Thaksin Triumphant: The Implications of One-Party Dominance

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Thaksin Triumphant: The Implications of One-party Dominance in Thailand

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Abstract: The 2005 elections were a watershed in Thailand’s democracy. For the first time, one party, the Thai Rak Thai (TRT), achieved a landslide victory. This victory ensures that TRT can reign hegemonic over Parliament and govern without the need of coalition partners. The consequences for Thai democracy are significant. Above all, this victory legitimizes Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s disdain of the need for democratic consultation. To assess the likely trajectory of the Thai polity under Thaksin, we examine the impact of this election in three areas: democracy, human rights, and the deep south. We conclude that the Thai polity may find its democratic fabric increasingly strained if Thaksin continues to govern as he did in his first term.

Key words: democracy, elections, Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra

The February 6, 2005 parliamentary elections in Thailand mark a critical turning point in modern Thai political history. Surpassing even the more sanguine expectations, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s Thai Rak Thai (TRT) won a landslide victory, taking 377 out of 500 seats in Parliament. For the first time, one-party dominance will form the basis for governance in Thailand. Plagued by unstable coalitions throughout its democratic and semidemocratic regimes (1973–76, 1978–91, 1992–present), Thailand appears to be entering a new political stage where the coherence and tight rulership characteristic of a hegemonic party system will set the tone for political dynamics in the country.
A hegemonic party system has important consequences for the conduct of social and economic policy, the state of democracy and human rights, and for national unity, especially in regard to the deep south. If one takes the model of Singapore and Malaysia, where a hegemonic party system prevails, one may suggest that policy implementation in Thailand is likely to be smooth, but that the leeway that one-party dominance provides may weaken the democratic fabric of the nation. This would have particularly dangerous consequences for solving the instability in the restive Malay-Muslim provinces. It may be too early to predict exactly how Thaksin will use his political leverage, but given the record of the first administration, we are likely to see an expansion of populist policies along with greater domestic investment, especially in infrastructure, while at the same time a concomitant constricting of democratic rights. In the deep south, Thaksin appears to be leaning toward more hard-line policies, although the decision to call a rare joint session of Parliament at the end of March 2005 to discuss the direction of policy also indicates some concessions.

While a hegemonic party system is clearly the big message that emerges from the elections, a second, perhaps equally important theme that should be highlighted is an increasing degree of party institutionalization. Only three parties were able to take advantage of the party-list system, where one has to cross a 5 percent threshold in order to be allocated a seat. Even more significant, only one party—the Democrat Party—was able to withstand the force of the TRT, albeit on a very geographically limited basis. Although the TRT swept through the country, it was firmly rejected in southern Thailand. Of fifty-four seats up for grabs, the TRT won only one of them—a seat in Phang Nga, a province devastated by the 2004 tsunami. The Democrat Party came out victorious in fifty-two constituencies in the south, including ten out of eleven in the three Malay-Muslim provinces of the deep south.

The implementation of the reformist constitution in 1997 as well as the coalescing of economic and political power in the hands of one man in 2001 set the conditions for weeding out smaller parties. After the 2001 elections, the TRT and the Democrat Party stood out as the two major parties, with three middling parties in the wings: Chart Thai, Chart Pattana, and New Aspiration. The latter two parties were subsequently absorbed within the TRT. The 2005 elections then consolidated the battle lines of 2001, framing the contest essentially between the TRT and the Democrat Party.

However, the electoral campaign was ultimately one-sided. To challenge Thaksin’s successful social and economic policies, the Democrats came up with a “201 campaign”—pleading for 201 seats (out of 500) as a means of ensuring a check and balance system in Parliament. Two hundred seats are necessary to ensure the prime minister. A campaign built around winning a minimal number of seats, however, was tantamount to conceding defeat in the elections. By rejecting the Democrats’ plea for a parliamentary balance, voters made it astoundingly clear
that their key concern is the improvement of their quality of life. In the past four years, Thaksin’s implementation of a battery of populist policies, such as the 30-baht health care program, the debt moratorium for farmers, the one-million-baht village fund, and the one-tambon, one-product (OTOP) scheme, has decisively made its mark on the grass roots.

