agendas. How far these developments will proceed is difficult to tell. However, most seasoned observers of Thai politics would be hard-pressed to recall a time when the polity was so riven, ordinary citizens (particularly from outside Bangkok) forcefully engaged in politics and ideas about democracy and about social and economic programmes so central to the electoral process.
The aim of this article is two-fold. First, to analyse the results and trends from the July 2011 elections and place them in the broader context of recent electoral results. Second, to discuss the social groups that were at the heart of the electoral campaign. These include the Red Shirts, who have championed Thaksin Shinawatra’s party, Phua Thai, and the Yellow Shirts, who began as an anti-Thaksin movement and have now evolved into a force against electoral politics. These two groups have been at the forefront of street demonstrations and it is they who have continued to engage the electoral process in a forceful manner — albeit for very different reasons and in very different ways. The article is based largely on fieldwork observations of the 2011 polls.

Election Results

The 3 July 2011 election of Thailand’s Lower House brought back into government a Thaksin Shinawatra-aligned party, Phua Thai. Out of a total of 500 seats in Parliament, Phua Thai swept 265 of them — leaving the runner-up, the Democrat Party, trailing behind by 106 seats (see Table 1). This amounts to more than a 20 per cent lead in the number of seats — significant by any measure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Party-list Seats</th>
<th>Constituency Seats</th>
<th>Total Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phua Thai</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat Party</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhum Jai Thai</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chart Thai Pattana</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chart Pattana Phua Pandin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palang Chon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rak Prathet Thai</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matubhum</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rak Santi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahachon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Democracy Party</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the Election Commission Thailand (ECT) website.
Since 2001, when Thaksin’s party — Thai Rak Thai — first contested in national elections, his parties have consistently won elections by a wide margin. The 2011 elections punctuated further this trend (see Figure 1). Like the 2005 elections, the Thaksin party won an outright majority of seats. In 2001, Thai Rak Thai’s seat share accounted for 49.6 per cent of the total. By 2005, when Thaksin’s popularity was at its height, his party swept 377 out of 500 seats in Parliament, forming the largest ever majority in Thailand’s history. The 2006 coup may have reduced Thaksin’s electoral support from a whopping 75.4 per cent of seats in Parliament; nonetheless, his parties still won two subsequent elections by a large margin.

Figure 1
Percentage of Seat Share of Major Parties in National Elections from 2001–11

Notes: *Thai Rak Thai, Palang Prachachon, and Phua Thai are treated as same party.
** Chart Thai merged with Chart Pattana in the 2011 election and changed the name to Chart Thai Pattana.
Source: Office of the Election Commission Thailand (ECT) website.
In 2007, the Thaksin-aligned Palang Prachachon Party (PPP) managed to gain 233 out of 480 seats, which accounted for 48.5 per cent of the seats. In contrast, the Democrat Party trailed by nearly 15 per cent of the seat share at 164 seats. Just to provide some added insurance, Samak Sundaravej, leader of Palang Prachachon, formed a six-party coalition with five other mostly small parties to safeguard against any potential coup threat. This six-party coalition translated into 316 out of 480 seats, accounting for more than 63 per cent of seats in Parliament. Following the 2011 elections, Yingluck Shinawatra, the prime minister-elect of Phua Thai pursued the same strategy as Samak did. She brought in five other parties — Chart Thai Pattana, Chart Pattana Phua Pandin, Palang Chon, Mahachon and New Democracy Party — to form a governing coalition that brought together a grand total of 300 seats, or 60 per cent of seats. This margin ensures that the Phua Thai coalition will be able to govern for a full four-year term.

There are four key features of the 2011 election that are worth noting. First, programmes took on greater significance and meaning for all parties than ever before. The electoral campaign is telling of the state of Thailand’s party system: between clientelistic and programmatic types. For a country whose party system has traditionally been based on clientelism and patronage, this change may point to the beginning of some degree of institutionalization of programmatic parties. However, it was still unclear in this election whether Thai parties viewed programmatic campaigns as a marketing tool as opposed to a deeper, concerted attempt to develop any linkages or affinity with voters based on party programmes. Nonetheless, the fact that all parties turned to such a strategy marked a changed attitude towards party platforms in the sense that they are now considered significant aspects of party organization and of electoral campaigns.²

A survey of party campaign posters of all large and medium-sized parties in the 2011 election is indicative of how important party platforms have become. As Table 2 illustrates, these parties have moved beyond mere slogans or pictures of candidates to spelling out specific policies on campaign posters. Such a change in electoral strategy should not be dismissed as mere marketing but rather should be viewed as either an attempt to mimic the success of Thaksin-aligned parties or a response to maturing electoral constituencies. Thaksin-backed parties have effectively induced a change in the electoral behaviour of parties in their campaign style by placing greater emphasis on policy and platforms. This holds true even for well-established parties like the Democrat Party whose campaign in this election was heavy on policies and less on personalities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Campaign Posters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phua Thai</td>
<td>“300 Baht Minimum Wage per Day”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“15,000 Baht Monthly Wage for University Graduates”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“More Loans for SMEs”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Tax Refund for First Time Homebuyers” “Tax Refund for First Car”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“20 More Subway Lines, 20 Baht Fare” “Airport Link BKK-Pattaya”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Goodbye Flood/Drought. New Dam Projects”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Credit Cards for Farmers”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Rice Price Guarantee of 15,000 Baht”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat Party</td>
<td>“Get rid of Narcotics” “Additional 2,500 Anti-Drug Force”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“200,000 more CCTV in Bangkok”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“12 New Subway Lines” “High Speed Trains BKK-Provinces”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Free Bus for Students, Elderly, Disabled”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Transportation Pass”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Income Guarantee for Farmers, 25% More Benefits”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Minimum Wage Increase 25% in 2 Years”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Low Interest Educational Loans”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhum Jai Thai</td>
<td>“New Government Funds to Add 1 Million Jobs”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Funds for Good Citizens”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sale 2% the Entire Country”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“More Women in Politics”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Professional Sport Skill Development Complex”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Unite to Protect the Monarchy, Amnesty for the Innocent, Stop Polarization”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chart Pattana Phua Pandin</td>
<td>“Funds for Youth Development”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“One District, One Sport Center”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Tourism Development … Increase Income”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parties, however, have not completely abandoned the old-style politics of clientelism either. In stronghold areas, where patron-client relations still run deep, we see campaigns that are highly personalistic as well as programmatic. For instance, throughout much of the south of Thailand, the Democrats' heartland, one often finds three types of campaign posters: programmatic (with no photos of candidates nor of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva), candidate-centred with pictures of the candidate (usually alongside Abhisit) with a slogan or personal message such as “please vote for me”, and lastly Chuan Leekpai party-list campaign posters. In the past one would hardly find a list of programmes on campaign posters, especially for an area that is a stronghold of a particular party. However, recent research has shown that political parties have become even more sophisticated in employing various campaign and marketing tools to secure an electoral victory.

