Chapter IV

Case Study of General Election of 2001:
Special reference to Songkhla Province

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Background of Election in Thailand:

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy ruled by King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), a much-revered monarch who has reigned since 1946. The King plays little part in day-to-day government operations, but serves as a powerful symbol of Thai national identity and commands enormous moral authority, which he uses on occasion to resolve internal crises or to draw the government's attention to pressing social problems. Real power, however, lies in the hands of a democratically elected government led by a Prime Minister. Since World War II, Thailand has alternated periods of democratically-elected civilian governments with authoritarian rule brought about by coups-d'etat. The military last seized power in 1991, but after middle-class protests and royal intervention, civilian rule was restored in 1992. Since that time, the military's role in politics has been greatly reduced, due to strong public opinion against coups d'etat, a vocal free press, and Thailand's overall political maturation. One of the most significant steps in that maturation was the enactment of the current constitution in 1997. This constitution, Thailand's 16th since 1932, brought substantial reforms to the Thai political process and expanded the rights and civil liberties of Thai citizens. Reforms mandated by the 1997 constitution, including establishment of a National Counter Corruption Commission, a Constitutional Court, a national Human Rights Commission, and a new
national Election Commission have helped Thailand move toward a more transparent and open system of government.

National elections for Members of Parliament were last held on January 6, 2001. The maximum term of Parliament extends for four years. However, the Prime Minister may choose to dissolve the House and call elections before that date. Elections for the country's first elected Senate were held in March 2000. All members of the Senate are elected concurrently for a set term of six years, and members are not eligible for reelection.

With the exception of the Democrat Party, Thailand's oldest organized political party, Thai political parties have tended to be centered on individual personalities rather than ideologies. Prime Minister Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai, which was formed in 1999, has adopted an approach to political and economic reforms that most commentators describe as populist. All Thai parties accept working within a framework of democratic principles and free enterprise economics. Frequent changes in government generally have not affected the country's overall stability, largely because policies, for the most part, are designed and executed by a competent professional bureaucracy. Meanwhile, the democratic ethos continues to develop and expand in Thailand, in spite of economic setbacks.

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{1}} International Trade Administration, U.S. Dept. of Commerce,Country Commercial Guide FY2002: Thailand}\]
Elections:

The 1997 Constitution established an Electoral Commission to enforce new rules aimed at discouraging vote-buying and other fraud. These rules were tested on 4 March 2000 during Thailand's first ever elections to the Senate (previously an appointed body). The impact was significant, with numerous seats having to be re-contested several times before all 200 Senators could convene on 1 August 2000. Under the new Constitution, Senators are forbidden to have party political links and can serve only one six-year term.

On 6 January 2001, the Electoral Commission organised the first ever general election under the new Constitutional rules. 500 seats were on offer in the House of Representatives (400 constituency MPs plus 100 MPs appointed from party lists based on each party's proportion of the national vote). Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai Party easily defeated the Democrats. The remaining seats went mainly to Chart Thai, New Aspiration, Chart Pattana and Seritham. Seritham and New Aspiration have since merged with Thai Rak Thai. Thai Rak Thai in coalition with Chart Thai maintain a comfortable majority in Parliament.

Thailand’s electoral reforms, which were adopted in 1997 and 1998, brought about far-reaching implications for the nation’s political system. They introduced direct elections to the Senate and established new rules for elections to the House of Representatives. The first election to the Senate took place between March and June 2000 followed by House elections in January 2001. Regrettably, the aims of the reforms could only be partially realized.