An editorial of the anti-Thaksin Nation observed astutely: "The TRT . . . has successfully devised and implemented populist policies that people have come to expect not only as entitlements, but also as benchmarks against which all political parties are judged." Government critics may charge that Thaksin has simply bought off the populace through his spending projects, but such criticisms miss one important reality—these programs have enabled the party to forge a concrete identity that has clearly resonated with an overwhelming majority. Even Ammar Siamwalla, an eminent economist and frequent critic of the government’s policies, noted that TRT’s support derives from its ability to deliver on its promises and not on its doling out of money to lure voters. No one can doubt the impact that Thaksin’s charisma and the TRT’s marketing skills had on the election’s outcome, but it must be stressed that in the end, Thaksin’s charisma and the marketing impetus are centered around concrete policies—and these policies have largely delivered.

Although the Democrat Party did not succeed in articulating a clear and compelling vision throughout the country, the election results indicate that the party has become increasingly institutionalized in the south. The Democrat Party’s cultivation of the southern region appears to have paid off handsomely in this election and saved the party from potential oblivion. At the same time, its effort to stand as a champion of democratic dissent and its espousal of a policy shift, known as the Pattani Declaration, in the deep south resulted in its virtual sweep of the three troubled Malay-Muslim provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala. Although the Nation reported that relative to the 2001 elections the Democrats had lost ground in the south, as TRT votes in the party-list system increased by 200 percent compared to only 4 percent for the Democrats, it is clearly premature to envision the Democrat Party losing its southern stronghold. If one compares the margin of victory in the party-list system in the fourteen provinces, on average, the Democrats outdistanced the TRT by more than twice the number of votes cast. Only in the provinces of Narathiwat, Phuket, Yala, and Satun did TRT receive at least half the number of party-list votes as the Democrat Party.

The Thai polity is now moving into uncharted territory. Thaksin appears to have firm control over the economy, political institutions, and the rural grass roots. Unlike traditional populists who tend to devalue organizational structures, Thaksin has built a solid party with a membership of fourteen million to back him. He has also shown that his brand of populism goes much beyond rhetoric. He delivers on his promises and, even more, continues to advance new ideas and visions for the country. But Thailand’s democracy will also be put to the test in
the next few months. Thaksin’s tendency to brook no dissent is likely to become even more accentuated now that he has the institutional context to do as he pleases. Faced with such a challenge, the Democrat Party will have to muster all its ingenuity and resources to prove that the votes it received in the south—and especially in the deep south—are translated into strong representation of the local constituents. The rest of this article will delineate the likely direction of the second Thaksin administration in the areas of democracy, human rights, and instability in the deep south.

**Democracy**

Thailand has, for the past decade or so, been considered one of the models of democracy and human rights in Southeast Asia. However, critics fear that with an unprecedented parliamentary majority and another four years in office, Thai voters handed a potentially dangerous political blank check to their prime minister. In particular, there is concern that the combination of his stated views on democracy, his overbearing influence on the key state and non-state institutions, and his historic electoral mandate that threatens to evolve into a de facto hegemonic system will weaken the country’s democratic institutions. To be sure, Thaksin has periodically sought to distance himself from such fears, most recently following his swearing-in ceremony before the much-loved King Bhumiphol Adulyadej. However, for a country that vacillated between democracy and dictatorship for much of the twentieth century, fears of a leader who is a democrat at election time but authoritarian once in office are understandable.