Moreover, this election also reflects a continued decline of the political influence of “dynastic politics”. According to the Thailand Information Center for Civil Rights and Investigative Journalism (TCIJ), 89 members from 42 political families were elected into Parliament, which according to some close observers of Thai politics represents a gradual decline of political families. A survey of 119 MPs conducted in 2011 by Thailand Political Database reveals that 45 per cent of MPs got involved in politics because they were asked by political parties, whereas half of that, at 21 per cent, became politicians because “it runs in the family”. The 2011 election saw an embarrassing defeat of several political families: Chaisaeng in Chacheongsao, Tan-Chareon in Chacheongsao, Tiangtham in Suphanburi, and Yoobamrungr in Bangkok.
Second, this election solidifies a pattern that had begun to emerge in 2005: elections are no longer competitive between the two largest parties. The landslide victory of Thaksin-aligned parties for the past several consecutive elections has created a significant electoral gap with the Democrat Party. The Democrats have not won an election since 1992 and its electoral performance in 2011 confirms the party’s continued failure on the electoral front. Indeed, the overall degree of contestation among political parties has declined in 2011 compared to the 2001 and 2007 elections. This is evident by looking at the number of candidates contesting an election in a particular district. In the 2011 election, only four parties sent candidates to compete in 50 per cent of the available seats (see Table 3). This is a drop compared to nine parties in 2007 and five in 2001. The fact that the degree of contestation of the national elections has declined over time is due to a decline in smaller parties and the emergence of parties with nation-wide appeal, and to some extent, regional electoral bases.

The third notable feature of these elections is the regional pattern. Regional variation in voting patterns has become more pronounced since 2005. The north and the northeast have become indisputably the heartland of the Red Shirts where Thaksin-aligned parties have easily swept seats. Such was not even the case back in 2001, when the Thaksin government came to power for the first time. The effective number of parties (nationally) was nearly 4 in 2001, but was 2.7 in the 2011 election, signifying a decline of small parties. Back in 2001, the voting pattern remained largely fragmented, with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentages of Constituencies</th>
<th>No. of Parties that Field Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the Electoral Commission of Thailand website.
the exception of the Democrat-dominated south, whereby several small and medium-sized parties were winning seats at the district level. In 2001 in the north, the Democrats were strong in provinces such as Maehongsorn, Tak, Prae, Nan, Utradt as well as Pichit, where fierce battles were waged among several different parties. Likewise, the northeast of Thailand in 2001 was represented by nine different parties with no political party able to sweep entire provinces. By 2005, however, Thai Rak Thai took 377 out of 500 seats — with the majority of the north and northeast under its wings. Even in the Central Plains, where elections have always been highly contested with no particular party able to claim dominance, TRT managed to gain more than three-quarters of the region’s districts.

A fourth feature of these elections is the heightened mobilization of social groups. Since 2006, social groups have been vigorously taking to the streets of Bangkok to challenge elected leaders. Although mass rallies were initially driven by anti-Thaksin protesters, by 2007, the Red Shirt movement emerged as a counter-reaction against these rallies and the elites behind them. In the 2011 elections, these two forces continued their battle but in very different forms. The Red Shirts moved from the politics of the street to the electoral campaign, while the Yellow Shirts were engaged in a drive against politicians and political parties, despite themselves fielding their own party. The focus of the rest of this article is on the social mobilization of the Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts and their role in the elections.

The Red Shirt Campaign

The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) or the Red Shirts was formed in response to the September 2006 coup and the dismantling of Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai Party. They have now become one of the most powerful social movements in recent Thai history. In the 2011 elections, the Red Shirts proved to be an indispensable asset for Phua Thai. From political rallies to the dissemination of voter knowledge, the Red Shirts served as a crucial wing of Phua Thai and were instrumental in the party’s resounding victory.