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**A} Introduction to the elections before and after 1997:**

On March 4, 2000, two and a half years after the promulgation of the sixteenth constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand in October 1997, Thai voters went to the polls for the first ever Senate elections held since the installation of a bicameral parliament in 1946. Numerous people and groups from civil society, who had taken part in the process of drafting the new constitution, as well as the national media and observers from abroad hoped that the elections would lead to an independent and competent second chamber. A chamber that would not be attached to the political influence of the bureaucracy and the military anymore, but could act as a powerful institution checking and deliberating upon the House of Representatives as well as the government. On January 6, 2001 the reforms to the electoral system stood another crucial test when the first poll for the House of Representatives was held under the new Constitution, which had been designed to reduce vote-buying and graft and to break the hold of provincial barons on politics.²

1. The Parliamentary System Before and After 1997

Thailand’s democracy is the result of a long-term transitional process characterized by frequent alternations of authoritarian regimes since the end of the absolute monarchy in 1933. Semi-democracy in Thailand was characterized by a strong government with a non elected prime minister at its apex, who most often was a former military-man, controlling the political process. A democratically elected House of Representatives had to share its political power with the Senate. The

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Senate had no democratic legitimacy because its members were nominated by the military and mostly came from the state bureaucracy and the ranks of the Armed Forces\(^3\).

**1.1 The Parliamentary System before 1997**

Within the formal institutional architecture of alternating authoritarian regimes, the Senate represented an element of institutional stability. Its specific function was to provide an arena for state actors to exercise political influence in an institutionalized form. Based on its far-reaching political prerogatives, the Senate in Thailand formed an institution that protected the interests of the ruling social groups. Since neither the elected House of Representatives nor the Thai voters had a chance to influence the composition of the Senate, the military and the bureaucracy encapsulated the Senate as one of the most important arenas for political decision-making from the democratically elected parliament. The following overview shows that state actors dominated the Senate until the early 1990s.

Table 4.1

Average Representation of Bureaucrats and Soldiers in Cabinets and the Parliament (1932-1992)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition of Cabinets</th>
<th>Composition of the Senate</th>
<th>Composition of the House of Rep.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1932-80</td>
<td>1980-92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>36.4 19.9</td>
<td>30.7 63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucrats</td>
<td>42 14.4</td>
<td>30.7 22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78.4 34.3</td>
<td>61.4 85.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Until March 1992; Bureaucrats only until 1990; Cabinet Chatichai II (1990-91) is excluded from the numbers given for the military; 2 Numbers for 1st – 13th, and 14th – 15th Senate; Numbers of bureaucrats are given only for 1985-1991; 3 Numbers are given for the periods 1932-1979; 1979-1988; All numbers are per cent; Sources: Calculations by the author based on numbers given in Kreuzer (1995), and Pasuk and Baker (1998).

Political liberalization during the government of General Prem (prime minister from 1980 to 1988) paved the way for a short-lived electoral democracy in 1988. However, this brief interregnum ended in February 1991, when dissatisfied generals under the leadership of General Suchinda staged a coup against the elected government. After this short-lived authoritarian regime had been ousted as a result of demonstrations culminating in ‘Bloody May 1992’, an interim government under career diplomat Anand was installed. Anand’s cabinet did not draft a new constitution but gave an order to rewrite the existing constitution, drawn up by the military in 1991. After an expert group had

formulated the amendments, the constitution was repealed in summer 1992. The fundamentals of the bicameral parliamentary system, embedded in the constitutional monarchy, remained unchanged. But those regulations that had determined the influence and the power of the military in the past were partly revised. Firstly, the rights of the still appointed Senate were weakened in favor of the House. The Senate lost its right to initiate legislation; its veto power was reduced to that of a suspensive veto. However, with respect to the process of constitutional amendment, the Senate still held an equal share of responsibility, securing the armed forces and their civilian allies a crucial veto position.

1.2 The Parliamentary System after 1997

After 1992, the old elites were at first able to preserve significant power resources, particularly since the military had been able to save some (although lessened) institutional autonomy and important political privileges. Data shows that the Senate was still the chamber of bureaucrats and the military. Between them, soldiers and bureaucrats hold a share of 75 per cent, and nearly 50 per cent of the seats in the Senate during the periods from 1992 – 1995 and 1995 – 2000.

