

## The 17th General Election of Thailand

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### Introduction

On 29 April 1988, Thai Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanonda dissolved the House of Representatives after a group of 28 MPs belonging to the Democrat Party, the largest partner in the four party government coalition, sided with the opposition in the vote on a major parliamentary bill. A Royal Decree enacted the same day called for new elections to be held on 24 July 1988. The dissolution of the House and the call for new elections came at a time of increasing political restiveness. While the army was intensely lobbying for major constitutional changes to reverse its progressive loss of power vis-a-vis civilian and extra-bureaucratic forces, criticism of Prime Minister General Prem was gaining momentum and hopeful aspirants for the Premiership began jockeying for good positions in the unfolding succession game. Given these issues at stake and the fluid nature of political alliances in Thailand, the possibility that the electoral process would bring about major realignments of the country's political forces could not be discounted. The July elections were thus clearly set to become a major event with repercussions on the future course of Thai politics.

The following analysis of the 17th general election of Thailand focusses on four major aspects: first, the factors that led to the dissolution of Parliament; secondly, the election campaign (that is, changes and realignments in the party system, patterns of candidate recruitment, campaign tactics, campaign issues, election spending and party platforms); thirdly, the election results before, finally, an attempt is made to assess the election results in the light of Thailand's longer-term political development.(1)

### The Prem V Administration: Resting on Shaky Foundations

Since its inception in August 1986, the fifth Prem government has found itself in trouble. The coalition negotiations between the Democrats (100 seats), Chart Thai (63 seats), the Social Action Party (51 seats), and Rasadorn (18 seats) already created the rifts that later facilitated the down-

fall of the coalition. The formation of the new cabinet marked the outbreak of a protracted internal conflict within the Democrat Party that soon went beyond repair. At its core stood serious disagreements over the distribution of the "spoils" of the election victory.

Infighting is a familiar phenomenon among Thai political parties, but it tends to be a disease that in particular affects the poll winners. Due to the absence of clear parliamentary majorities, multi-party coalition governments have to be formed and as political parties are little more than highly volatile, pragmatic alliances of political leaders controlling groups of follower-MPs, the victorious party is hardly able to accommodate all its factions with cabinet posts or other lucrative rewards. The resulting pressures have repeatedly led to break ups of the major political parties and are the main cause for their cyclical ups and downs.

In the aftermath of the 1986 election, the Democrat leadership was faced with the dilemma of being unable to honor major campaign promises. Party leader Bhichai Rattakul had successfully campaigned on the theme of an elected Prime Minister. Bhichai announced that in case the Democrats emerged from the polls as the strongest party, he would work hard to form a government under his leadership instead of inviting an "outsider" to head the government. Lacking sufficient support from his prospective coalition partners and pressured by the armed forces which resented the anti-military stance of the Democrats, Bhichai had to give in. As previously, General Prem Tinsulanonda, a non-MP turned out to be the "most acceptable choice" to all parties concerned, and was again invited to be the Prime Minister.

With Prem demanding a quota of seven ministerial positions (inter alia, key ministries such as the Prime Minister's Office, Defense, Finance and Interior) to be filled with his personal choices, the Democrats found themselves in a quite unfavourable position in the haggling over the 44 cabinet posts. As a result, they had to settle with fewer and less important portfolios than expected.<sup>(2)</sup> Several key leaders like Chalermbhand Srivikorn, a major party sponsor, or Den Tohmena, a Muslim leader from the South, found themselves left from the cabinet line-up. The frustration that built up among those remaining empty-handed turned primarily against Bhichai whose immediate resignation as party leader was demanded.<sup>(3)</sup> The conflict between Bhichai and the dissidents headed towards a major show down on January 10, 1987 after both sides agreed to hold a special party caucus and call for an early election of the party's leadership. Bhichai eventually succeeded in completely edging out his rivals from all

leadership positions.(4) But this soon turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory. In reference to the day of their defeat, the Democrat rebels formalized their opposition by establishing the "January 10 Group" which initially commanded the support of some 45 MPs.(5)

While the conflict remained inconclusive and continued to supply the media with headlines, it caused serious concern among the coalition partners over the stability of the government. After complicated negotiations between both camps, a formula for compromise was worked out by September 1987, and a settlement of the conflict seemed in sight. Both sides agreed on a cabinet reshuffle that would give the dissidents four cabinet posts. Yet, this raised the tricky issue of whom to replace from among the incumbent Democrat ministers. New trouble was in the air. Bhichai, who never whole-heartedly supported the compromise, played the ball into the Prime Minister's court by leaving the decision to him. Prem, however, likewise declined to make the delicate choice. In November, as a result of the new deadlock, the dissidents stepped up pressure on the party leadership and the government by siding with the opposition in the vote on several parliamentary bills, including the tumultuous first reading of the highly controversial Copyright Amendment Bill.(6) When the session period finally closed on November 30, a dissolution of Parliament had been only narrowly averted.

During the new Parliamentary session that opened in April 1988, the Copyright Bill was again on the agenda. On April 28, 1988, the Bill passed the House with a comfortable margin of 183:134 votes, but again the Democrat dissidents had sided with the opposition.(7) This triggered the resignation of the 16 Democrat cabinet ministers and, on the next day, the House dissolution was announced by the Prime Minister citing the breach of coalition discipline as the main reason for his decision.(8)

However, the dissidents' voting behaviour was most probably not the sole reason for the House dissolution. Although voting against the government version of the Copyright Amendment Bill, rebel Democrat leaders repeatedly pledged their continued support for Prem. This appears plausible, since some dissidents such as Veera Musigapong had a long and close relationship with Prem. Moreover, as the January 10 Group had voted against the Copyright Bill already last November, according to his own rationale, General Prem should have dissolved the House already then. It was therefore widely speculated that Prem resorted to the House dissolution in order to escape a lingering no-confidence motion orchestrated by Samak Sundaravej (Prachakorn Thai), Chalerm Yubamrung

(Muanchon) and Boontheng Thongsawasdi (United Democratic Party). Accompanied by intensifying personal attacks on Prem, it was the first such move that directly aimed at the Prime Minister in the eight years of his rule. Unlike in the previous years, heavy lobbying of the government and General Prem's personal aides could not derail the motion which amidst growing tension, was tabled on the House agenda for May 9, 1988.(9) In contrast to the previous year, Prem received no explicit backing from the military, fuelling rumours of a souring relationship with Army commander-in-chief and acting Armed Forces supreme commander General Chaovalit Yongchaiyudh. Squeezed into this awkward position, Prem who is known for his strong dislike of confrontational situations and parliamentary grilling, is believed by many to have used the Democrat's internal conflict as a pretext for the House dissolution.(10)

### **The Election Campaign**

The gradual political liberalization initiated in the late seventies by Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chomanand and continued under Prem allowed for the first time in Thai history political parties to flourish over a longer period of time. Prior to 1978, political parties, if ever permitted to exist, were little more than scarcely disguised devices of ruling military cliques to provide a democratic facade to their authoritarian government. Although the days of the chaotic and wildly proliferating party system of the 1973-1976 period (11) are gone and have given way to a more consolidated party structure, political parties in Thailand are still weak. Perhaps with the sole exception of the Democrat Party, they are organizationally underdeveloped and, lacking a nation-wide branch network that reaches down to the grass roots level, they are thus restricted to a few regional strongholds. Moreover, Thai parties are essentially conservative and ideologically vague. Most are better described as personal followings of individual political leaders who join forces under a party's umbrella in pursuance of particularistic goals. Opportunism, vested interests and pragmatism are thus the prime movers of the system which, lacking ideological cohesion, is highly fluid and thus prone to frequent party splits and shifts of party affiliation.(12)

Against this background it is hardly surprising that the announcement of elections for 24 July caused a flurry of activities within and among parties. During a May 4 golf outing with General Prem, the leaders of

three of the four coalition parties concluded an informal agreement to cooperate in the forthcoming election by fielding candidates in such a way that competition among them is minimized and if justified by the election results, to continue their coalition.(13) However, as might have been expected, this cooperation agreement had little real impact on the electoral contest. Prominent part figures try to avoid each other and prefer running in "safe" constituencies. Yet, as far as the rank-and-file candidates are concerned, parties have to rely on locally known personalities who can not be switched at will to other constituencies. Not surprisingly, only a few cases of such cooperation materialized. Interestingly, these deals were struck not between government parties, but with the opposition. Chart Thai and Ruam Thai, for instance, agreed to avoid competing in some constituencies in Phayao, Nan, Lampang, Phrae, Lamphun and Chiang Rai.(14) Also Prachakorn Thai and Muanchon, both opposition parties, reached a similar understanding in some Bangkok constituencies.