Indeed, if his first term is a harbinger of what is in store, then there is little to suggest that Thaksin’s teleological views on democracy will change much, if at all, during his second term. “Democracy is a good and beautiful thing, but it is not the ultimate goal,” Thaksin infamously said on Thai Constitution Day in December 2003. “Democracy is just a tool. . . . The goal is to give people a good lifestyle, happiness and national progress.” This is the same prime minister who also purportedly insisted that he knew a great deal about the workings of democracy before subsequently telling a colleague in Parliament that “those who know less than me better shut up.”

During his first term, Thaksin did everything he could to centralize power, all the while seeking to weaken any real or potential source of opposition. Notably, he and his allies tried to gain control of the country’s independent press indirectly (through financial pressure) as well as directly (through purchase or intimidation or both). Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were also regularly harassed, and human rights groups, environmentalist groups, and local rural collectives were often denounced as “subversive,” “anti-social,” “unpatriotic,” and “agents of the West.” As he sought to deliver on his populist and nationalist socioeconomic program, Thaksin systematically emasculated the various independent watchdog
agencies that had been created in the wake of the 1997 constitution and that were meant to keep the spirit of political reform alive through institutional checks and balances on the executive.\textsuperscript{12} As an editorial in one of the Thai dailies once put it:

Thaksin’s leadership style is the most problematic due to his personality and the ways he exercises his power. In the past three years, he has employed strong state-control measures in all spheres of our lives—economic, political and social. He has ignored the constitutional framework and silenced critics.\textsuperscript{13}

Thaksin knows that his appeal derives partly from his “end justifies the means” mindset, a central part of which holds that democracy is just another tool toward the more virtuous goal of greater happiness among the majority of the citizenry. His erstwhile mix of economic populism and repressive political crackdowns is part and parcel of that mindset—a mindset that could move Thailand into line with the country’s two southern neighbors, where economically successful “democratic authoritarianism” has long been the norm. Like populists elsewhere, Thaksin’s style is characterized by a radical critique of the status quo ante, part of which is a critique of his immediate predecessor’s pursuit of democracy for democracy’s sake. And it is in that ham-fisted approach to Thailand’s politics that the long-term impact of Thaksin’s government on Thai democracy may most leave its mark.

Thaksin has very skillfully used the framework of the post-1997 constitution that granted greater powers to the executive to strengthen his position, as well as to eliminate and forestall dissent within and without his party—something that no previous democratically elected Thai leader or government has been able to do. This has led some observers to suggest that the Thai premier’s dream is to craft a climate of “calm politics,” modeled from elsewhere in Southeast Asia, in which technocratic political-business elites serve policy solutions to a largely nonparticipatory populace.\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, that so much democratically acquired power is currently concentrated in a very small and tight circle of political-business elites is without precedent in recent Thai history.

However, some of the fears of Thaksin’s detractors may very well be overstated. For example, although Thaksin no doubt had soft authoritarian tendencies during his first term, he never mounted the sort of systemic campaigns to purge and/or eliminate political critics and opponents the way despots do. In fact, many of the government’s critics continue to speak their minds even as others have simply gone silent through self-censorship.\textsuperscript{15} The Thai sociopolitical landscape, even with a strong leader at its apex, simply has too many divisions, factions, and mixed loyalties—a fact that necessarily implies that no Thai leader, dictator, or prime minister can fully control all the various parts of the Thai polity for extended periods of time.

Throughout Thaksin’s first term, the opposing Democrats not only failed to put forth a more reformist leadership, but also were further undermined by their own
conservative stance. Indeed, that Banyat Bantadtan, an old party insider and supposedly a master of the old games of intraparty coalition building and money politics, triumphed over the youthful and reformist Abhisit Vejjajiva in the party’s leadership election in April 2003 meant that the Democrat Party was led during a critical period by conservative individuals without much in terms of new ideas with which to challenge the popular, incumbent government. This way, the Democrats with their inherent weaknesses, were partly responsible for Thaksin’s consolidation of TRT’s fortunes and the success of its populist appeal.