The Red Shirts are often described by the media as the rural and urban poor, the majority of whom hail from the north and northeast of Thailand. While generally correct, such purely class-based characterizations of the Red Shirts gloss over the many layers of
interests represented in the Red Shirt movement. Recent scholarship has acknowledged a more complex picture of the movement.9

The Red Shirt movement represents what Taylor describes as “broad interest groups brought together by a desire to see full representative democracy established in the country”.10 One study characterizes the Red Shirts as representing “an emerging class of urbanized villagers that straddle both urban and rural society”.11 Nithi Aeosriwongse has argued that the Red Shirts are largely “lower middle-class” — not the truly poor, but the poorer sections of the middle class.12 Fieldwork conducted by a Chiang Mai University research team supports this claim and further shows that the Red Shirts are better understood as a “political movement” rather than as a purely class-based movement.13

The UDD came together as a more organized movement in 2007 comprised largely of two groups: the pro-Thaksin supporters (whose electoral base is in the north and northeast) mobilized by former Thai Rak Thai politicians, and a collection of anti-coup civic groups/NGOs. The latter was the first to mobilize immediately following the September 2006 coup, protesting what they believed was the country’s unacceptable democratic reversal.14 Sombat Boon Ngamanong, leader of the Red Sunday Group,15 argues that this section of the Red Shirts includes NGOs, activists, intellectuals, students and some sections of the “idealistic” middle class.16 Members in these groups do not all support Thaksin and his policies but they share the view that the coup was unjust. The former group, or what Pasuk and Baker (2010) term “the Thaksinites”17 truly made the Red Shirts a mass movement, with membership of around 5.5 million.18 The grass roots supporters of Thaksin were initially mobilized by the Veera-Nathawut-Jatuporn trio19 through People’s Television (PTV) talk shows and subsequently through a series of Truth Today rallies between 2008 and 2009. The plight of Thaksin played center stage in the struggle of the Red Shirts. As Jatuporn Prompan, speaking at a rally, put it:

As a result of a number of good policy initiatives, Thaksin was entrusted to be our prime minister. But someone had to destroy him and make Thai people hate one another. They accused Thaksin of being anti-royal to create an atmosphere of hate. He was punished for working so hard for the country and the Thai people ... Is this fair or just?20

The UDD solidified their movement between 2008–10 through “socialization in a common struggle”.21 At the beginning of the
Abhisit administration, the Red Shirts heightened their activities. Despite being denied proper channels to advance their cause, such as state television and radio, their numbers expanded rapidly. Immediately following the dissolution of Thaksin-aligned Palang Prachachon Party following a controversial court ruling that the party had engaged in corrupt activities, the UDD leaders set up the “Red Land Network” (Daeng Tang Pandin) and declared “war” on the “ammat” — a group of political elites who supported the September 2006 coup. Without an official channel to mobilize supporters, mass rallies and mass communication via satellite and local radio stations became the strategies of choice for mobilization. The long-term goal was parliamentary dissolution and new elections.

By 2009, in what later would be termed “Bloody Songkran”, initially peaceful anti-government protests in Bangkok began to spread to several provinces nationwide. Thaksin’s video-link to a large crowd of Red Shirt protesters outside Government House on 27 March, in which he named Prem Tinasulanonda as the mastermind behind the 2006 coup, did much to mobilize thousands more to join the rallies in Bangkok. The UDD leaders set 8 April as the “D-Day” when more than 150,000 Red Shirts turned up in Bangkok outside Government House, Victory Monument, as well as key ministries and judicial courts, while thousands more protested in twenty-one provinces nationwide. Hundreds of Red Shirts under the leadership of Arisman Pongreungrong interrupted the ASEAN Summit in Pattaya to “make clear to foreign delegates that the Abhisit government lacked legitimacy and was undeserving of being accepted in the international stage”. As protesters clashed with state authorities leading to two deaths and hundreds injured, Abhisit declared a state of emergency with scores of Red Shirt leaders arrested.

The clash in Pattaya strengthened the Red Shirt movement: “They’ve lived through violence and repression by the state, which only made their grievances grow.” The UDD continued its anti-government activities both on the streets and through seminars nationwide. After the April 2009 crackdown the UDD turned to a less confrontational means to channel their grievances. They collected over five million signatures to petition for a royal pardon for Thaksin. Subsequently, the UDD collected 100,000 more signatures to petition for the return of the 1997 Constitution, while pressing ahead with nearly weekly anti-government rallies. The trigger for arguably the largest mass protest ever in contemporary
Thai history came as the Supreme Court seized US$1.4 billion of Thaksin’s assets on 26 February 2010. The UDD leaders quickly finalized what they termed “the last battle” — a mass anti-government demonstration where over a million Red Shirts were expected to turn up. “I sent an SMS to you all, fellow Red Shirts, to ask you to help me this one last time, to get back democracy for you and your future generation on March 14”, Thaksin pleaded to UDD protesters. What was planned as a seven-day rally turned into 67 days of drawn out protest (from 14 March to 19 May) that ended with a violent crackdown and the deaths of 94 people and more than 2,000 injured. This was among the worst episodes of mass violence that Thailand had experienced.

The incidents of April–May 2010 eventually pushed the Democrat government to dissolve Parliament for about a year after the protests. Following Abhisit’s announcement in early May, the Red Shirts switched gears from street mobilization to campaigning for Phua Thai. Nattawut Saikua, one of the UDD’s core leaders and also a party-list MP candidate of Phua Thai, found that the two groups were inseparable. “People asked me if it was right as a Red Shirt leader to be campaigning for Phua Thai and I said because of this Phua Thai would win a landslide in Isarn and the North.” On 19 May 2011 — the one-year anniversary of the crackdown — Red Shirts leaders commented that their group “occupied” Phua Thai with their leaders gaining twenty-two spots on the party list. This constituted 25 per cent of the Phua Thai party list.