Attempts of the government parties to unite were replicated on the opposition side. Already in March Prachakorn Thai, Ruam Thai, UDP, CAP and the Progressives entered into a loose alliance in order to push through with the no-confidence motion against Prem.(15) What somewhat misleadingly became known as the "UMNO-model"(16) was resumed after the House dissolution, with Ruam Thai, CAP, the National Democracy Party (NDP), the Democrat dissidents and a break away faction of UDP led by Boontheng Thongsawasdi taking part in a series of merger talks. Yet, after two weeks of intensive debate, Ruam Thai and, one day later, CAP abandoned the merger plan after they failed to find a common formula for accommodating the conflicting demands for executive positions and the raising and distribution of campaign funds.(17)

While the merger talks did not produce tangible results, the political landscape changed due to the emergence of new parties. The long-standing feud within the Democrat Party came to an end when on May 2, 1988, the January 10 Group, led by Chalermbhand Srivikorn broke away from the party.(18) Apart from participating in the failed merger talks, Chalermbhand's group unsuccessfully sought to join UDP (19) and later the NDP (20) before eventually finding refuge under the banner of Prachachon, a hitherto virtually unknown splinter group that held no seats in the previous Parliament.(21)

The UDP, with 38 seats the largest opposition party, shared the fate of the Democrats and likewise fell apart due to internal conflicts. While the relationship between party leader and Prem foe, Boontheng Thongsawasdi

and the party's chief adviser and main financier, Colonel Phon Rerngpraserwit, who is a close follower of General Prem, was delicate throughout the party's short lifetime, the breaking point came when the opposition launched its censure motion in April. Phon refused to go along with the move - for Boontheng reason enough to leave UDP together with 18 MPs. Like the Democrat rebels, Boontheng subsequently struggled to realign his group with a new partner. Before finally joining Ruam Thai (22), he unsuccessfully participated in the merger talks, approached the Democratic Labor Party of communist defector and former ISOC advisor Prasert Sapsunthorn (23), and the Puangchon Chao Thai Party (24). The reason behind the desperate struggle of these break away factions to find refuge under the umbrella of another party is quite obvious. The Political Party Act practically prevents the creation of a new party on short notice as certain minimum requirements in terms of organization and party membership must be fulfilled.(25) As a result, the unprincipled search for partners in the existing party system frequently brings together strange bed-fellows - a major reason for the endemic instability of the Thai party system.

While Chalermbhand and Boontheng sought new partners, Bangkok Governor Chamlong Srimuang expanded his informal Ruam Thai group into a national party - renaming it Phalang Dharma Party (PDP) (26). Although having declared only a few months earlier that he was not yet ready to enter national politics,(27) Chamlong's move was not completely unexpected. Chamlong decided not to run himself, but it was nevertheless widely believed that, especially in Bangkok, PDP's candidacy would substantially raise the stakes.

Another new entry was General Arthit Kamlang-ek who reappeared as leader of the Puangchon Chao Thai Party (PCCP) from two years of political oblivion. Arthit took over this party from a group of former military men close to the "Democratic Soldiers" who had meanwhile withdrawn from the party. PCCP held one seat in the dissolved House.(28)

Recruitment of candidates in Thai parties is usually a top down exercise, since the decision to field which candidate in what constituency rests almost exclusively with the party's executive committee. Yet, the whole process is surrounded by an atmosphere of hectic activities. Candidates dissatisfied with their former party are busily seeking nomination on another ticket while parties are shopping for promising candidates from their opponents or trying to recruit new-comers who seem to command large voter pools.

The great number of candidates and the nation-wide candidate-seat-ratio of more than 10:1 suggests a high level of competitiveness (see Table 1). However, the number of candidates is artificially blown up due to constitutional provisions which stipulate that a party must field at least 179 candidates or equivalent to at least one half of the seats in the House.(29) But only large parties such as Chart Thai, SAP and - in the last election - the Democrats are able to field candidates with reasonable chances of winning in all parts of the country. Most of the smaller parties must resort to fielding "ghost candidates" in order to meet the legal minimum requirement. While it is common practice among small parties to hire Ramkhamhaeng students as candidates at the standard rate of 10,000 Baht,(30) the UDP fielded 37 housewives from Uttaradit in the Bangkok constituencies.(31)

**Table 1:**  
**Candidates and Candidate-Seat-Ratio by Region, July 1988**

Region	No of candidates	No of seats available	Candidates / seat ratio
Bangkok	377	37	10.2:1
Central	811	80	10.1:1
North	620	71	8.7:1
Northeast	1,494	126	11.9:1
South	304	43	7.1:1
Total	3,606	357	10.1:1
1986 election	3,813	347	11.0:1

*Source:*

Adapted from: Election '88 (lüag dang '31).

As Table 2 shows, 16 parties entered the election race. Compared with the election two years ago, a decline in the number of candidates can be noted. Most remarkable is the sharp decrease of Democrat candidates -

without doubt a reflection of the party split and an indicator of financial troubles.<sup>(32)</sup> With rebel leader Chalermbhand Srivikorn the party has indeed lost a major financier. But the other parties also tended to field fewer candidates, perhaps in order to concentrate funds more economically on those constituencies where their candidates had a real chance of winning a seat.

**Table 2:**  
**Number of Candidates,**  
**Thailand General Elections, 1986 and 1988**

Parties	Number of candidates	
	1988	1986
Palang Dharma	319	-
Chart Thai	256	249
Prachachon	256	149
Puangchon Chao Thai	244	216
Muanchon	238	209
Progressive Party	233	280
Community Action Party	216	228
United Democracy Party	214	276
Agro-Industry Party	214	-
Social Action Party	213	240
Democrat Party	210	312
Prachakorn Thai	207	237
Ruam Thai	205	193
Rassadorn	199	253
Social Democratic Force	195	185
Liberal Party	189	287
Total	3,606	3,813

*Source:*

Far Eastern Economic Review, 21 July 1988, p.25.

Campaigning started with the registration of candidates on June 24. Most parties kicked off their campaign with major rallies in Bangkok. In



general, however, except for Bangkok and some other major urban centers, rallies played an insignificant role in the vote getting strategy of the parties. Candidates started touring their constituencies and tried to reach as many voters as possible by door-to-door campaigning. Especially in the urban areas, they concentrated their efforts on lower income residential areas and the big housing estates in Bangkok because here large voter blocks could be mobilized through vote-buying. Another frequently used technique to reach prospective voters was the attendance of ordinations, weddings and funerals. One candidate in Phuket province reported to have attended no less than 800 funerals since the last election.(33) Buddhist temples (wat) and schools were further targets of the campaigners,(34) since abbots and school teachers frequently wield considerable influence over the choice local people make at the polls.(35)

The most crucial role in marshalling the votes, however, is played by an army of canvassers (hua kanaen) that the candidates persuade to work for them.

**Table 3:**  
**Major Rallies during Election Campaign, June and July 1988**

Party	Date	Audience	Place
Prachakorn Thai	24 June, 1988	30,000	Bangkok
Prachachon	27 June, 1988	2,000	Bangkok
Democrat Party	27 June, 1988	10,000	Bangkok
Phalang Dharma	24 June, 1988	10,000	Chiang Mai
Phalang Dharma	25 June, 1988	10,000	Lampang
Phalang Dharma	26 June, 1988	10,000	Lamphun
Phalang Dharma	27 June, 1988	5,000	Bangkok
Muanchon	23 June, 1988	6,000	Bangkok
Puanchon Chao Thai	29 June, 1988	35,000	Bangkok
Phalang Dharma	15 June, 1988	4,000	Nakhon Si Thammarat
Phalang Dharma	18 July, 1988	50,000	Bangkok
Prachakorn Thai	22 July, 1988	40,000	Bangkok

*Source:*

Own compilation, interviews.

Although state representatives are required by law to stay neutral, village headmen (*phu yai baan*), commune leaders (*kamnan*), local government officials and other members of the local elite are the persons most frequently sought after as canvassers, usually because they command a following that goes beyond friends, kinship ties, tenancy and employment relationships. The canvassers handle the vote-buying money and in return deliver the votes of their clientele. Having the right set of canvassers is thus often a question of money - especially in poverty-stricken areas such as the rural Northeast where traditional clientelist networks are still intact.(36)

Vote-buying, although a common practice in Thai elections, became particularly rampant during these elections. The ceiling in campaign spendings, as fixed by the election law, is 350,000 Baht. This amount, however, is by far exceeded by most serious contenders for a House seat. Although no exact figures are available, many candidates and observers believe that the total amount of money spent for votes exceeded that of the previous election, when an estimated three billion Baht (= 119 million US dollars) changed hands. Money dumping was particularly notorious in the Northeast and the North (37) where business tycoons operating backstage financed scores of candidates across party lines. But also in the South, a region with traditionally low campaign spending, a marked upsurge in vote buying was reported.(38) This was mainly due to the fact that with Prachachon a new, well-financed competitor appeared on the scene, wooing the same voter groups as the hitherto dominant Democrat Party.