The TRT’s 377 seats in the 500-seat Parliament will mean that the opposition will not be able to call no-confidence motions against ministers. Although such no-confidence motions always failed, they were a key strategy for the opposition to remain in the public eye. Having a smaller representation in Parliament this time around also means the diminution of the only other trump card the opposition had in Parliament: the committees its more dedicated parliamentarians chaired during Thaksin’s first term. Although not particularly well-institutionalized, Thai parliamentary committees matter more today given that they are mandated to investigate policy issues, proposed legislation, or government activities.

Whereas Abhisit Vejjajiva, the new leader of the Democrats, has vowed to change his party’s image and future fortunes, his largely emasculated and still quite divided party will make Thaksin’s job easier for the foreseeable future. The Democrat Party has, over the past several decades, stood more or less for a liberal democratic political philosophy. However, the party was never particularly good at pushing its agenda precisely because its ideology was vague, rather than a clear and consistent support for democracy—a far cry from what Thaksin’s TRT was able to do during its first four years in power, when Thaksin spent considerable resources building something akin to a sophisticated, policy-driven, and modern political party machine.16

Indeed, if there is one discernible change in the conduct of contested Thai politics during Thaksin’s first term in office, it is the coherence in TRT’s policy agenda, hitherto unknown in Thai politics. An additional product of TRT’s policy politics and Thailand’s nascent democracy may soon come when the Democrats (as well as any number of the other smaller parties) mimic that approach, even as the TRT seeks to consolidate even further its populist agenda.17

Human Rights

For a man more associated with brashness, Thaksin’s postelection statements have thus far been surprisingly encouraging with regard to the sensitive issue of human rights. Perhaps in recognition of the blemished human rights record during his first term in office, the Thai prime minister has sought to set a very different tone by announcing that his government will highlight the importance of not only democracy and the protection of people’s rights and freedoms, but also,
of the role played by ordinary people in Thai society when formulating public policies.\textsuperscript{18} He even assured the Thai media of his intent to "listen" to his critics, and to work with the opposition.\textsuperscript{19} Yet, not to give the impression that he was making a policy reversal, Thaksin's new shift on human rights was also presented as part of nine key principles, proposed by the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), that the postelection cabinet agreed would form the basis for the government's policies.\textsuperscript{20}

Nonetheless, it will take more than sweet pronouncements to convince the numerous skeptics that Thaksin's second term will see a radical shift in his approach to human rights.\textsuperscript{21} And it is not particularly difficult to understand why. Throughout his first term in office, local human rights activists were routinely subjected to surveillance, harassment, and intimidation. Members of the press and media deemed unsympathetic to government policies were routinely singled out for either direct denunciation or indirect intimidation.\textsuperscript{22} On a personal level, Thaksin's intolerance of media criticism was so notorious, he frequently portrayed his detractors (both foreign and local) as enemies of the state, and even suggested that the Thai press should be less critical of his programs, as they were all part and parcel of nation-building efforts.\textsuperscript{23} Even the widely respected Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International both concluded that Thaksin's first term in office saw a disquieting deterioration in the state's approach to human rights. "Thailand has gone from being a beacon of freedom and respect for human rights in the region to being a country of high concern," Human Rights Watch wrote in one of its reports.\textsuperscript{24}

For many internal and external observers of Thailand, the embodiment of Thaksin's approach to human rights was his infamous "war on drugs," which saw the extrajudicial killing of at least twenty-five hundred alleged drug dealers.\textsuperscript{25} Although the popular campaign's long-term impact on the drug trade was questionable, it indisputably undermined law-based governance in the Thai polity. The government claimed most of the deaths were the result of internecine feuds among the drug dealers and smugglers. However, human rights groups argued that the deaths included a large number of innocents shot by police in extrajudicial killings to satisfy the government's demand to create drug-free provinces.\textsuperscript{26}