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The reference to the alleged negative qualities of the elected members of the House of Representatives served as one of the central legitimizing parameters to maintain the Senate as a veto institution. In Thai political discourse - not only on the side of the former power elites - civilian politicians are reproached for being incompetent, corrupt and of dubious moral. According to this view these – sweeping and alleged – characteristics of civil politicians required the control of the “non partial” and “nonpolitical“ Senate. Within the political reform movement of the 1990s this view was also shared by numerous reform-minded groups and organizations within civil society, where a negative perception of political parties and civil politicians had gained ground. The increasing disappointment among the citizens with the political practices of parliament and political parties after 1992 led to a profound de-legitimization of established political actors and institutions of the representative democracy in the view of the civil society.

Hence, a reduction in the institutional veto powers, that still remained in the hands of the military and the bureaucracy, through new adjustments to the Senate’s position in the Thai political system were seen as only one of the urgent aims of constitutional reform in the mid-1990s. Simultaneously, the strengthening of the Senate’s power to control the House and the political parties was an equally important goal of the reform movement. After a first attempt to reform the constitution had failed in 1994, a so-called Constitutional Draft Assembly (CDA) was established in September 1996. The old forces, including the Senate, were

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in too weak a position to influence the assembly entrusted with the preparation of a new constitution\(^8\). The CDA drafted constitution was introduced into the National Assembly (the joined assembly composed of Senate and House) for consideration in late 1997. Although the draft was directed at the vested interests of actors within the state sector, the military and the House of Representatives, the assembly approved the constitution by a vast majority. The reasons for this were, firstly, that the National Assembly had strictly limited options to deal with the draft. The Assembly role was confined to either approving or rejecting the draft as a whole but not to amending it. Secondly, civil society groups and the media had placed massive political pressure upon the National Assembly. Last but not least, the outbreak of the “Asian crisis” in July 1997 had influenced public opinion very much against the “old system.

\(1\) With regard to the basic division of legislative powers between both chambers, the Senate is still subordinated to the House of Representatives. The Senate neither has the right to introduce bills nor does it have a vote of no-confidence in the government. The right to veto decisions of the House of Representatives is strictly restricted. Furthermore the Senate can amend laws, which have passed the House of Representatives. If the latter rejects the amendments, it has to vote again at the end of a six months period\(^9\). Besides the Senate works as a court in

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case of an impeachment trial against members of government, other organs of the constitution as well as high officials. Last but not least, the Senate forms the organ of designation in the filling of the Senate in an impeachment trial has a distinct relevance. Seen from a historical perspective, impeachment trials are one of the classical domains of second chambers.

2) The new constitution replaces the formerly appointed Upper House by a directly elected second chamber. The direct election is supposed to secure that the Senate is neither dominated by the old elites from the military and the bureaucracy nor by political parties and businessmen. Instead the Senate shall work as an institution for control and deliberation, which is free from partisan politics and composed of independent-minded personalities from all sections of society. To achieve this goal, the constitution strictly restricts membership. Actual Members of the House of Representatives or former parliamentarians who have not been out of the post for at least one year are ineligible for candidature (Sect. 126). At the same time a Senator can not be a candidate for the House of Representatives. Among other groups, members of the public administration, employees of state enterprises, and members of the six constitution organs are also excluded from both Senate and House elections (Sect. 109, Sect. 126, 4). While party membership is mandatory for candidates for the House of Representatives (Sect. 107, 4; Sect. 126, 1), all members of political parties are banned from the Senate. Just as in the 15 constitutions before 1997 this requirement illustrates the poor reputation of political parties in Thai politics in a very significant way.
In a similar vein, the new constitutional provisions and related law on the elections to the House of Representatives reflect the wish to clean up politics, stamp out corruption and patronage and to broaden participation in politics without being able, however, to entirely eliminate loopholes. It was hoped, for instance, that the reforms of the electoral system would lead to political parties “that would become less dependent on founders than hitherto” (Prudhisan 1998, 275). However, the example of the Thai Rak Thai (Thai Love Thai) party or TRT has more than ever shown the traditional informal function of political parties to serve primarily as the direct political arm of special interest groups or ambitious personalities. Only shortly after TRT was founded, correctly prognosticated the looming fusion between political and economic power, which runs counter to the spirit of the new Constitution. “TRT will become the political party of a gigantic telecommunications capital group [the Thaksin Shinawatra group].” Within only a couple of years party founder Thaksin, who is often referred to as the richest man in Thailand, had strategically and systematically built up TRT by luring away MPs from other parties and recruiting a base of 11 million party members (according to the party’s own estimates) especially among the rural population. This was followed by the most expensive, most professional and most persistent campaign in the history of Thailand. Eventually