Since its official formation in 2007, the UDD has shown that as a social movement it does not only engage in calling for political reforms in Thailand, but has engaged directly with Thaksin-aligned parties to mobilize for elections. The 2011 election has seen an unprecedented level of electoral mobilization by the Red Shirts in its support of Phua Thai through activities such as electoral education and electoral monitoring. For instance, UDD headquarters disseminated information through its subunits nationwide regarding information on electoral misconduct and provided several hotlines for members to phone in for advice. In another example, the UDD election office held training sessions for the thousands of volunteers that would be observing the election across the country. All of these efforts are not only meant to influence electoral outcomes; rather, the Red Shirts’ scale of mobilization is testament to the wide degree of public participation in the electoral process in general. These campaigns have underscored a new level of electoral activism that has changed the static relationship between a voter and candidate.
into one where voters help shape electoral outcomes. Voters view themselves as no longer just voting on election day, but as engaged with the entire electoral process — from campaigning with a political party, educating themselves and others about parties, policies, and election laws as well as the constitution and being actively engaged in the election monitoring process.

The overlapping leadership structure between the UDD and Thaksin-allied parties has meant that the Reds, the majority of whom are Thaksin supporters, could be counted on as a loyal electoral support base. Acting UDD Chair, Thida Thavornsate, told fellow Red Shirts to get into campaign mode once the House dissolution was officially announced. Phua Thai campaign rallies were characterized by a sea of enthusiastic and jubilant Red Shirt supporters, thrilled, in particular, by the sight of the charismatic prime ministerial candidate, Yingluck Shinawatra. Red Shirt leader and Phua Thai candidate, Jatuporn Prompan, noted that in “this election [2011] the Red Shirts are fighting for Phua Thai ... the Reds don’t take orders from the party ... they support the party on their own initiatives. Without the Red Shirts there won’t be Phua Thai today.” Kwanchai Praipanna, leader of one of the largest UDD sub-groups, “We Love Udon Club”, echoed similar concerns: “Prime Minister Thaksin and the Red Shirts have developed a strong bond over the years, but not Phua Thai. Some Phua Thai politicians even wanted to dissociate themselves from the Red Shirts. If there weren’t the Red Shirts, Phua Thai would have been destroyed long time ago.”

Besides having mobilized their supporters to aid Phua Thai’s election campaign, the Red Shirts also set up educational programmes for their supporters with regards to the electoral laws. Since new rules were passed just before the House dissolution, new electoral laws came into effect which included redistricting, ballot structure, and even changes in electoral formula. The Red Shirt headquarters disseminated information to various provincial and local chapters, including Red Shirt villages, to educate their own groups of the new changes.

The most telling example of this effort was when the Election Commission printed party-list ballots that could easily have confused voters intending to choose Phua Thai. The party-list ballot has both the logo and name of the party printed. Yet in contrast to all other parties on the ballot, in the slot where the logo of the party was supposed to be printed, the logo of Phua Thai was inexplicably written in extremely small print while the name of the party was
written next to the logo. Thus, the name of the party was written twice: once incorrectly in small font next to the logo, and once correctly in large font. Since the instructions stated that one had to mark the space after the name of the party, voters could easily have marked the wrong space. This would have made the ballot invalid. The Red Shirts immediately acted upon this problem by printing out numerous copies of the ballot error and showing their supporters where they should place an “x” on the ballot.

On election day, the UDD set up a special unit to monitor the polls called “Center for Election Monitoring UDD”, which consisted of some forty volunteers working around the clock to coordinate efforts to monitor both the campaign and the electoral process in order to prevent fraud. The end result was a minimum of one Red Shirt representative stationed at each of the 92,200 voting units across the country on election day. Such level of monitoring by units other than governments or political parties to monitor elections is unprecedented in Thailand.

Although impossible to quantify, few would doubt the powerful impact of the Red Shirt movement on the electoral success of Phua Thai. From organizing on the streets to organizing for electoral battle, the Red Shirt movement showed clearly that it could put its large numbers in the service of democratic engagement. Such engagement for the purposes of supporting a political party is a new phenomenon in Thailand. But also remarkable is a popular movement to simultaneously engage and challenge the electoral process. We now turn to this perverse movement, the Yellow Shirts.

The Yellow Shirt Campaign

At the heart of the social movement against Thaksin has been the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD), or the Yellow Shirts. This is a movement that has brought together a broad range of groups whose interests were adversely affected by the Thaksin regime. Jermsak Pinthong, one of the earliest and most vocal opponents of the Thaksin regime, sums up the anti-Thaksin sentiment: “The Thaksin regime may look like a democracy from the outside, but it is authoritarian because it monopolizes power, interferes with independent institutions, centralizes power in the executive, uses populism to create popular sentiment, makes laws to suit the leader and his cronies, violates human rights and threatens free media.” Despite the diversity of the groups that have allied themselves under
the rubric of the PAD, the nature of the PAD core was exemplified by their five top leaders: (1) Sonthi Limthongkul represents the fight against Thaksin’s crackdown on the media; (2) Chamlong Srimuang symbolizes the fight against Thaksin’s money politics; (3) Phipob Thongchai exemplifies opposition to Thaksin’s political reforms; (4) Somkiat Pongpaibul brings together resistance to Thaksin’s reform of the bureaucracy; and (5) Somsak Kosaisuk exemplifies forces united against Thaksin’s plan to privatize state enterprises.

The pre-coup PAD anti-Thaksin rallies were supported largely by networks of NGOs, state enterprises and trade unions. Somrak, for instance, was the leader of the Confederation of State Enterprise Labor, which represents over 200,000 workers. Similarly, Phipob was a highly respected NGO leader, who was the head of the Campaign for Popular Democracy that drew support from a large network of NGOs all over the country. Drawing on the networks of the core leaders themselves and other anti-Thaksin groups, such as senators, university academics, Luang Ta Mahabua Students, high-ranking civil servants, students and opposition parties, the PAD came together to form an alliance in February of 2006 — about seven months before the September coup. The PAD’s core leader and media tycoon Sonthi revealed: “If you asked me whether PAD called for a military overthrow [of Thaksin] … I think so … I always say [political] change can only be brought about in two ways, one via a coup and another through gradual change. The army should launch a coup as long as they do it for the country, and not for themselves.”