The longer the campaign lasted, the more candidates tended to apply unfair tactics. Candidates locked in a tough battle or seeing their rival surging ahead often resorted to mudslinging and rumour-mongering in order to undermine the opponent's credibility. Groups with uncertain loyalties were offered money in exchange for their ID cards, so that they could not exercise their voting right (and thus not vote for the opponents). If that did not help, voters and canvassers of the rival camps were physically intimidated. As a result of such intimidation and violence perpetrated against several of his party workers, Major General Chamlong sought police protection for his candidates.(39) Similar precautions were taken by candidates in Chachoengsao and Chonburi provinces - scenes of particularly competitive contests.(40) Yet, although the government did not release official figures, violent incidents seemed to have occurred on a much lower level than in other countries of the region. Election-related murders and shootings were reported from Chiangrai, Prachin Buri and Chon-

huri.(41) Finally, on election day a hand grenade attack was launched on Somchai Roekwararak, known as a godfather (por liang) in Ang Thong province who bankrolled candidates of Chart Thai (but also of other parties) in this and adjacent provinces, killing two persons and wounding seven others. In the South Muslim dissidents burnt several schools and other government buildings.(42)

Parties do not place much emphasis on ideology. Party platforms thus had little meaning for the election campaign. Perhaps with the exception of the Democrats they generally lacked any systematic approach towards the problems facing Thai society. Instead, more often than not, they raised rather hazy, sometimes even trivial issues.(43)

No wonder that party programmes failed to create the issues in the election. It was Prime Minister Prem and Bangkok Governor Major General Chamlong who stood at the center of the election issues that stirred the greatest controversies. After the House dissolution, parties grouped into pro- and anti-Prem camps. While the coalition parties - in particular Chart Thai leader Major General Chatichai Choonhavan - opted for a return of General Prem as Prime Minister, the anti-Prem alliance included Samak Sundaravej's Prachakorn Thai, Chalerm Yubamrungs Muanchon, former Army commander-in-chief and supreme commander Arthit Kamlang-ek and former Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj. Kukrit, althoigh having supported Prem during his first three cabinets, relentlessly attacked the Prime Minister in his weekly column in Siam Rath newspaper, seminars and interview statements. Aged 77 and having declared his farewell from active politics way back in 1985, Kukrit nevertheless worked hard to portray himself as a serious contender for the Prime Minister position. Students and academics likewise criticized what they called "Premocracy" and - resuming a campaign theme of the previous election - asked for an elected Prime Minister. Pressure on Prem mounted further as a group of 99 academics submitted a petition to King Bhumiphol Adulyadej (44) charging that the country's major institutions, including the armed forces, are being used to support Prem and that the care-taker government is biased against certain parties in the election.(45)

In July, however, the "Prem-issue" was overshadowed by controversies surrounding Major General Chamlong and his PDP. Given the fact that the new party was primarily banking on the popularity and charisma of Governor Chamlong, it was expected that PDP would heavily cut into Prachakorn Thai's support base which was likewise mainly in Bangkok. Hence, it was not surprising that Prachakorn Thai leader Samak Sunda-

ravej, known as a fiery orator and demagogue, concentrated heavy attacks on Chamlong even before the campaign had actually opened. Samak accused Chamlong - thereby referring to the latter's former position as secretary general of the Prime Minister (1980-1981) - of being a "lackey of General Prem" setting up his party for the sole reason of returning Prem to power.(46)

Another campaign theme dug out by Prachakorn Thai highlighted Chamlong's alleged relations to Santi Asoke, a non-conformist, radically anti-materialist Buddhist sect that was, quite unfounded, accused of pro-communist leanings. In rebuttal to these accusations, Chongkol Srikanthana, a PDP candidate in Bangkok's constituency seven, somewhat naively characterized Major General Chamlong as a staunch rightist who had played a leading part in the demonstrations against leftist students that preceded the October 6 coup of 1976. As the coup was marred by unprecedented violence - the storming of Thammasat University campus by heavily armed forces of the Border Patrol Police and Village Scouts and the concomitant massacre of mostly unarmed students - Chamlong found himself suddenly embroiled in an explosive issue that caused him great embarrassment.(47)

The October 6 issue became the dominant theme in the final weeks of the campaign, since it opened the chance to delve into a dark chapter of Thailand's recent history that up to this point was treated as taboo. Chamlong's defense was not very skillful. Instead of frontal counter-attacking Samak who - like many other powerful figures still active in the political arena - had a highly dubious record in the immediate pre-and post-October 6 period, he first tried to hide his involvement while later giving the impression he was a mere by-stander who attended rallies of the right "out of his concern for law and order in the country". As more and more revelations about Chamlong's role were made, the public came to the conclusion that Chamlong was deliberately trying to hide his past. This, however, hardly matched the virtuous aura of a self-styled "Mr. Clean" that he nurtured successfully since he ran for Governor of Bangkok. There was no question that his credibility was severely hurt by the issue.(48) It thus made little impact that Samak and Major General Chatichai Choonhavan also came under fire in the closing days of the campaign for their role in the events leading to the coup.(49) Before the voters went to the polls, it had already become obvious that the handling of the issue had strongly damaged PDP's election perspectives.

## The Election Results

On 24 July 1988, Thailand's 26.6 million eligible voters were called upon to vote for 357 MPs to serve a four year term in the House of Representatives. A total of 3,606 candidates from 16 parties were seeking the voters' endorsement for a House seat.

The Thai electoral system rests essentially on plurality vote. Constituencies are subdivided by province (*changwat*). A province is entitled to send one MP to the House for each 150,000 inhabitants. Larger provinces with more than three MPs are subdivided into additional constituencies. Except for a handful small or underpopulated provinces which are represented by only one MP, most provinces have multi-member constituencies with two or three MPs. Thus most voters have up to three votes which they can either cast for a straight party ticket or split up among candidates from different parties.

There are some obvious deficiencies built in this electoral system. First, it violates the principle of equality by giving voters from multi-member constituencies greater political weight than voters from small constituencies who may cast their vote for only one candidate. Secondly, as the plurality system basically works in accordance with the "winner-take-all" rule, there is considerable wastage of votes - i.e. those votes that were cast for losing candidates. Since minor political parties concentrate their campaign only on one or two regional strongholds, the wastage of votes is much greater for large parties such as the Democrats, Chart Thai and SAP which try to mobilize vote on a nation-wide scale.

It is thus hardly surprising that the Thai electoral system has been prone to frequent amendments. The last round of discussions was initiated by the army and the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) about one-and-a-half years ago. General Chaovalit, ISOC and several other key figures in the military maintained that the present electoral system facilitates rampant vote-buying and as a consequence, the ascendancy of a class of greedy and self-serving business MPs, forestalling the development of a more democratic political system in Thailand. The unrestrained pursuit of narrow group interests and wide-spread corruption, it is argued, prepares the ground for the re-emergence of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) which was declared militarily defeated in the early eighties.<sup>(50)</sup> In order to cut down vote-buying, the army, supported by a group of academics, proposed the introduction of smaller, single-member constituencies - usually referred to as the "one-man-one-vote" system. However, as

argued by the critics of the scheme, "one-man-one-vote" was not free from ulterior motives. It was part of a constitutional amendment package designed by the army to stop the growing influence of extra-bureaucratic forces on the political decision-making process. In fact, the assumption that the creation of smaller, single-member constituencies would even increase the incentives for vote-buying is very plausible.

Apart from this, especially the larger parties were afraid to lose the so-called "coat tail" effect - which means that in a multi-member constituency a highly popular candidate can pull through his running mates to a House seat. Moreover, such an arrangement would also make it easier for "outsiders" to intervene into elections by sponsoring a set of candidates and thus increasing the fragmentation of the political system to their own advantage. It is for these reasons that most parties have so far rejected the proposed amendments.

Voter turn-out in the 24 July elections reached a record high of 63.56 percent, some two percent higher than in the July 1986 elections (see Table 4). This was in large part the result of an intensive promotional

**Table 4:**  
**Voter Turn-out in Thai Parliamentary Elections, 1932-1988**

Election year	Nationwide voter turn-out (%)	Voter turn-out in Bangkok (%)
November 15, 1933	41.45	17.71
November 7, 1937	40.22	22.24
November 12, 1938	35.03	16.28
January 6, 1946	32.52	13.40
January 29, 1948	29.50	15.68
February 26, 1952	38.95	23.30
February 26, 1957	57.50	42.46
December 15, 1957	44.07	29.92
February 10, 1969	49.16	34.66
January 26, 1975	47.17	32.18
April 22, 1976	43.99	26.64
April 4, 1979	43.90	19.45
April 22, 1983	50.76	32.57
July 27, 1986	61.43	38.13
July 24, 1988	63.56	37.5

*Source:*

Election '88 (lüag dang '31), p.22.

campaign of the Ministry of Interior urging voters to make use of their suffrage. Provincial authorities set out cash and other rewards for those communities that exceed a turn-out of 75 percent. Village headmen and kamnans, eager to capture these awards, made determined efforts to mobilize their clientele.(51) Not surprisingly, voter turn-out was thus considerably higher in rural areas, where traditional patron-client networks were still intact.(52)

Although taking into account the changing and differentiating social fabric in urban areas, Bangkok's low turn-out must be considered a surprise, since with Governor Chamlong's PDP a new force had entered the race and increased competition. The 37.5 percent turn-out was lower than two years earlier when it reached 38.1 percent.

From among the 16 contesting parties, 15 won seats in the new chamber. As expected by many, the well-financed Chart Thai garnered the lion's share of seats. Chart Thai won 87 seats, 24 more than in 1986. While defending its traditional stronghold in the Central Region, winning 39 out of 80 seats, the party came out first in the Northeast for the first time (31 out of 126 seats). In the North, the party remained the second strongest force (14 out of 71 seats), but performed weakly in the South (3 out of 43 seats) and in Bangkok where it won no seat at all.