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Thaksin achieved the primary aim of his efforts. TRT’s landslide victory in the January 2001 elections earned him the post of Prime Minister.

2. *Election System and Organizational Context*

2.1 *Senate*

The organizational context and the electoral provisions are laid out by the detailed regulations of the constitution, the new election law as well as the law about the Election Commission itself. Sect. 122 of the new Thai constitution states that in each of the 76 provinces at least one Senator is elected. As a first step each province received one seat per 150,000 registered voters. The remaining seats are distributed according to the population size of each province. The number of mandates per province ranges from between one and eighteen. Mandates are given to those candidates that receive a simple majority of the cast and valid votes (Sect. 93 Election Law). Each voter has one vote, so that the electoral system can be characterized as a combined plurality system with elements of the single-member district method, binomial plurality system and the Single-Non-Transferable Vote System (SNTV).

The new Election Commission (EC), founded in November 1997, was responsible for the organization and conduct of the Senate elections. To secure the “non-party” character of the elections and to safeguard equal chances of competition, the candidates were not allowed to campaign for themselves. Also forbidden was contact with political deputies, parties and state authorities, as long as it was for the purpose of their own candidature, as well as the employment of campaign workforces (Art 36 Party Law, Sect. 91, 92 Election Law).
2.2 House of Representatives

The 1997 Constitution\textsuperscript{12} increased the number of seats in the House from 392 to 500 and introduced a mixed electoral system, partly modeled on Germany’s. One hundred members of the House of Representatives are elected nation-wide on a party list basis and another 400 on a single-member constituency basis (Sect. 109). Simultaneously, the Constitution introduced a separation of powers between party-list MPs and constituency MPs\textsuperscript{13}. While the formers are eligible to become Ministers, the latter are not. If any representative elected on a constituency basis is appointed to be a minister, the person must be removed from the representative seat within 30 days of being appointed and that person or the party will be charged for the new election held in that constituency. The party-list provision is not without restrictions either; it includes a percentage hurdle to limit the number of parties in parliament and to make access for splinter groups more difficult. Any party receiving less than 5 percent of the total national vote does not qualify for any seats. The total number of party-list votes, excluding those cast in favor of parties winning less than 5 percent of votes, will then be

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{12} For a more detailed analysis of the institutional changes introduced by the new Constitution see Connors 1999.

\end{footnotesize}
used to calculate the number of party-list MPs the rest of the political parties will receive (Sect. 100 Constitution; Sect. 76 Election Law).

2.3 House of Representatives

Expectations were high that the changes in the electoral system would result in a considerable reduction in the massive abuses linked to money-politics as were experienced in the past. 3,722 candidates from 37 parties competed for the 500 parliamentary seats (2,700 registered for the 400 single seat constituencies). While a victory of Thai Rak Thai had been anticipated, its sheer magnitude came as a surprise. TRT originally won 256 of the 500 contested seats, giving the party a simple majority of total seats in the House of Representatives. But TRT lost seats in the second electoral round. With a total of 248 MPs Thaksin’s party eventually failed to attain majority by three seats. Since February 2001 the final result has been repeatedly modified as the result of fresh rounds of by-elections in several constituencies without changing the overall power structure though. Although Thaksin needed only one partner to secure his election as Prime Minister and to form a stable government, he opted for a broad coalition, taking both the Chart Thai Party (41 seats) and the New Aspiration Party (36) on board as well as absorbing the Seritham Party (14). This left the Democrat Party (128) of former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai as the principal opposition force. Having gained the support of a comfortable majority, Thaksin may avoid any votes of no-confidence in the future. Such a motion can only be submitted by at least two-fifth of the total number of the existing members of the Lower House (Sect. 185 Constitution). Thaksin passed the first crucial test when the
House of Representatives approved his nomination as Thailand’s 23rd Prime Minister by an overwhelming vote of 340 to 127\textsuperscript{14}.