The PAD identifies itself as a “largely middle-class urbanized” movement. Chaiwat Sinsuwong, one of the PAD’s top leaders and former Palang Tham MP concurs: “The majority of PAD supporters are middle class, although we have some lower class folks too. Many had followed Sonthi’s TV show ‘Thailand Weekly’ and joined the protests on their own. But people who attended rallies often had money.” In contrast to the Red Shirts, the class aspect of the movement did not factor prominently for the PAD initially. PAD leaders needed to make broad appeals to the public and class was certainly not going to get them mass support. They thus chose a classic Thai strategy to undermine a political opponent: anti-royalism. Sonthi has persistently deployed the spectre of anti-monarchy as a framework to mobilize the masses in opposition to Thaksin, crafting the PAD slogan “Save the Motherland” (“koo chart”) that portrayed Thaksin as an anti-royalist and highly corrupt politician who was selling out his country.
After the 2008 electoral victory of the Palang Prachachon Party, the PAD embarked on what their leaders termed “the last war”. This was the longest, most violent anti-government rally to date. The 193-day protest began soon after Samak announced he would seek to amend the 2007 military-sponsored constitution. After a long drawn-out rally that included raiding the Government House and occupying the country’s main airports, the PAD declared its “victory” in December 2008 when the PPP was dissolved by the court, paving the way for the Democrat Party to cobble together a coalition and ascend to power. This represented the apex of PAD influence.

“Vote No” Campaign and the Decline of the PAD

In the 2011 elections, the PAD’s most notable action was the “Vote No” campaign, in which it called on voters to choose “none of the above” by ticking the slot “mai prasong long khanen”. Although voting “no” is not new for the Thai electorate, the PAD’s campaign should be viewed as a strategy to create a “protest vote movement” that its supporters believe could lead to a fundamental change in Thai politics. Sonthi gave an interview on 12 May 2011 discussing the purpose of the “Vote No” campaign:

Vote No means you don’t like any parties, you don’t like the current party system because parties run like corporations, MPs act like lackeys of whoever will be the next PM — they don’t represent you. If no less than 5 million people Vote No then it will have some legitimacy. Existing politicians are highly corrupt and money-driven. They can’t represent their electorates, therefore we need new politics. Ideally the new political system needs (1) partial appointment to get fair representation of people from the entire society and (2) partial direct election. Appointed representatives will be no worse than highly corrupt elected politicians.

The “Vote No” campaign was a resounding failure. Less than 3 per cent in the party list and 4 per cent in the constituency ballot chose to “vote no”. Indeed, these percentages were even less than the 2007 elections (see Table 4). It is thus clear that Thai voters still view elections as the most legitimate form of transfer of power. The continued efforts of the Yellow Shirts to put democracy on hold, through the “Vote No” campaign and their proposed five-year “transition” period of no elected government, lost significant support
The fact that the PAD lost much of its popularity and mass support, in comparison to previous campaigns, is partially the lack of mass appeal of the “Vote No” campaign. Chaiwat admitted in an interview that the PAD lost a lot of backing and their last round of 157 days of demonstrations attracted at the most 20,000 people — a far cry from its heyday in the pre-coup phase and the 193-day protest, which at one point drew an estimated 100,000–300,000 supporters. The abject failure of the “Vote No” campaign suggests that the PAD’s vision of political reform did not resonate well with their own supporters and the general public. More tellingly, it indicates that Thais see their parties and politicians as legitimate vehicles for articulating their political interests.

Besides the failure of the “Vote No” campaign, record voter turnout could also be taken as evidence of citizens’ rejection of the Yellow Shirts’ demonization of politicians and of the democratic process. Prima facie, the 1997 Constitution may be seen as a reason for the increased voter turnout in the past polls because it made voting mandatory. However, mandatory voting in Thailand is often not enforced. Although citizens who do not vote will not be eligible to run for office or sign a petition (to be submitted to MPs), such rules are a concern to few. The 2011 election recorded the highest voter turnout ever in Thailand’s history at 75 per cent, which translates to 35.2 million votes out of nearly 47 million eligible voters. Furthermore, voter turnout has consistently been on the rise since 2001 (see Figure 2).

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Proportional Representation</th>
<th>Constituency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1.77%</td>
<td>3.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2.85%</td>
<td>4.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2.72%</td>
<td>4.03%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The 2011 election was a mixed-member system whereby 375 MPs were elected from the majoritarian constituencies and an additional 125 MPs were elected from a closed-list proportional representation party list.

*Source:* ECT.
The Democrat Party and the Yellow Shirts

Frustrated by its inability to check the power of Thaksin, an informal alliance developed between the Yellow Shirts and the Democrat Party began in early 2006. Members of the Democrat Party felt they shared similar deep resentment and dissatisfaction towards the Thaksin government as the PAD. Wittaya Kaewparadai, Democrat MP and former minister commented:

Parliamentary mechanisms for checking the executive were crippled. The 1997 Constitution created such a strong executive and Thaksin knew it. We in the opposition couldn’t launch the no confidence motion on Thaksin. So many times parliamentary sessions had to be cancelled because not enough MPs showed up. Thaksin did not respect parliamentary procedures. The Upper House couldn’t do anything either. This is a total parliamentary tyranny... Since formal parliamentary channels were closed off, we had to pursue extra-parliamentary ones.\(^60\)