The Social Action Party (SAP), third in 1986, came in second in 1988, although the party won only three additional seats. Yet, this was nevertheless a quite satisfactory performance, since some analysts had expected the party to perform even worse than in 1986 due to internal rifts. The SAP kept its stronghold in the Northeast (30 seats), but in terms of seats won, was overtaken by Chart Thai. It seems that the party is now losing the bonus it enjoyed in the past for being associated with Kukrit's Tambon Development Fund.(53)

Other winners of the election included Prachakorn Thai, General Arthit's Puangchon Chao Thai Party and Ruam Thai. Prachakorn Thai triumphed over new-comer Chamlong and his Phalang Dharma by winning 20 of the capital's 37 seats. Samak reaped the fruits of his aggressive, at times even defamatory campaign against Chamlong. Prachakorn Thai performed particularly well in lower class residential areas where the combination of vote-buying and Samak's populist appeal attracted the voters, and in constituencies with a high percentage of military voters. The party was likewise successful in some of the provinces adjacent to Bangkok (Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani and Samut Prakan), while elsewhere it benefitted from its new "acquisition", Kosol Krairiksh, a former Com-

merce Minister, who first defected from the SAP to UDP (1986) and most recently to Prachakorn Thai. Together with his son Chuti, Kosol won two seats in Phitsanuloke province for Prachakorn Thai.

Ruam Thai emerged as the strongest party in the North. Strengthened through its merger with Boontheng Thongsawadsi's UDP faction of 15 MPs and well financed by tobacco tycoon Narong Wongwan, the party won 26 out of 71 seats in the North. Yet, the party could not expand its support base into other regions, winning only eight seats in the Northeast and one in the Central Region. In total, however, the party nearly doubled its membership in the House from 19 to 35 compared to 1986.

The greatest surprise was perhaps the strong political comeback of former army chief General Arthit Kamlang-ek. His hitherto little known Puangchon Chao Thai Party (PCCP) won 17 seats - three more than the much-vaunted PDP. The party's stronghold was clearly in the Northeast where it won 15 seats. PCCP was capitalizing on General Arthit's popularity in this region where he had served in the suppression campaign against the communist insurgents in the seventies. With his strong-man image, General Arthit still enjoys support in wide circles of Thai society, especially among voter groups with a less sophisticated political outlook who have become cynical about what they disdain as free-wheeling bargaining and horse-trading of Thai parliamentary democracy on which they also blame corruption and other societal ills. In a society with deeply rooted hierarchical and authoritarian value patterns, figures like General Arthit are still able to muster broad support. Opinion polls before the election (though not representative ones) showed Arthit more popular than other leaders such as Samak Sundaravej, Minister of Foreign Affairs Siddhi Savetsila, Bangkok Governor Chamlong Srimuang and Premier Prem Tinsulanonda.(54)

The elections' greatest loser was undoubtedly the Democrat Party. The party lost more than one half of its seats, dropping from 100 to 48. This was, however, not an unexpected decline. It resulted from heavy infighting and the break away of the January 10 Group with almost 35 MPs and the subsequent loss of credibility among the voters. Nevertheless, the party's showing at the polls was still better than anticipated by pessimists. Many analysts predicted heavy losses particularly in the South, where the Democrats had clinched 36 out of 43 seats in 1986. Here they faced strong competition from members of the January 10 Group, now running under the banner of Prachachon Party. Despite substantial losses, the Democrats by capturing 16 seats remained the front-runners in this region. In Bang-



kok, however, likewise a traditional Democrat bailiwick, the party lost its leading position that it shared with Prachakorn Thai in the 1986 election. The Democrats dropped from 16 to five seats and were thus relegated to the third place in the capital's electoral contest.

Another big loser was Chamlong's Phalang Dharma (PDP). Originally expected to win one half to two thirds of the seats in Bangkok and a total of 60 seats in the whole country, the 14 seats actually won represented a great disappointment to the party leadership. In Bangkok, PDP was comfortably beaten by Prachakorn Thai and won only 10 seats. Even Chamlong's wife Sirilak, pitted against Samak in Bangkok's Dusit District, was among the casualties. Military votes likewise went mainly to Prachakorn Thai. This must, in large part, be attributed to Chamlong's past connections with the Young Turks - a group of middle ranking military officers who wielded sizeable political influence in the second half of the seventies and staged two abortive coups in 1981 and 1985.(55) The Young Turks, graduates of Class 7 of Chulachomkhalao Military Academy and now eliminated as a serious political force, were known to be at odds with the Class 5 graduates who have risen to major command positions in the capital and upcountry. Given the fact that unit commanders exert a strong influence on the voting behaviour of their men, this may explain PDP's poor performance in constituencies with a high military population. For instance, Prachakorn Thai tickets made clean sweeps in Dusit (Constituency 1) as well as in Bangkhen (Constituency 13).(56) But Chamlong's tough anti-hawking policy might also have backfired on him. While Chamlong, a devout Buddhist, was also to mobilize the "silent majority" of Bangkok's apolitical non-voters in the 1985 gubernatorial elections, landing an impressive landslide victory over his Democrat opponent, his party failed to mobilize this voter group during this election. His personal example, charisma, and promises to flush out "dirty politics" through "virtuous people", moral upliftment, honesty and integrity, were less appealing to the voters than three years before - most probably a consequence of the less than skillful response to Samak's verbal onslaught. The low voter turn-out in Bangkok (37.5 percent) clearly worked to the disadvantage of PDP.

Prachachon Party was also among the poll losers. The party had concentrated its campaign effort mainly on the South, hoping to win 17-20 seats in this region.(57) Sixteen of the Democrat defectors came from the South. Later, General Harn Leenanond and MP Chaturon Kotchasi, two other figures popular in the South, joined the party, too.(58) However, with 19 seats nation-wide and only 11 seats in the South, the party perfor-

med disappointingly. Southerners tend to vote for party tickets (instead individuals as is done in most other regions of the country) and have a strong affiliation with the Democrat Party. Hence, Prachachon candidates found it difficult to portray themselves as an alternative to the Democrats. In fact, Prachachon's campaign was highly defensive. Candidates time and again had to explain why they defected from the Democrats. This implied the paradox that Prachachon candidates tried to present themselves as the "better Democrats". Slogans such as "vote for Prachachon candidates to help restore the Democrat Party"(59) or "support the Prachachon Party which is run by Democrats"(60) did little to help the image of the party. Interestingly, other parties which hitherto had little chances to penetrate the strong phalanx of Democrat candidates, benefitted from the Democrat-Prachachon rivalry. As shown in Table 5, SAP won five seats, the Progressives four, Chart Thai three and Community Action Party (CAP) two seats in the South.

Finally, the United Democratic Party (UDP) almost disappeared from the political landscape. Grappling with the defection of half of its 38 MPs and troubled with financial problems the party managed to hold only five seats. Also Rassadorn, predicted to gain strongly in the elections, can hardly be termed an election winner. Rassadorn could not shed its image as a military party and came out with only 21 MPs compared to 18 in 1986.

All other parties won less than ten seats. Boonchu Rojanasthien's Community Action Party lost six seats, the Progressives one, while Muanchon and the Liberals gained slightly by winning two additional seats.

The election sprang few surprises as far as the faring of individual candidates is concerned. Apart from Sirilak Srimuang, the most prominent losers were undoubtedly Dr. Kasem Sirisamphan (SAP) who was defeated by singer Suthep Wongkhamhaeng in Bangkok's Constituency 2 and Democrat Deputy Finance Minister Dr. Supachai Panichpakdi who failed to defend his seat in Constituency 7. Another losing cabinet member was Deputy Minister of Public Health, Watcharin Ketawandee (Democrat, Loei). Other prominent poll victims included Khunying Sasima Srivikron, wife of Prachachon leader Chalermbhand, Thavil Praisont and Dejo Savananda (both Prachachon), Chavalit Techapaibul (Democrat Party) and Tamchai Khambato (UDP).

Table 5:  
Election Results: Seat Distribution by Region, 1983, 1986, 1988

Party	Bangkok			Central			North			South			Northeast			Total		
	1983	1986	1988	1983	1986	1988	1983	1986	1988	1983	1986	1988	1983	1986	1988	1983	1986	1988
Chart Thai Party	-	1	-	29	30	39	11	13	14	1	-	3	31	19	31	72	63	87
Social Action Party	4	2	1	14	7	9	27	6	9	8	1	5	38	35	30	91	51	54
Democrat Party	8	16	5	1	10	4	8	10	6	25	36	16	13	28	17	55	100	48
Prachakorn Thai Party	24	16	20	10	6	8	1	1	3	-	-	-	1	1	8	36	24	31
Ruam Thai	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	11	26	-	-	1	-	7	8	-	19	35
Rassadorn	-	-	-	-	8	7	-	4	6	-	-	11	-	6	8	-	18	21
Prachachon Party	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	6	-	-	19
Puangchon Chao Thai Party	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	1	15	-	1	17
Phalang Dharma Party	-	-	10	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	14
Community Action Party	-	-	-	1	2	1	-	6	2	-	2	2	-	6	3	-	15	9
Progressive Party	-	-	-	2	5	4	1	1	-	-	1	4	-	2	-	3	9	8
Muanchon Party	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	-	3	5
United Democratic Party	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	21	3	-	2	-	-	11	2	-	38	5
Liberal Party	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	3
Social Democratic Force	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1
National Democratic Party	-	-	-	3	1	-	3	-	-	1	-	-	8	2	-	15	3	-
Democratic Labor Party	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-
Free People	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Pracha Thai	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	4	-	-
Siam Democracy Party	-	-	-	2	-	-	5	-	-	5	-	-	6	-	-	18	-	-
Social Democratic Party	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	-	-
Independent	-	-	-	7	-	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	-	25	-	-
New Force	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>357</b>

Sources:  
Ministry of Interior, own computations, and The Bangkok Post.