\textit{The general election of 2001:}

The general election on January 6, 2001, is the first election of representatives under the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand BE 2540 and is different from past general elections. It consisted of the constituency election for 400 House members who represent 400 constituencies and of the party list election for 100 more House members. Considerable changes to electoral rules are aimed at ensuring clean and fair elections and solving long-standing problems of the Thai political system. This is considered as a major political reform to maintain democracy. The changes prompt the research on the voting behaviors and factors behind Thai voters’ decisions to elect representatives. It is expected to create knowledge on the Thai politics and the indicators of democracy and good governance in the nation. The details of the findings are presented in Chapter 5.

\textbf{Table 4.2}

\textbf{Official Results of the Elections to the House of Representatives\textsuperscript{*2001}}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of MP per political party in regions</th>
<th>Bangkok</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>Total No. of MP from single-member constituencies</th>
<th>No. of MP from proportional representation (party list)</th>
<th>Total of MP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thai Rak Thai</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chart Thai</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Aspiration</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chart Pattana</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seritham</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rassadorn</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Motherland</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{14}Election Commission 2001-2001 General Election Results.

The vote count was accompanied by violent protest at several ballot-counting centers. An election commissioner stated that in several areas, protests were started by people who had bet enormous amounts on the elections. Widespread complaints of vote-buying and other irregularities led the Election Commission to schedule re-runs in 62 constituencies across 29 provinces where the winners had received “yellow cards” for suspected fraud. Eight of 62 invalidated winners were handed “red cards” and not allowed to contest the second election round on January 29, 2001.\[viii\] 33 of these 62 winners were TRT candidates (Bangkok Post, January 24, 2001). Election-law violations in the second round “were the worst ever seen by the Election Commission” (Election Commission 2001a). The EC’s main concern prior to the run-offs proved to be right. Candidates seemed to resort to fraud again as they no longer feared punishment from the EC because of the constitutional provision that the House of Representatives must be ready to convene and to select a prime minister within 30 days of the initial polling day (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2001).
In total, the EC had investigated vote fraud in 338 constituencies from the first election round and interrogated almost 10,000 witnesses.\textsuperscript{15}

The Election Commission’s administration process:

\textbf{The above chart indicates the structure of the Election Commission at all levels. That is, at the government level, there is the central Election Commission, and at the provincial level, the Provincial Election Commission still exists. However, at the constituency level, the commission should maintain some of government officers from the Department of Local Administration. As mentioned above, the election}

\textsuperscript{15} Bangkok Post, May 23, 2001
fraud can be committed easily at the constituency and polling station levels since it is easier to control. Therefore, the election officials at these levels should be those who are in the government circles. This is because there have already been the disciplines in controlling their behaviors, thus, it will be easier to investigate and punish if any fraud occurs.

From the obtained data, there is an explanation on the structure and work of the Election Commission. It can be concluded that, although the Election Commission is political free organization, its administrative structure was still ambiguous. There were various redundant operational lines of work. Additionally, in terms of management principle aiming at being the organization to enhance the honest and efficiency in Thailand electoral system, the Election Commission was not able to fulfill this requirement due to limitation from excessive work and inadequate personnel, as well as the decreasing budget for personnel support.