The frustration of the opposition party was not unfounded. Between 2001 and 2006, Thaksin hardly responded to questions raised in Parliament and parliamentary sessions were cancelled six times.
due to an insufficient number of government MPs being present. Thaksin’s large majority also meant that the opposition could never secure enough support within Parliament to check the government. Eventually, some Democrat MPs began to frequent PAD rallies, some even going on stage to show their support for the movement.61 “What the PAD leaders said on stage resonated very much with how we felt in Parliament. We saw eye to eye on a number of issues.”62 The biggest contribution the Democrat Party made to the PAD movement was to provide mass support. In fact, Democrat Party leaders admitted to mobilizing their supporters to PAD rallies, most notably during the infamous 193-day protest. While figures vary, according to party estimates, supporters of the Democrat Party most likely accounted for about half of the total PAD protesters.63 “Democrat Party members, mostly southerners, mobilized the masses to join PAD rallies.”64

After the rise of the Democrat-led coalition in December 2008, the alliance between the PAD and the Democrat Party began to fray, most notably over the Preah Vihear temple dispute on the Thai-Cambodian border. A number of prominent Democrat Party members, including outspoken PAD supporter and Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya, parted ways with the Yellow Shirts.65 Since then, the number of PAD supporters has quickly dwindled. While PAD leaders felt that the decline of their organization’s popularity beginning in 2010 was a result of several factors, including diminishing financial support, leadership break-up, poor coordination, and fatigue, the loss of Democrat Party support proved to be especially detrimental to PAD’s mass appeal.66 In retrospect, “Sonthi overestimated mass support for PAD and started a feud with the Democrats because they didn’t give him what he wanted.”67

The fallout between the PAD and the Democrat Party was also bad news for the latter’s electoral performance. The Red-Yellow cleavage that emerged and deepened as the political crisis dragged on meant that the Democrats’ hope of electoral gains could only come from the Yellow camp or the undecided. The Democrat Party obtained between 19–34 per cent of seats in the 2001, 2005 and 2007 elections, whereas the Thaksin-backed parties garnered 49–75 per cent of seats for the same period.68 Although the combination of the Yellow Shirts’ “Vote No” campaign and its own breakaway party, New Politics Party (NPP),69 was unlikely to contribute to the Democrats’ overall defeat to Phua Thai in the 2011 election, the breakup of the PAD-Democrat Party alliance did make a difference in some constituencies. Given that the electoral rule
was changed to one-person, one-vote at the constituency level, the “Vote No” campaign and NPP took away votes that could have gone to the Democrats and could have meant a victory for the Democrat Party in a tight race. A Democrat local MP explained how the “Vote No” campaign adversely affected her election campaign: “My constituency had the highest ‘Vote No’ ... around 10% ... I was kicked out from some houses ... that never happened to me. Before the coup I was attending PAD rallies everyday because the majority of people in my constituency went ... I went to garner votes ... now the ‘Vote No’ campaign really hurt the Democrat Party.”

Despite auspicious beginnings as a broad middle-class movement against Thaksin, the Yellow Shirts have now dwindled into a bizarre grouping of religious ascetics, fervent activists and middle-class elites deeply opposed to political parties and politicians. Its severed tie with the Democrat Party weakened its legitimacy as a force for middle-class political reform and its failed campaign against “all of the above” further damaged its future prospects. Yet, the Yellow Shirts remain an important social movement whose potential for street mobilization during and against the electoral process cannot be underestimated.

Conclusion

After the violence that engulfed Bangkok in April and May 2010, the July 2011 elections appear as a respite from the politics of the street. Crucially, they allowed the energies and frustrations of Thaksin’s supporters to be channelled towards electoral campaigning and in effect fulfilled the goals that the Red Shirt protests a year earlier were unable to achieve: a fair election. The elections also served as an opportunity for Thaksin’s opponents to challenge the legitimacy of the electoral process. The outcome may have reinforced the Yellow Shirts’ belief that little can be achieved through the ballot box. Nonetheless, the Yellow Shirts mobilized vigorously throughout the campaign and in the process ironically confirmed the significance of voting for Thai citizens.

While tensions continue to simmer in the Thai polity and efforts to undermine one’s opponents through extra-legal means persist, the peaceful conduct of the 2011 elections is worth noting in the context of an enduring political crisis. In the big picture, these elections will be remembered for reinforcing Thaksin’s continuing dominance over the polity, for affirming the rise of mass movements fully participatory and engaged in the electoral process, and perhaps most crucially, for...
demonstrating that ordinary Thai citizens — despite the continued presence of extra-democratic forces and events — see the value of taking time on a Sunday to mark a ballot behind a small desk in a political ritual that many other countries happily take for granted.

NOTES

1 For full details on the deaths and injuries of April–May 2010, see the independent report of the People’s Information Centre, Khwam jing peua kwam yutitham: het kan lae phon kra thop jak kan salay kan chum num mesa-prutsapha 2053 [Truth for Justice: Events and Consequences of the Dissolution of the Assembly, April–May 2010] (Bangkok, 2012).


3 Chuan Leekpai is widely respected in the south of Thailand, the Democrat heartland. Chuan is among only a few southerners who have served as a prime minister. His popularity has helped the Democrat Party to maintain its electoral dominance in the region over the years. For more detail on this, see Marc Askew, Performing Political Identity: the Democrat Party in Southern Thailand (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2008).

4 Anyarat argues in her study on vote canvassers during the Thaksin era that candidates have now employed a wide range of sophisticated tools, including mapping techniques, to secure votes. See Anyarat Chattharakul, “Networks of Vote-Canvassers in Thai Elections: Informal Powers and Money Politics”, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Leeds, 2007.