Other significant human rights blemishes on the government during Thaksin's first term included brutality and violence associated with the military crackdown against the steadily escalating insurgency in the country's Muslim-majority southernmost provinces.\textsuperscript{27} In October 2004, that crackdown culminated in the death of eighty-five protesters at the hands of security forces, triggering a retaliatory spate of bombings and beheadings of locally prominent Buddhists, apparently by Muslim insurgent groups.\textsuperscript{28} Likewise, the government's restrictions on criticism by purging dissenting voices in the government bureaucracy, its use of government and private means to tighten control of the media whenever the media highlighted critical commentary and exposés of scandals, and its hand-in-glove
approach to relations with the military regime in Myanmar will keep Thaksin’s critics seething for a while.

The extent to which Thaksin lives up to the new tone he has set for his government on human rights will, at least in the short term, be demonstrated by the way his government handles several pending high-profile cases. First, Thai authorities will need to come clean about the fate of Somchai Neelaphaijit, a prominent Muslim human rights lawyer who disappeared under mysterious circumstances in early 2004. Second, if Thaksin decides not to ask his corporate empire to drop the defamation lawsuit against media reform activist Supinya Klangnarong, then his critics will see that as a continuation of the status quo ante. In August 2004, Shin Corporation, Thailand’s largest telecommunications conglomerate, which was founded by Thaksin and is controlled by members of his family, filed for civil damages of Baht400 million (approximately US$9.6 million) from Supinya and three editors of the *Thai Post*.29 Earlier in June, a Thai court also agreed to hear the case as a criminal libel case, which could result in punishment including imprisonment and a heavy fine.30 The charges stemmed from a July 16, 2003 story in the *Thai Post* in which Supinya, who heads a civic group called Campaign for Popular Media Reform, claimed that Shin Corporation was a major beneficiary of the Thaksin government’s policies. Third, Thaksin will have to answer his critics who have called for him to decouple his family’s business interests from iTV, Thailand’s sole “independent” television station, whose interests the critics say make it very difficult for its reporters to function independently.31 Last, and perhaps most important, the manner in which Thaksin handles the low-level but escalating violence in southern Thailand will say much about his willingness to change his approach to human and civil rights.

**The Deep South**

Violence and discontent in the deep south have continued to dominate international headlines since the raid of an army depot in Narathiwat in January 2004. More than five hundred fifty people have died in the past year, and the violence appears to be spiraling out of control. The confrontation between Muslim militants and state authorities stems from multiple factors, including social injustice, uneven development, and institutional changes in authority structures made during the Thaksin administration. Amid unabating violence, the national elections provided an important opportunity for the local population to assert its interests through the ballot box.

News reports and on-the-ground analysis in the days preceding the elections pointed toward a TRT victory in the deep south—just like the rest of the country.32 A journalist of the *Nation* noted that in the most restive areas of the deep south, candidates had quit campaigning during the day due to local residents’ fear of vio-
lence. This was thought to provide an advantage to the TRT incumbents. Indeed, the view that the TRT would take the deep south was reflected in the Bangkok Post's erroneous reporting. The day after the election, the newspaper claimed that TRT was taking over the deep south, but the next day reversed itself.

On the eve of the election, the situation in the deep south could not have been more advantageous to the governing party. Out of eleven seats at stake, only one was held by an incumbent Democrat, even though the Democrats had won five seats in the 2001 elections. Sensing the momentum clearly in the direction of the TRT, four of the five Democrat members of Parliament (MPs) decided to join the dominant party prior to these elections. All except one of these Democrat turncoats had held their seats for at least two terms, making it more difficult for the Democrat Party to be able to dislodge their former party members. Adding to the problem of party-switching, the Democrats were also faced with six incumbent MPs from the Wadah faction of the TRT—all of whom had been former members of the now defunct New Aspiration Party. Given the party-switching, most of the candidates put up by the Democrat Party in the deep south were relatively new faces. Under these circumstances, the battle in the deep south was TRT's to lose.