Election fraud seemed to have remained within the confines of the usual. Of course, there were the ubiquitous complaints of heavy money dumping and vote-buying. But as long as the huge disparities in wealth persist, little can be done to eradicate the habit: for impoverished villagers and urban slum dwellers the 50 - 500 Baht gratification paid per vote is a welcome extra-income. Most irregularities, however, were perpetrated at the vote counting stage through bribed election officials. In fact, in two major cases of alleged election fraud that emerged after the polls - one in Bangkok, the other one in Nakhom Phanom - the protestants were referring to such manipulations in the vote counting. A poll watchdog group, set up by former supreme commander General Saiyud Kerdphon, and staffed by volunteers, most of them Ramkhamhaeng students, unearthed some cases of vote-buying and other manipulations, but in most cases met with little cooperation from election officials. In fact, even the irregularities brought to the attention of the authorities will bear little consequences for the implicated candidates. A certain level of election fraud is a tacitly accepted fact of life in Thai elections and will not stir major controversies as long as it is perpetrated by individual candidates. It is certainly a different story, however, if a party or a political group manipulates elections as part of a grand design in an attempt to install or consolidate a monolithic regime.

### **The Election's Aftermath: General Prem Steps Down**

As soon as the official election results were out, in line with their pronouncements made earlier during the campaign, the former coalition parties entered into negotiations to form a new government. Chart Thai as the party with the greatest number of seats automatically assumed the leadership in these talks. Since the coalition parties lost 24 seats, with Colonel Phon Rerngpraservit's UDP a fifth party was invited to join the government. The co-optation of UDP, while adding only five seats to the coalition, must also be regarded as a reward for Colonel Phon's role as the government's "Trojan horse" within the opposition ranks, which became most visible in his determined bids to derail two censure motions directed against the Prem V administration. Later Police Captain Chalerm Yubamrung's Muanchon Party with five MPs was likewise co-opted into the government fold - a shrewd move designed to pre-empt Chalerm to launch similar aggressive attacks against the new administration as he did on

Prem's last cabinet.(61)

Amidst increasing clamour for an elected Prime Minister, Chart Thai leader Chatichai consistently turned down overtures to head the new government. Hence, most observers were sure that General Prem would return to Government House.(62) In the evening of 27 July 1988, the leaders of the prospective coalition parties went to see General Prem at his residence inviting him to head the new government. General Prem, however, dropped a political bomb shell by declining to accept the premiership, instead announcing his decision to retire from politics.(63) Over night a completely new situation had emerged with potentially far-reaching implications on the alignment of political forces and the national power equation.

As the news of General Prem's resignation spread, political parties hurried to get control over political developments in this fluid situation. Chart Thai leader Chatichai in a swift turn around now declared himself ready to become Prime Minister. Thus, for the first time in twelve years, the possibility appeared that Thailand would get a government under an elected MP - by many considered a crucial step in the direction of a full blown democratic system. The five, later six, would-be coalition partners immediately begun to negotiate the distribution of portfolios among themselves. At the same time a group of major opposition parties, led by Samak Sundaravej's Prachakorn Thai, likewise tried to form a government. However, as they were short of the necessary parliamentary base, mustering the support of only 128 MPs, the group worked hard to lobby the SAP to change sides and be the core party of an alternative coalition. SAP leader Siddhi Savetsila was offered the Prime Minister's post.(64) Without detailing every twist and turn of the protracted horse-trading for cabinet positions among and within the parties, suffice it to say the opposition's move had failed by August 3, the dead-line set by Parliament President Ukris Mongkolnawin to submit nominations for Prime Minister. Ukris thus went on to propose to His Majesty the King the appointment of Major General Chatichai as the country's new Prime Minister. On 4 August 1988, Chatichai received the Royal appointment, although the negotiations for the formation of the new government were still under way.(65)

In the meantime the public was wondering what prompted General Prem to turn down the offers of heading another coalition government, when in fact, he was seen working for another term. Prem was lobbying to keep the former coalition parties together, thwarting the political ambi-

tions of General Chaovalit and repeatedly making subtle reminders that he intended to return to power after the elections.(66)

Since there were few clues from General Prem himself, saying only that he harboured no political ambitions and was tired of doing the job, much is left to speculation. Nevertheless, some of the following considerations might have been in General Prem's mind when he made his decision.

1. The election result did not augur well for a stable new government. The coalition parties had lost ten percent of their seats, while Prem's main foes such as Samak, Boontheng and Chalerm reappeared stronger than before. Given the increased fragmentation in the new chamber, the notorious factionalism within major coalition parties, no-confidence motions and attempts to blackmail the government on important issues would have become even easier than before. Samak and Chalerm had already made it their point to continue their attacks on Prem unabatedly, in case the latter returned as Prime Minister.
2. Throughout the campaign it had become clear that General Prem had lost much of the popular support that he had enjoyed during the first years of his rule. Apart from the opposition parties, discontent with "Premocracy" became particularly pronounced among students and the intelligentsia. Perhaps particularly embarrassing was the petition submitted to King Bhumiphol by 99 academics, complaining about what they saw as manoeuvres by General Prem to hold on to power. Apart from Kukrit's stinging attacks in his weekly column in Siam Rath newspaper, the country's press increasingly pleaded for a change in the country's top political post. Yet much of the criticism levelled against General Prem might have grown out of the boredom and impatience that resulted from the fact that he was at the helm of the government for more than eight years - longer than any other Prime Minister under a parliamentary system. This is indeed a very long time in a society in which promotion is based on seniority and people usually reach their peak late in their career. While such a system facilitates a relatively smooth elite circulation, fears arise that advancement to the top may be blocked, if individual leaders overstay.
3. Another reason for General Prem to step down might have been the eroding support from the military.(67) With his relationship to General Chaovalit souring, it would have been less probable that the army would lobby as vehemently for Prem, as it did in the successful attempt to derail the opposition's censure bid in April 1987.

4. Perhaps the most decisive reason could have been the lack of explicit Royal endorsement. It is a well known fact that during the long reign of King Bhumiphol Adulyadej the monarchy has become a highly influential political force behind the scenes and since the days of Sarit Thanarat, the most revered source of legitimization.(68) During all his years in power, Prem has always enjoyed a particularly close relationship to the Palace which has helped him ward off two coup attempts. Speculation that he might have lost this unwavering Royal backing centered around two conspicuous audiences with the King. The first was granted to M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, elder statesman and a staunch royalist, on 17 May and lasted for more than two hours, nurturing rumours that politics figured high on the agenda.(69) It was noted that after the audience Kukrit even stepped up his crusade against Prem - suggesting to political pundits that - although not necessarily having Royal blessing he did not explicitly act in opposition to the King. Prem's audience with the King shortly after the election was much shorter. Although no details surfaced, it might have been that during this conversation General Prem's decision to call it quits was sealed.

#### **The 1988 Election and the Future of Thai Politics: Some Preliminary Assessments**

1. General Prem's resignation will have an almost certain impact on the country's power equation. During his eight years in power he was extremely skillful in striking a balance between military and civilian political forces and between contending factions within the army itself, thereby keeping challenges against his rule at bay. Therefore, his departure undoubtedly created a political vacuum. However, since key players in the political game do not show their cards, and taking into account that Thai politics is a very slippery terrain, speculation on imminent moves of major political protagonists are deliberately avoided here. Yet, the forthcoming October military reshuffle will be an important first indicator for which direction the expected changes in the national power equation will take.
2. With a presumably much weaker Prime Minister than Prem, the fragmented party structure and changing alliances, a period of greater political instability must be anticipated. The new coalition has a narrower majority than its predecessor and is thus more vulnerable to de-

fections. Break-aways from the coalition parties cannot be ruled out: Chart Thai, for instance, is divided into a Chatichai/Banharn (Silaparcha) and a Pramarn (Adireksarn) faction, the Democrats into a faction of Southern and Northeastern PMs, SAP into a pro-Siddhi and a pro-Kukrit (70) faction - just to mention the most obvious cleavages. Disappointed expectations for cabinet posts could further increase the centrifugal forces. Apart from the political parties the military and the bureaucracy are also highly factionalized. This is a legacy of General Prem's successful policy of 'divide-and-rule'. In fact, it is due to these uncertainties and the anticipated shifting of factional alignments that many observers expect the new government to be short-lived.