9 John Funston, ed., Divided over Thaksin: Thailand’s Coup and Problematic Transition (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009); Naruemon Thabchumpon and Duncan McCargo, “Urbanized Villagers in the 2010 Thai

10 Taylor, “Larger than Life”, op. cit., p. 3.
15 The Red Sunday Group was founded by Sombat Boon Ngam-anong in 2010 after the Ratchaprasong crackdown. The group collaborates closely with the main UDD but is not directly under UDD supervision. The Red Sunday Group’s main activities are civil disobedience, campaigns and workshops that focus on raising awareness about democracy, injustice and human rights.
16 Author interview with Sombat Boon Ngam-anong, Bangkok, 27 June 2011.
18 Estimates of the number of Red Shirt members vary sharply. Efforts to better record the membership of the Red Shirts through the issuance of identity cards were started but have not been systematic. Author interview with UDD staff, UDD Headquarters, Bangkok, 12 January 2012. One reliable estimate is 5.5 million based on the number of petitions filed for Thaksin’s amnesty in August 2009. We believe this is a conservative estimate. For more details on the amnesty petitions, see “Red Shirts Ecstatic — 5.3 Million Petitioned for Thaksin Amnest”, *Thairath Online*, 31 July 2009.
19 Veera Musikpong, Jatuporn Prompan, and Nattawut Saikua (the “Trio” or “Sam Kleu”) emerged as Red Shirt leaders through their talk/comedy show, “Kwam
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Jing Wan Ni” [Truth Today] in 2008. The show was meant to mobilize Thaksin supporters to oppose the military-installed government and to continue their fight for (Thaksin’s) justice.

Veera Musikpong, speech at Truth Today Rally, Ratchamangkala Stadium, Bangkok, 1 November 2009. The attendance was over 50,000.

Author interview with Jatuporn Prompan, Klong Prem Remand Prison, Bangkok, 8 July 2011.

While the Red Shirts were denied access to key media channels during this period, some media outlets were able to continue their service. Of note are newsletters, newspapers and Red Shirt multimedia. Of particular importance are low-frequency radio stations that managed to continue in much of the north and the northeast. Several Red Shirt local leaders are indeed radio hosts, who helped to disseminate information as well as mobilize supporters. Once the PPP was dissolved, the UDD did not have access to NBT (state TV); their satellites were shut down; and their politicians scrambled to re-organize without a party. These street protests, low-frequency radio stations and local UDD communities were crucial for the movement’s continuation.

Nattawut Saikua, speech at Mobile Truth Today rally, Nontaburi, 8 August 2009.

The term “ammat” was adopted by the UDD leaders, following Thaksin’s reference to an “extra-constitutional power” (poo mee barani nok rabob) that was responsible for his overthrow. The UDD leaders often use the term “ammat” loosely to refer to powerful individuals who supported the coup. In a Red Shirt publication, Prathet Thai nai ung mue ammat [Thailand in the Hands of Ammat], ammat instigated the coup by utilizing the military-bureaucratic mechanisms within the polity, supported by intellectuals, NGOs, and the media who “created conditions for a coup”. While ammat is often used broadly, some key individuals have been targeted by the UDD as its core: Prem Tinasulanonda, the army chiefs (Sonthi Boonyaratklin, Anupong Paochinda, Prayuth Chan O-cha), Abhisit (and the entire Democrat Party), Sonthi Limthongkul, the PAD, etc. For more discussion on this, see Pitch Pongsawat, The Politics of Prai (Bangkok: Openbooks, 2011). Kwanchai Praipanna, leader of the We Love Udon People Club explained in an interview that Thaksin is not an ammat because even if he were corrupt, he gave money back to the people. Author interview, Udon Thani, 11 July 2011.

The events are known as “Bloody Songkran” because the clashes occurred around the period of the Thai New Year, known as Songkran.


Jatuporn Prompan, Interview, Klong Prem Remand Prison, Bangkok, 8 July 2011.

Many seminars are run by groups of volunteers and community leaders based out of former Thai Rak Thai Party headquarters (now House 111 Foundation). Most seminars invite Red Shirt community leaders from throughout the country to train and exchange ideas on how to democratize their communities. Projects such as “Bringing Democracy to Your Community” or “Creating Political Participation” were part of the democracy educational and training programmes. During election times, gatherings at the House 111 were used to support Phua Thai candidates. During major Red Shirt rallies the Foundation was used as a refuge area and supplies coordination centre. Fieldwork observation and interviews of key House 111 Foundation staff, Bangkok, April–July 2011.


“UDD to Hold Decisive Rally Next Month”, *Bangkok Post*, 23 February 2010.

Thaksin Shinawatra, video link at Red Shirt rally in Udon Thani, 10 March 2010. Thaksin delivered an emotional speech pleading for the Red Shirts to fight for him one last time and that he owes everything to fellow Red Shirts. He promised to be their faithful “servant” once again.

“We thought we would succeed in pressuring Abhisit to dissolve Parliament and we would all go home after a week”, reckoned Kamol, head of the Red Shirt newspaper, *People Channel Online*. Interview, People Channel Headquarters, Bangkok, 9 July 2011.

Nattawut Saikua, speech at a Phua Thai/Red Shirt rally, Lumpini Park, Bangkok, 18 May 2011.

This statement is confirmed by various interviews with Red Shirt protesters conducted between 2009–11; also Red Shirts’ own publication, Singthong, *Bloody Songkran*.


Fieldwork observations, Phua Thai campaign trail in Bangkok, May–June 2011. Many Red Shirt supporters attended every function where Phua Thai candidates would attend. Based on our observations they often came in groups of more than eight people, were red, and often had handclappers, pins and t-shirts of Yingluck.