For the research question of “Will the Election Commission be able to create honest and efficient election system?”, the research results can be concluded as follows:

1) **Vote buying:** Fraud in the election still appeared during this election process despite the expectation that the new constitution would be able to solve such problem. From the surveys on the operation of the Election Commission and the People Network for Election presented in the newspaper report, there were several behaviors indicating fraud in election or vote buying in various constituencies of Bangkok.

2) **The operation of the Election Commission:** The society expected this new form of organization would be able to administer the election fairly and honestly. However, according to the research result, members of Election Commissions in some constituencies performed
their duties in favor of certain candidates who were their relatives. In addition, some members of Commission did not dare to make a decision concerning the offences committed by certain candidates or political parties. Besides, some of them were not fair in allocation of time for election campaign, or refused to give red card (revoke the right) for those who violated the election law, or did not cooperate at work or lacked unity. These mistakes represented the inefficiency of the Election Commission performance during this election.

Moreover, the Election Commission also confronted problems from vote counting due to its new procedure and complexity of the system. Therefore, there were protests from some constituencies in Bangkok in order to conduct the re-counting of votes. This was because there were some adjustments in the procedure. All the ballots from all the polling stations in each constituency were taken to the designated place for vote counting, and the results must be in accordance with the report before commencing the vote counting. This new system was rather complicated. The operation on this new system resulted in the delay in reporting the election result, and probably in the mistakes in vote counting.

3) **This election was not able to solve problems concerning the quality of MPs:** Although in various constituencies of Bangkok, many new candidates from new parties were successful with considerably high rates. However, it does not mean that these new members of parliaments are all of high quality. It is only an opportunity for the new MPs with creative vision to work for the country.

4) **Political Reform:** The change of election system was only the commencement if the reform. Therefore, the new system was not successful in various aspects. Several
mistakes occurred. However, it is considered that this political reform gave a learning opportunity on new systems for all parties, including the government, private sector, and general people. Considerable experience is required for political reform.

5) **The change in election campaigns:** Due to the Act accompanying the constitution concerning the trading of votes and election fraud, the fraud and trading of votes have been changed from the past. Various new forms of vote buying have been initiated to avoid the election law. Among them, which became the phenomena during this election period, include the arrangement of travels and patronage of various community activities. Besides, some candidates or political parties applied the election law as a tool to pull the legs of their competitors by various methods.

3. **Political violence:**

   At least 18 people have been killed and scores injured in election-related shootouts since November 9. Some 130,000 policemen have been deployed and the military is on standby. Hundreds of grenades, rifles and pistols have been seized, and more than 200 politicians have asked for police protection.

   Vote-buying mushroomed during the country's economic boom in the 1980s. The depressed economy is expected to make parliamentary seats more valuable because they are perceived as an easy route to riches.

   The Nakhon Ratchsima Rajabhat Institute, which has been studying the extent of election fraud, estimates that at least US$460 million in bribe money will circulate nationally during the campaign.
The Election Commission has already disqualified three parliamentary candidates for vote buying and will likely ban scores more for offenses ranging from doling out cash and other inducements for votes; spending over the campaign limit and using violence or intimidation to sway voters.

In one of the amended electoral rules, the EC is empowered to issue a red card, expelling candidates from the polls, hence doing away with the cumbersome procedure of holding repeated rounds of voting to resolve contested results.

On the basis of reports leaked by electoral officials, the EC may issue up to 120 red cards, mostly to Thai Rak Thai candidates, followed by Chat Pattana and the Democrats.

4. The Parties

Out of the 43 parties that have registered for the elections only a handful have a realistic chance of securing sufficient votes to have any effect on the outcome. Thai Rak Thai party is tipped to win about 180 of the 500 parliamentary seats followed by the Democrats with 125 or so seats.

The three medium-sized parties, Chat Thai, Chat Pattana and New Aspiration, are expected to take about 50 seats each and the remainder to be shared among small parties.