Yet, voters in these provinces threw out the ten TRT incumbents. One immediate explanation for this is the frustration and discontent of the local population with Thaksin's heavy-handed tactics. But beyond simply voting against Thaksin, it is also likely that the local population voted positively for the Democrats' own proposal for peace and stability in the deep south. During the electoral campaign, the Democrats circulated and actively promoted the "Pattani Declaration"—a set of policy proposals developed in December 2004 to quell discontent in the deep south. Unlike the national campaign centered on the need for a check-and-balance system, in the deep south, the Democrat Party had a substantive and positive message to convey.

The Pattani Declaration calls for a return to the institutional structure that had prevailed prior to the Thaksin administration and for the establishment of policies that are more sensitive to the Muslim population's needs. It calls for the reinstatement of two key institutions that Thaksin had disbanded—the Southern Border Provinces Administration Center and the Forty-third Civilian-Police-Military Command—and for the end to the CEO governor system implemented during the Thaksin government. The declaration further proposes that the government make efforts to improve the quality of education in schools, appoint judicial datos, and form Shari'a courts to address family and inheritance cases under Islamic law.

The loss throughout the south was a stain in what would otherwise have been a total rout for Thaksin. But the trouncing of the party in the deep south was particularly disturbing, given Thaksin's massive channeling of funds for development programs in the region. Soon after the elections, Thaksin announced the harshest policy to date for dealing with militancy in the deep south. To deal with those villages suspected of aiding militants and that were least cooperative, Thaksin proposed a zoning policy where such villages identified as "red zones"
would be denied funding from the Small Medium Large (SML) village fund scheme (a revolving line of credit to promote entrepreneurship). Villages where there is "moderate" support for insurgents would be labeled "yellow," while those villages that were considered free of militants and law abiding would be labeled "green." Out of 1,580 villages in the deep south, 358 are red (200 alone in Narathiwat), 200 are yellow, and the rest are green. This strategy for dealing with militancy harks back to the struggle against communism in the northeast during the 1970s. But unlike Thaksin’s zoning policy, zoning in the northeast was meant to target the communist areas by providing villages with more aid to reduce the hold of leftist ideology and win over the hearts and minds of the locals.

The evident harshness of this policy and its blatant violation of the constitution prompted an outpouring of criticisms from the media, civil society, and the political opposition. As the Nation's editorial page of February 18, 2005, put it: "the prime minister's crude approach is tantamount to treating Thai Muslims of Malay descent like circus animals, rewarding the obedient ones with food while cracking the whip at the wayward ones as punishment." A group of academics calling itself the "Network for Unanimity and a Peaceful Approach" called on the prime minister to rethink such a dangerous approach. Even General Surayud Chulanont, privy councillor and former supreme commander of the armed forces, cautioned of greater instability in the Muslim south.36

 Barely a week after the announcement of the zoning policy, Thaksin decided to call for a rare joint session of parliament to discuss the problems in the south. This was an acknowledgment that the criticisms of the zoning policy had made their mark. Only twice in the current democratic period has a joint session of parliament been held— during the May 1992 crisis and the 1997 financial crisis. Although the zoning policy still awaits implementation, it is clear that Thaksin’s impatience with the restive south has reached a boiling point. One local activist commented that this was an act of revenge for the electoral defeat TRT suffered in the deep south.37 For the large majority of Malay-Muslims who voted against the government, it would not be surprising if such a view was widely upheld.38

Conclusion

There is perhaps a great irony underlying Thailand’s current state of democracy. Thaksin’s organizational skills and well-oiled party machine enabled him to make the best use of constitutional changes introduced while the Democrats were in office that were meant to spur the development of a few large parties in place of the myriad weak ones that used to make Thailand’s democratic polity extremely volatile. The goal of the new constitution was to strengthen democracy, while also ensuring a more stable policymaking environment. By skillfully exploiting these constitutional changes, Thaksin has effectively built up an increasingly authoritarian form of governance. Yet, at the same time, one
may argue that Thaksin has also expanded the very basis of what a just democracy should mean by incorporating the rural poor—something that the Democrat Party, despite its long democratic history, never managed to do. Social reforms have had some real short-term success, and it will be important to see how the second Thaksin administration builds on this.