3. Although it is misleading to impose Western categories of Left and Right on the Thai political system, the election results must nevertheless be interpreted as a shift towards the Right. Staunchly conservative forces such as Chart Thai, Rassadorn, Chamlong's PDP, Chalerm's Muanchon, Arthit's PCCP and the faction of Northeastern MPs within the Democrat Party have strengthened their position. There is, in fact, no party with leftist or social-democratic orientations represented in the House.
4. Although Chatichai repeatedly assured the public that the (economic) policies of the Prem-era would be continued, many observers suspect that the shift towards the Right will have an impact on those promises. With Chart Thai, a party known for its close ties with big business forming the core of the new government, policy decisions are believed to be biased towards business interests.<sup>(71)</sup> While the various Prem governments have already performed below par when it came to rural development and the distribution of Thailand's economic growth, even less is expected of the present government. Memories are revived of Chart Thai's ill-fated role in crushing the fledgling workers' and farmers' movements in 1975 and 1976. In fact, several unions (of state enterprises) have already registered their protest against certain personalities in the new cabinet <sup>(72)</sup> who are feared for their hard line position vis-a-vis workers' interests. Moreover, while the previous government showed prudent restraint in pushing through controversial projects such as the Tantalum plant in Phuket, the Cable Car project in Chiang Mai or the Nam Choan dam in Kanchanaburi province, ecologists, conversationists and other opponents of such projects might find less understanding for their arguments with the new set of leaders. In fact, as shown by various editorials in the Thai press, there is growing



concern that powerful vested interests and cronyism might have a destructive effect on national interests and national development.(73) The new government's plans to curtail the role of the National Eco-

**Table 6:**  
**Percentage of Businessmen Among Members of the House of Representatives**

Number of Election	Month, Date and Year of Election	Number and Percentage of Businessmen	
		No	%
1	November 15, 1933	15	19.2
2	November 7, 1937	18	19.8
3	November 12, 1938	20	22.0
4	January 6, 1946	20	20.8
5	August 5, 1946	9	11.0
6	January 29, 1948	22	22.2
7	June 5, 1949	7	33.3
8	February 26, 1952	25	20.3
9	February 25, 1957	42	26.3
10	December 15, 1957	44	27.5
11	February 10, 1969	100	45.7
12	January 26, 1975	93	34.6
13	April 4, 1976	82	29.4
14	April 22, 1979	112	37.2
15	April 18, 1983	124	38.3
16	July 27, 1986	136	39.2
17	July 24, 1988	243	68.1

*Sources:*

Pisan Suriyamongkol/James F. Guyot: *The Bureaucratic Polity at Bay*. NIDA, Bangkok 1986, pp.32-33; *Profiles of Thai Politics (banteuk gan muang Thai)*, Bangkok 1987; Pisan Suriyamongkol, *The Institutionalization of Democratic Political Processes in Thailand*, Bangkok, p.85.

conomic and Social Development Board (NESDB), the country's chief planning agency, definitely sends signals which act to aggravate these misgivings.(74) While some of the NESDB's development strategies might be debatable indeed, the agency, staffed with competent technocrats, must nevertheless be credited for being an efficient check against financially and technically unsound projects. It is one of the NESDB's greatest merits that the "white elephants" which characterize the developmental efforts of many other Third World Countries are virtually unknown in Thailand.

5. The increasingly oligopolistic structure of the Thai capital accumulation process is (75) reflected in the political sphere as well. Big business and other powerful economic interests are increasingly represented in the House. The percentage of businessmen among MP's has risen substantially over the past 10-15 years. As shown in Table 6 , it increased from 29.4 percent (1976) to roughly 45 percent in 1988.(76) This change can perhaps be best seen in the Northeast. While in the seventies a substantial number of MPs representing peasant and worker interests managed to win parliamentary seats, today there is a strong bias towards MPs with backgrounds as construction contractors or agro-industrialists.

Hand in hand with the emergence of a business class of MPs, a disturbing trend toward oligarchization in Parliament can be observed. A recent study showed that in the July 1988 election between 150 to 160 candidates had kinship relations, with the father-and-son combination most common.(77) If we take into account candidates related to politically active family members holding office in other political bodies or who have meanwhile retired from politics, the picture of an increasing oligarchization becomes even more clear-cut. Another indicator for a reduced elite circulation in Parliament is the growing number of re-electionists which rose from 40.43 percent (1983) to 47.83 percent (1986) and finally, to 54.90 percent in 1988.(78)

The best illustration of these dynastical tendencies is perhaps the new leadership circle itself. It is a revival of the old "Soi Rajakru" clique that wielded immense political and economic influence during the second phase of Field-marshal Phibunsonghkram's rule (1948-1957).(79)

**Table 7:**  
**Members of Parliament and their Affiliation with Million-Baht-Business**

Name of MP	Party Affiliation	Position	Business Affiliation
Major General Chatichai Choonhavan	Chart Thai	Prime Minister	Financial companies, export-import business, manufacturing, links to various TNCs, energy;
Major General Pramarn Adireksarn	Chart Thai	Minister of Interior	Extensive interests in Thai textile industry, glass manufacturing, chemical industry, long-time President of the Thai Textile Manufacturing Association & President of the Associa- tion of Thai Industries;
Banharn Silapa-archa	Chart Thai	Minister of Industry	Chemical industry;
Chumphol Silapa-archa	Chart Thai	MP	Brother of Banharn;
Suraphan Chinnawatra	Chart Thai	MP, former Deputy Industry Minister	Thai silk magnate, silk manu- facturing, export business; department stores;
Pramual Sabhavasud	Chart Thai	Finance Minister	Construction contractor;
Thavich Klinprathum	Chart Thai	Minister of University Affairs	Bangkok Cranage Co., transportation business, formerly delivering hardware to US bases during Vietnam war;
Sora-attha Klinprathum	Chart Thai	MP	Son of Thavich;
Korn Dabarangsi	Chart Thai	Minister of the Prime Minister's Office	Affiliated with several of the Choonhavan companies (export-import, energy);
Sanoh Thientong	Chart Thai	Deputy Minister of Interior	Owner of petrol stations & rock crushing plant;
Chucheep Harnsawat	Chart Thai	Deputy Minister of Commerce	Engineering business;

Name of MP	Party Affiliation	Position	Business Affiliation
Pong Sarasin	SAP	Deputy Prime Minister	Soft drink company (associated with Coca Cola), interests in commercial banking, construction, trading;
Chavalit Osathanugroh	SAP	MP	Member of Osathanugroh-family which has extensive interests in manufacturing (electrical appliances, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics), advertising, education, land & housing development;
Nikom Saencharoen	SAP	MP	Brother-in-law of entertainment tycoon Somchai Khunpluemr (Kamnan Porh);
Subin Pinkayan	SAP	Minister of Commerce	Engineering consultancy firm;
Bhichai Rattakul	Democrat	Deputy Prime Minister	Pharmaceutical manufacturing, finance, President of Thai Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association;
Dr. Phichit Rattakul	Democrat	MP	Son of Bhichai;
Phornthep Techapaibul	Democrat	MP	Son of Udane Techapaibul who heads one of the largest business conglomerates in Thailand with interests in banking, finance, industrial real estate, insurance, brewery, distillery, glass manufacturing, cement, hotels, textiles;
Srisakul Techapaibul	Democrat	MP	Wife of Phornthep Techapaibul;
Niphon Promphan	Democrat	Deputy Minister of Finance	Brother of Srisakul Techapaibul; & owner of a timber trading company;
Prachuab Chaisarn	Democrat	Minister of Science, Technology & Energy	Job placement firm for overseas workers;

Name of MP	Party Affiliation	Position	Business Affiliation
Chalermbhand Srivikorn	Prachachon	MP	Interests in hotels, manufacturing, land development, construction, trading & education; Construction contractor;
Kosol Krairiksh	Prachakorn Thai	MP	
Chuti Krairiksh	Prachakorn Thai	MP	Son of Kosol Krairiksh;
Paweena Hongskul	Prachakorn Thai	MP	Sister-in-law of business tycoon Chuthikiati Chirathiwat, with interests in hotels, department stores;
Dr. Samut Mongkolkitti	Phalang Dharma	MP	Brother-in-law of Chuthikiati Chirathiwat;
Colonel Phon Rerngprasertvit	UDP	Minister of the Prime Minister's Office	Agro-industrialist, pineapple farming & canning, tinplate manufacturing;
Pratueng Khamprakob	UDP	MP	Construction contractor;
Boonchu Rojanasthien	CAP	MP	Former Deputy President of Bangkok Bank, finance magnate;
Dr. Arthit Ourairat	CAP	MP	Hospital & school owner, interests in manufacturing;
Narong Wongwan	Ruam Thai	MP	Tabacco tycoon, interests in wood processing;
Suraj Limpatapalop	Puangchon Chao Thai	MP	Son of a Korat tycoon, operating a large construction company;
Wattana Assawahem	Rassadorn	Deputy Minister of Interior	Oil trading, fishery;

*Sources:*

Compiled from Who is Who in Thailand, Profiles in Thai Politics (Banteuk gan muang Thai), Million Baht-Business in Thailand, Thai Executive Directory, The Bangkok Post, and The Nation.