By such projections, Thai Rak Thai will have a mandate to be the core party in the next government. The support of smaller parties in Thailand's fragmented political arena, where loyalties can swiftly change, is vital in forming coalition governments. Invariably, no single party wins an outright majority.
Given Thaksin's problems, the prospect of either Banharn Silapa-archa of Chat Thai or Chavalit Yongchaiyudh of the New Aspiration Party demanding the post of prime minister as a pre-condition for joining hands with Thai Rak Thai in forming a coalition is no longer unthinkable.

Since joining with the Democrats is highly unlikely, Thai Rak Thai needs the support of these smaller partners to be assured of the seat of power.

Consequently, the country faces the possibility of having the old guard, identified with money politics and the patronage system, back in power, despite the best intentions and efforts of the NCCC and the Election Commission.

1. The Democrat Party

The party led by Chuan Leekpai. Victory for the Democrats would give them - and Chuan - a third term in office in the past eight years. The first term, which lasted from September 1992 to May 1995, ended in humiliating circumstances over illegal land deals brokered by Suthep Thaugsuban, the Minister of Transport and Communications in the most recent government.

Chuan's second term as prime minister started well following the collapse of the Chavalit Yongchaiyudh administration in November 1997. He helped restore stability to the country following the crippling financial crisis that broke in mid-1997.

However, a falling currency, a spiralling stock exchange, high public debt and stubborn non performing loans have eroded
confidence, especially among farmers, who comprise up to 60 percent of the population. Opinion polls say voters are likely to punish the Democrats over such post-meltdown measures as selling off national banks and companies. Opposition parties have struck a nationalist chord by accusing Chuan of mortgaging the country to foreigners.

Also, the disqualification in March of the influential Interior Minister Sanan Kachornprasart for five years from politics severely dented the party's image. Sanan became the first victim for the NCCC when it found him guilty of concealing assets. Nevertheless, Sanan, who is the undisputed kingmaker in Thai politics, is likely to still wield considerable influence behind the scenes.

While the Democrats have traditionally been perceived as the most honest of Thai politicians, several members have recently been linked to shady deals. Once again, Suthep has been linked to abuse of funds in setting up a co-operative in his southern constituency of Surat Thani.

The Democrats are pinning hopes on delivering the majority of Bangkok's 37 parliamentary seats, a crucial indicator of middle class support. They have also been rallying the faithful in their stronghold in the South.

Internal bickering has not helped the party's cause. At the December announcement of the elections, prominent members of Chuan's economic team refused to run for another term. Deputy Prime Minister (and Commerce Minister) Supachai Panitchpakdi said he would not run, saying he wanted to prepare for his term as head of World Trade
Organization. Deputy Finance Minister Pisit Lee-atham also indicated he would quit politics.

The Democrats have benefited from the cloud hanging over Thaksin. Dissatisfaction with Thaksin and doubts that the Thai Rak Thai might not be as effective should he be forced to quit, have translated directly into support for the Democrats.

2. *The Thai Rak Thai Party*

The party led by multi-billionaire Thaksin Shinawatra. The party is a newcomer to the political scene, having been formed as a vehicle for the oft-expressed desire of Thaksin to become prime minister.

Since its inception, Thai Rak Thai has promised to make a difference by injecting new blood into politics and by introducing sweeping economic policy changes.

It has succeeded in attracting more than 100 MPs from the dissolved parliament, allegedly offering them inducements of millions of baht each to switch allegiances.

Thaksin has endeared himself to the rural vote (but not to economists) by promising a three-year debt moratorium to farmers and by handing out one million baht to all of Thailand's 70,000 villages.

Thai Rak Thai has also boosted its chances upcountry through defections by members of the New Aspiration Party, Chat Thai and other smaller parties. Behind the promises, though, doubts remain over whether Thaksin can deliver.
There is no doubt Thaksin has proved himself as an excellent businessman by making his Shin Corp the Kingdom's media and technological giant. Detractors will argue, however, that this success was based on the former military man being able to secure lucrative monopolistic contracts with the government.