Author interview with Jatuporn Prompan, Klong Prem Remand Prison, Bangkok, 8 July 2011.

Author interview with Kwanchai Praipanna, Udon Thani, 11 July 2011.

UDD Election Watch, Interview with staff, Imperial Ladprao (UDD Headquarters), Bangkok, 26 June 2011.

In thirteen polling booths observed in six different districts in Bangkok, Phua Thai always had a representative monitoring the voting, while the Democrat Party was not always represented. Fieldwork observation, 3 July 2011.


Terdtham Songthai, The Officials Call Us Traitors ... but We are the People’s Warriors Saving the Motherland (Bangkok: GPP Publications, 2008), p. 99 (PAD publication).

For a list of the many NGOs linked to these leaders, see Olarn Sukasaem, Thaksin prachai: mob 2549 lae botrian tee Thaksin tong kid mai [The Defeat of Thaksin: 2006 Mob and the Lessons that Thaksin Needs to Rethink] (Bangkok: Than Media Network Publishing, 2006).

Senators who were openly against Thaksin before the coup were: Jermaks Pinthong, Kraisak Choonhawan, Kaewsan Atipoh, Karun Sai-ngam, Thongbai Thongpao, Nirand Pitakwatchara, Sophon Supapong, Pichet Pattanachote. Manager Staff, “Sonthi-Thaksin roh songkram mai wang klue pol kon chan klang phua srang kruekai mai” [Sonthi-Thaksin Waiting for another War, Hoping to Mobilize all Classes to Build Network], Manager, 13 July 2006.

The Luang Ta Mahabua Student groups are composed of “thousands of followers” of a revered senior monk. The PAD considers this group as part of its core.

“PAD Saving the Motherland Forces Insist Moving to Rama V Statue at 14:00”, Manager Online, 11 February 2006.


PAD leaders and their media have often called their movement urban and middle class-based. Pichet Pattanachoke-dee, former senator of Nakhorn Sri Thammarat and one of the main forces behind PAD mobilization in the south argues: “The PAD’s anti-Thaksin campaign in urban areas works well because the middle class are educated and are able to consume a variety of media.” Quoted in “Sonthi-Thaksin roh songkram mai wang klue pol kon chan klang phua srang kruekai mai” [Sonthi-Thaksin Waiting for another War, Hoping to Mobilize all Classes to Build Network], Manager, 13 July 2006; Terdtham Songthai writes: “Eventually both the upper class and middle class in Bangkok and major urban cities all over the country begin to see Thaksin’s true colors ... it’s no surprise that tens of thousands of them turned up to PAD rallies.” The Officials Call Us Traitors, op. cit., p. 91; Kraisak Choonhawan, former senator and one of the most vocal members of the anti-Thaksin 40 Senator Group, now Democrat MP, went further: “PAD is the uprising of
the middle class.” Author interview, Ratchakru Residence, Bangkok, 19 July 2011.

53 Author interview with Chaiwat Sinsuwong, PAD rally, Bangkok, 10 July 2011; Dr Thamrong Saengsuriyachan, former Palang Tham MP and one of Santi Asoke’s leaders made a similar statement. Author interview, Santi Asoke, Bangkok, 10 July 2011.

54 PAD, “PAD Saving the Motherland”, op. cit., pp. 41-42.


56 This literally means “no intention to vote”.


58 The “Vote No” campaign was replete with billboards and posters of politicians dressed up as animals: monitor lizards, tigers and water buffalos (the latter being the ultimate insult in Thailand).


60 Dr Witaya Kaewparadai, Democrat MP and former minister. Author interview, Democrat Party Headquarters, Bangkok, 12 July 2011.

61 Democrat MPs who went on the PAD stage (various times) include Kasit Piromya, Somkiat Pongpaibul, Kulaya Soponpanich, Anchalee Thepbutch and Kraisaik Choochawan. Dr Witaya Kaewparadai confirmed this during an interview: “The Democrat Party considered PAD as an alliance … indeed some of our members joined PAD and engaged in their activities. Some went on stage, others donated food and money.” Author interview, Democrat Party, 12 July 2011. This statement is corroborated by the PAD side. Author interview with Somsak Kosaisuk, New Politics Party Headquarters, Bangkok, 11 July 2011; also author interview with Dr Thamrong Sanegsuriyachan, Santi Asoke, Bangkok, 10 July 2011; Prapan Koonmee, interview with Khao Sod, reprinted in PAD, Panthamit koo chart [PAD Saving the Motherland], p. 324; Chaipan Prapaswat (academic, frequent speaker on PAD stage and ASTV). Author interview, PAD rally, Bangkok, 24 June 2011.

62 Various Democrat MPs. Author interviews, Democrat Party Headquarters, Bangkok, 12 July 2011.

63 Author interview with Dr Witaya Kaewparadai, Democrat Party Headquarters, Bangkok, 12 July 2011.

64 Author interview with Thawil Paison, Democrat MP and a long-time party member, Democrat Headquarters, Bangkok, 12 July 2011.

65 Democrat members who left PAD include, for instance, Kasit Piromya and Anchalee Paiweerak. Prapan Koonmee, who was an advisor to the deputy minister of science and technology, left the Democrat Party to join the PAD.

Author interview with Prateep Ung Songtham, Klong Toey, Bangkok, 2 July 2011. Prateep is a well-known activist in the slum areas of inner Bangkok. She noted that many Democrat MPs whose constituencies contain some “slum areas” went on stage with the PAD.

Election Commission Thailand.

The Yellow Shirts rather incoherently ran both a party and a “Vote No” campaign.

Of note are Bangkok districts 5, 11 and 16.

Author interview with Democrat MP in Bangkok central district, District Office, Bangkok, 14 July 2011.