Major General Chatichai's father, Field-marshal Phin Choonhavan, was one of the key members of the Coup Group that cut short a three year interlude of parliamentary democracy in November 1947. Another member of the clique was Major General Pramarn Adireksarn who was married to one of Field-marshal Phin's daughters. After the ouster of Phibun through Sarit, the fortune of the Soi Rajakru group temporarily declined, before staging a strong comeback during the so-called "democratic interregnum" (1973-1976). In 1974, Major General Pramarn founded the staunchly right-wing Chart Thai Party in order to roll back what was regarded in military, bureaucratic and business circles as the rise of a dangerous leftist movement. Since then, both Major General Pramarn as well as Major General Chatichai have repeatedly been members in Thai cabinets. Meanwhile, junior members of the clique are increasingly tapped to perform leading government functions. Chatichai's nephew, Korn Dabarangsi, like Chatichai a MP from Nakhon Ratchasima, was appointed a Minister of the Prime Minister's Office and is expected to play a key role as political co-ordinator in the cabinet and right hand man of the Prime Minister.(80) Another nephew, Colonel Kamol Dabarangsi, will soon be named as Chatichai's aide-de-camp.(81) Finally, Chatichai's son Kraissak, a self-styled "neo-Marxist", will serve as his father's personal advisor on labour affairs and as a member of an academic advisory group to the Prime Minister.(82)

Which direction the Thai policy will take after the elections in the long run remains to be seen. There are some encouraging prospects that the country might continue its path from "liberalization without democracy" to a full-fledged pluralist and democratic system; such as the appointment of an elected Premier, moves to make the parliamentary debates more transparent through broadcast and television coverage, the demand for making the Speaker of the House of Representatives the President of Parliament, the broadening and differentiating base of interests groups and voluntary associations and the growing political sophistication of the media. Yet, conservative forces came out strengthened from the elections and major societal groups such as the industrial workers, slum dwellers and, in particular, landless farmers and small peasants are still not well represented in the mainstream political process. Only when these groups are fully integrated into political decision-making, the distortions of the Thai political system such as rampant vote-buying, dynastic tendencies, oligarchization and the prevalence of powerful vested interests can be

overcome. This lop-sided political structure is both cause and consequence of the wide-spread (and in fact even widening) social and regional disparities in the country. A political system that also enables the representation of lower class interests, is thus a necessary condition so that Thailand's impressive economic growth may reach down to the grass-roots level and translate into greater socio-economic equity.

### Notes

- (1) The article is based on field research conducted in Thailand in July and August 1988.
- (2) The Democrats, for instance, had to compromise their claim for the Ministry of Interior. See, *The Nation*, 6 August 1986, p.1.
- (3) *The Nation*, 14 August 1986, p.1.
- (4) *The Nation*, 11 January 1987, p.1.
- (5) Due to successful overtures of the Bichai faction, several dissident MPs left the January 10 Group and returned to the main party. The strength of the January 10 Group finally consolidated at around 35 MPs.
- (6) Strongly pressured by the US, the Thai government introduced a parliamentary bill designed to protect US intellectual property (including literary and artistic works as well as computer software) in Thailand. The US Trade Representative warned that, if there would be no substantial progress with regard to this bill in due time, Thailand would lose the privileges it enjoys under the US Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). Thailand's GSP benefits amount to 18 percent of total exports to the US. As a matter of fact, loss of these privileges would have serious economic consequences for the country. While the government - within the confines of minor modifications - grudgingly gave in to US demands, many oppositionists including the January 10 Group denounced American pressure as thinly veiled blackmailing. Hence, rejection of the bill was considered an act of patriotism and dictated by national pride. Among a long series of newspaper publications on the Copyright Bill - issue see *The Bangkok Post*, 3 November 1987, p.1; *The Nation*, 21 April 1988, p.8.
- (7) *The Nation*, 29 April 1988, p.1.
- (8) *The Nation*, 30 April 1988, p.1.

- (9) Under the Constitution, a no-confidence motion is valid only, if it is supported by more than one-fifth, or 70 members, of the House of Representatives. Although the opposition had mustered the signature of 85 MPs for the censure motion, fears persisted that in a last ditch effort, the government could lure away a sufficient number of MPs from supporting the motion through the spreading of coup rumours, House dissolution or bribing. The opposition claims that the no-confidence motion filed in April 1987 was sabotaged by the government by buying off 15 of the 84 opposition MPs who signed the motion. The motion became invalid after the 15 MPs withdrew their support. *The Nation*, 28 March 1988, p.1.
- (10) That Prem considered the House dissolution as an option already at an early point of time is supported by reports in the Thai press that quoted General Prem as saying on April 17, 1988: "There will be no censure debate against the government. But I cannot tell you what we plan to do" (*The Nation*, 18 April 1988, p.1). A few days later, Deputy Prime Minister Pong Sarasin (SAP) advised his part members to get ready for a "snap election" (*The Nation*, 21 April 1988, p.1).
- (11) For a detailed account of this period see David Morell/Chai-anan Samudavanija: *Political Conflict in Thailand. Reform, Reaction, Revolution*. Cambridge (Mass.) 1981; John L.S. Girling: *Thailand. Society and Politics*. Ithaca/London 1981; and Ross Prizzia: *Thailand in Transition. The Role of Oppositional Forces*. Honolulu 1985.
- (12) See Kamol Thongdhamachart: *Toward a Political Party Theory in Thai Perspective*. Singapore 1982.
- (13) *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 12 May 1988, p.12; *The Nation*, 2 May 1988, p.1.
- (14) *The Nation*, 20 July 1988, p.3.
- (15) *The Nation*, 24 March 1988, p.2.
- (16) To what was actually referred was the Barisan National, an umbrella organization including nine political parties based in Peninsular Malaysia and several groups operating in the East Malaysian States of Sabah and Sarawak which - under the leadership of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) as the country's dominant party - form the Federal Government of Malaysia. See Diane K. Mauzy: *Malaysia*, in: D.K. Mauzy (ed.): *Politics in the ASEAN-states*. Kuala Lumpur 1984, p.138-185.
- (17) *The Nation*, 13 May 1988, p.3 and 14 May 1988, p.3.



- (18) The Nation, 4 May 1988, p.3.
- (19) The Nation, 4 May 1988, p.3.
- (20) The Nation, 5 May 1988, p.8.
- (21) The Nation, 13 May 1988, p.3.
- (22) The Nation, 21 May 1988, p.3.
- (23) The Nation, 15 May 1988, p.1.
- (24) The Nation, 16 May 1988, p.2.
- (25) The Political Party Act stipulates that a party seeking official registration must have a membership of not less than 5,000. Members must come from at least five provinces of the country's four Regions. In each province there must be not less than 50 members. See Political Party Act, B.E. 2524, Chapter I, Section 7.
- (26) The Nation, 3 May 1988, p.1.
- (27) The Nation, 2 February 1988, p.4.
- (28) The Nation, 12 May 1988, p.1.
- (29) The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2521, Chapter VI, Part 3, Section 95.
- (30) The Nation, 6 June 1988, p.1.
- (31) The Nation, 23 June 1988, p.2.
- (32) Party funds were allocated in accordance with the anticipated chances of the candidates. Reportedly, new-comers had to settle with 30,000-50,000 Baht, in some exceptions being allocated up to 100,000 Baht, whereas proven veterans received up to 200,000 Baht. See, The Nation, 17 June 1988, p.2 and interview material, 17 August 1988. This, however, is still below the constitutional ceiling on campaign spending of 350,000 Baht. As most candidates spend considerably more than what the ceiling fixes, Democrat candidates must complement election expenses from other sources of their own pocket. Yet, especially in the South, many Democrats have a civil servant background, suggesting that they do not have the necessary personal wealth to make up for meagre party allocations.
- (33) Interview material, 1 August 1988.
- (34) A point frequently made by candidates and observers interviewed.
- (35) Parties also set up election posters in residential neighbourhoods and public places and fielded loudspeaker vans that toured the major thoroughfares of the constituencies. Interestingly, most posters did not refer to straight party tickets. They mainly emphasized the individual candidate's name and his number on the ballot sheet.
- (36) For an excellent background analysis of the strategies applied by

candidates and canvassers, see Peter Mytri Ungphakorn: *Marshaling the Numbers*, in: *The Nation*, 24 July 1988, p.13.

- (37) Reportedly one candidate running in Chiang Mai's Constituency 1 spent between 20 and 30 million Baht in his campaign. Interview material, 8 August and 17 August 1988.
- (38) Interviews conducted on 3 August 1988.
- (39) *The Nation*, 8 July 1988, p.1.
- (40) *The Nation*, 8 July 1988, p.1.
- (41) *The Nation*, 8 July 1988, p.1 and *The Bangkok Post*, 9 July 1988, p.1.
- (42) *The Bangkok Post*, 25 July 1988, p.2.
- (43) PDP's main point, for instance, was to field "virtuous" people able to emulate the model of their leader. Chamlong's PDP professed to be "good water" in Thai politics, flushing out "bad water". Apart from this rather general goal, Chamlong is known to support constitutional amendments that would separate the legislative and the executive branches. The election manifests of other parties may be more specific than PDP's platform, but nevertheless are little more than an eclectic assortment of issues. Prachakorn Thai, for instance, outlined a ten point platform addressing the following issues:
- Reduce the country's foreign debts by allowing the private sector to invest more in construction of public utilities
  - Boost the incomes of farmers by developing agricultural industries
  - Introduce a comprehensive tax reform plan
  - Promote equitable opportunity in business
  - Solve traffic problems
  - Promote joint ventures in housing projects between the public and private sectors
  - Distribute more land for agriculture purposes
  - Up-grade the country's communications and transportation systems
  - Introduce more environmental protection programmes
  - Promote freedom of the press

And Muanchon Party stressed the following points:

- Push for the dominance of political parties over individual politicians
- Propose lower landownership tax
- Reclassification of forest reserve areas to end confusion over forest reserves and designated planting areas
- Live broadcast of all House meetings

- Strict control on war weapons

- Solving hawkers and traffic problems in Bangkok

For the parties platforms see *The Nation*, Election '88 (lüag dang '31) (in Thai), and *The Nation*, 24 May 1988, p.3 and 8 June 1988, p.4.