It remains to be seen now whether Thaksin's historic reelection mandate will make for a more compassionate, more judicious leader, particularly when it comes to his approach to human and civil rights. Or perhaps, like many other strong leaders elsewhere, he will ride on his own sense of destiny and indispensability even as he exerts enormous pressure on the country's democratic institutions and hard-won rights and freedoms. It is also still unclear whether Thaksin's TRT will end up being the sort of weakly institutionalized party formed by politically ambitious and often wealthy individuals as vehicles for their own personal advancement, or continue to evolve into a trend-setting, policy-based, vertically and horizontally institutionalized party.39

For many, Thaksin's policies in the deep south have been boorish and misguided, exacerbating old animosities there, jeopardizing relations with Malaysia and the wider Islamic world—all of which has cast a dark shadow over his international image. Should Thaksin continue his heavy-handed approach to the violence in the deep south, especially given that his nationalistic response is unlikely to lose him any admiration elsewhere in the country, one can almost certainly expect a continuation of the almost daily assassinations of local police, soldiers, religious leaders, and other civilians that marked Thaksin's first term. Indeed, the intermittent violence represents the single-most serious challenge to the Thai polity in the near future. As he begins his second term in office, it is uncertain whether Thaksin will initiate more local autonomy initiatives or settle for a protracted period of separatist unrest. Given that Thaksin has, among other things, equated himself to President George W. Bush in that both are fighting Muslim insurgents and a war on drugs, it is not difficult to see why his approach to the violence will most likely verge toward the latter.40

NOTES

3. TRT strategist and deputy secretary-general Phumtham Vejaychai pinpoints three factors for the party's victory: expanding the membership base of the party from eleven to fourteen million, Thaksin's own charisma, and the success of policies targeted toward the rural grass roots. See "It Was Thaksin Who Made Up Voters' Minds," Nation (Thailand), February 21, 2005.
4. By institutionalization, we refer in the Huntingtonian sense to organizations whose value supersedes that of personalities. Parties are institutionalized to the extent that voters identify with the party qua rather than with individuals. See, among others, Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 8–32; and Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully, eds., Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 4–6.

6. Calculated by counting the share of votes of the TRT vis-a-vis the Democrats with data from *Nation* (Thailand), February 18, 2005.

7. See “PM Vows to Change His Tune,” *Bangkok Post*, March 18, 2005, in which Thaksin is quoted as making extensive promises to, among other things, listen to his critics and respect human rights. See also Jane Perlez, “Thai Leader Faces Growing Criticism,” *New York Times*, March 14, 2004, in which Thaksin is quoted as saying that his “decisiveness isn’t dictatorship.”


9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.


16. Elsewhere, TRT’s leadership has also done something atypical in Thai party politics: picking candidates for plum seats that the various faction leaders were coveting for their own in a deliberate tactic to undermine potential threats to the party and build more loyalty among its MPs.


21. See, for example, Pinijparakarn and Bhumiprabs, “Critics Challenge Thaksin’s New Human Rights Policy.”


25. For a summary of Thaksin’s “war on drugs” as well as the justifications for it, see Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 158–67, 253–67.


32. See, for example, Weerayut Chokchaimadon, “Democrats in Fight to Save Stronghold,” Nation (Thailand), August 13, 2004.
37. Nation (Thailand), February 17, 2005.
38. A Muslim taxi driver in Bangkok who often returns to his province of Narathiwat insisted, however, that Thaksin was sincere in his efforts to solve the southern crisis and had therefore earned his vote.
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