- (44) The petition was subsequently supported by the Lawyer's Association of Thailand as well. *The Nation*, 5 June 1988, p.1.
- (45) *The Nation*, 4 June 1988, p.1.
- (46) *The Nation*, 9 May 1988, p.2.
- (47) Starting 1 July 1988, when these remarks were made by Mrs. Chongkol during a campaign speech, there was virtually no day in which the English and the Thai language dailies as well did not carry a major article on this subject.
- (48) *The Bangkok Post*, 16 July 1988, p.3 and *The Nation*, 18 July 1988, p.8.
- (49) *The Nation*, afternoon edition, 18 July 1988, p.1; *The Nation*, 20 July 1988, p.8.
- (50) See Kanok Wongtrangan: *Change and Persistence in Thai Counter-Insurgency Policy*. ISIS Occasional Paper No.1, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok 1983; Kanok Wongtrangan: *The Revolutionary Strategy of the Communist Party of Thailand: Change and Persistence*, in: Lim Joo-Jock/H. S. Vani (eds.): *Armed Communist Movements in Southeast Asia*. Singapore, n.y., p.133-192; Saiyud Kerdphon: *The Struggle for Thailand. Counter-Insurgency 1965-1985*. Bangkok 1986.
- (51) The Ministry of Interior announced that tambons (a group of villages) that register an 85 percent or higher voter turn-out will be given 50,000 Baht and a honorary plaque, while those with a 75 percent turn-out will get 30,000 Baht and a plaque. See *The Bangkok Post*, 19 June 1988, p.1.
- (52) These incentives, however, led to manipulations of voter registration lists. In order to achieve a high voter turn-out and to capture the cash awards, there were cases that village headmen and kannans removed residents suspected of not voting from the lists. Interview material, 5 August 1988.
- (53) The Tambon Development Fund was initiated by Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj in 1975 to encourage decentralization of decision-making and project funding from bureaucracy to local village leaders, thereby stimulating political participation at the grass roots.

Each tambon council was given an equivalent of US \$ 25,000 to be spent for roads, irrigation canals, small dams and other small-scale public works. Although the scheme was hastily drawn up and implemented amidst endemic corruption ("decentralized corruption"), it was a move into the right direction. David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija went even so far as terming the Tambon Development Fund an "agricultural New Deal for Thailand". See David Morell/Chai-anan Samudavanija, op.cit., p.126.

- (54) *The Nation*, 22 July 1988, p.2.
- (55) On the Young Turks see Chai-anan Samudavanija: *The Thai Young Turks*. Singapore 1982.
- (56) Although PDP had triumphed over Prachakorn Thai in two by-elections for the Bangkok Assembly in Bangkok which were regarded as crucial tests for the up-coming parliamentary elections. Yet, as the voter turn-out was very low - about 13 percent - it must be assumed that the military personnel and their dependents residing in the district did not go out to vote in these municipal by-elections.
- (57) *The Nation*, 14 June 1988, p.3.
- (58) *The Nation*, 13 May 1988, p.2.
- (59) *The Nation*, 2 June 1988, p.4.
- (60) *The Nation*, 8 June 1988, p.8.
- (61) *The Bangkok Post*, 4 August 1988, p.1.
- (62) See, for instance, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 12 May 1988, p.12 and 4 August 1988, p.16; *Asiaweek*, 8 July 1988, p.19 and 5 August 1988, p.15; *The Economist*, 25 June 1988, p.57.
- (63) *The Nation*, 28 July 1988, p.1.
- (64) *The Nation*, 21 July 1988, p.1; *The Nation*, afternoon edition, 1 August 1988, p.3; *The Bangkok Post*, 1 August 1988, p.1,3; *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, 1 August 1988, p.8.
- (65) *The Nation*, 5 August 1988, p.1.
- (66) On return from a trip to Eastern Europe General Prem was quoted as saying: "We are proud of what we have accomplished on the trip. We have served our fellow countrymen by solving these problems (including the Kampuchean conflict). And we will continue (our service) non-stop." *The Nation*, 31 May 1988, p.8.
- (67) There were several indications for such speculation. Firstly, in March 1988 the government took over from the army the much publicized Green Isan-Project, a pet project of General Chaovalit, with the intention to re-forest and irrigate large parts of the drought - and

poverty-stricken Northeast within five years. Shortly thereafter, when the no-confidence motion was launched against Prem, General Chaovalit did not explicitly lend his support to Prem as he had done on a similar occasion one year earlier. General Prem on his part responded by rejecting General Chaovalit's resignation - a move that was widely regarded as an attempt of disposing the army chief as a serious contender for the Premiership. Finally, in June General Prem declared, that the time is not yet ripe for the constitutional amendments proposed by Chaovalit and ISOC. All of Prem's actions can be interpreted as moves to curtail the power of General Chaovalit and his army faction in the on-going political game.

- (68) See Thak Chaloehtiarana: *The Sarit Regime 1957-1963. The Formative Years of Modern Thai Politics.* (Ph. D. Thesis) Cornell University 1974.
- (69) *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 June 1988, p.37 and interviews, 9 August 1988 and 4 August 1988.
- (70) Although Kukrit resigned as leader of the SAP in December 1985 and shortly thereafter left the party he founded as a respected elder statesman he still exerts considerable influence behind the scenes. His followers in the SAP include Dr. Kasem Sirisamphan, Pong Sarasin and Amnuay Yossuk.
- (71) In fact, one of the first moves in that direction was Major General Pramarn's proposal of setting up a casino in Thailand. See, *The Nation*, 10 August 1988, p.2 and 11 August 1988, p.3.
- (72) *The Nation*, 2 August 1988, p.2.
- (73) In an article entitled "A Cabinet of competence or cronies?" *The Nation* writes: "The overriding concerns in making appointments seem to have been vested interests, pride, and - dare we say it - greed". The article continues by implying that economic key ministries such as Finance, Industry and Communications are not filled with the best choices, before concluding with a stern warning: "Think of Marcos. Think of Suharto." ... "Thailand cannot afford corrupt ministers or officials. They should not even be scandal-prone." See, *The Nation*, 9 August 1988, p.13. Another article, appearing the following day, is entitled "Government faces tough task ahead. Many Cabinet figures cause unease". See, *The Nation*, 10 August 1988, p.13. A less than flattering assessment of the cabinet line-up also appeared in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 August 1988, p.22-23.

- (74) The Bangkok Post, 8 August 1988, p.6 and The Nation, 8 August 1988, p.21.
- (75) Suehiro, op.cit., and Hewinson, op.cit.
- (76) Matichon and Siam Rath presented statistics on the socio-economic background of the newly elected MPs. According to these statistics, 100 of the 357 MPs (=28.01 percent) are businessmen. Yet, this is a gross under-estimation of the actual figure. There is a large residual category comprising 84 MPs listed under the heading of "others" and a sizeable number of MPs listed as "professional politicians" (70 MPs). Cross checks with other sources such as "Who is Who in Thailand" or directories of business executives show that many of these professional politicians (and most probably those listed under "others") have extensive business interests.
- (77) The Nation, 20 July 1988, p.31.
- (78) Own calculations. In previous elections the percentage of re-electionists was lower. Weber, for instance, reported of a 26 percent share in 1975. Karl E. Weber: Serendipity Missed: Report on the Parliamentary Elections in Thailand 1975, in: Internationales Asienforum, Vol.6, Heft 3/1975, p.321.
- (79) On the wealth amassed by the group during that period, see Akira Suehiro: Capital Accumulation and Industrial Development in Thailand. Bangkok, January 1975. See also Thak Caloemtiarana, op.cit.
- (80) The Nation, 7 August 1988, p.6-7.
- (81) The Nation, afternoon edition, 9 August 1988, p.3.
- (82) The Nation, 8 August 1988, p.3.

### Summary

The article analyzes the 17th General Election of Thailand by focussing on four major aspects: first, it investigates the factors that led to the dissolution of Parliament; secondly, it reviews the election campaign (that is, changes and realignments in the party system, patterns of candidate recruitment, campaign tactics, campaign issues, election spending and party platforms); thirdly, it presents and interprets the election results before, finally, an attempt is made to assess the election results in the light of Thailand's longer term political development. The article argues that the election signified a strengthening of the political right and conservative

forces. Moreover, in the light of the surprising resignation of Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda and the increased fragmentation of political parties in the Parliament, power realignments are almost certain in the near future. The election thus inaugurated an area of greater political uncertainties than hitherto. A first indication into which direction the power realignments will move, will be the forthcoming annual October military reshuffle.