If elected, he promises to act like the country's CEO - just call it Thailand Inc - and inject into the government his business and professional prowess. But critics point out that his public service records are nothing to boast of. He is haunted by his brash statement in an earlier tenure in office as a deputy prime minister that he could solve Bangkok's traffic problems in six months. Nothing of the sort happened.

And of course, the debacle of his transferred assets, which has raised concern over his claims of an honest and transparent administration.

3. *The New Aspiration Party*

The party led by *Chavalit Yongchaiyudh*. The former prime minister has a huge credibility gap to overcome following his resignation amid accusations of grossly mismanaging the Thai economy during the onset of the 1997 economic crisis.

His publicity is not helped by his deputy party leader, Chalerm Yubamrung, who has an abrasive style - as do his two sons, who are also running for parliament.

More important was the defection of 46 party members, a faction known as the Wang Nam Yen group, to Thai Rak Thai. This was seen as
a serious blow to the party as the group regards a big part of the Central Plains as its stronghold.

Despite this, Chavalit is putting on his usual confident. He has a strong and loyal backing in the Northeast, which will ensure that a number of NAP members are elected.

This will allow him to once again negotiate for some prominent cabinet portfolios in any coalition.

4. The Chat Thai Party

The party led by Banharn Silapa-archa. In his brief tenure as prime minister in 1996, Banharn's legacy included a failing economy, infrastructure in his home province Supan Buri that is the finest in the land, and a graduate degree thesis that was the laughing stock of the academic world.

To international observers and the majority of Bangkok's middle class, Banharn is no more than a provincial politician, short in stature and vision. But to other local politicians, he's a force to reckon with, especially in the old government-forming process where alliances count for everything.

Chat Thai is all about Banharn, his relatives and very loyal comrades, who command a large following in the Central Plains and the Northeast. The wily Banharn and Chat Thai have always managed to forge alignments which landed them important ministerial portfolios.
In the days leading up to the election reports have been widespread that he has been in close contact with Thaksin, who would like Chart Chai as his preferred partner.

5. **Chat Pattana**

The party led by Korn Dabaransri. While the odds are low that the party will beat the Democrats or Thai Rak Thai, Chat Pattana has steadily built its supporter base in the hope of swinging the tide. Korn and his deputy, Suwat Liptapallop, are the driving forces of Chat Pattana.

Korn has taken the line that he is ready for the premiership, portraying himself as a new-generation politician and a visionary. His leadership skills are a source of doubt; however as most of his government portfolios have come from political arrangements rather than his talents.

Korn has said that if the Election Commission disqualifies too many candidates it could spark a coup. In late November, army commander-in-chief General Surayud Chulanont revealed that some officers were advocating a power grab to forestall what they see as a tainted election that will only produce another corrupt and ineffective government.

Korn has been particularly vocal in calling on Thaksin to throw in the towel before the elections in the "national interest" and is seen as an unlikely partner for Thaksin.

6. **Prachakorn Thai**

The party led by Samak Sundaravej. Prachakorn Thai once dominated Bangkok, so much so that its feisty battle-scarred leader has often been tipped as a prime minister. But in the last few years the party
has lost its firepower and manpower with members defecting to bigger parties in search of more secure (and lucrative) political careers.

Samak's landslide win in the Bangkok governor's race this year - against a Thai Rak Thai candidate - saved the rightwing party from possible extinction after nearly two decades.

On becoming governor, Samak tried to anoint a successor and several high-profile politicians were canvassed. However, party officials say Samak's grip on Prachakorn Thai is so strong it would be virtually impossible for a new face to lead effectively.

The new electoral process will make it difficult for small parties like Prachakorn Thai to survive.

7. **The Seritham Party**

The party led by Prachuab Chaiyasan. Among the smaller parties, Seritham has been the most unequivocal about its political principle, saying it will not merge with any party.

Seritham was at the center of controversy when Prachuab quit his university affairs portfolio with the Chart Pattana Party to take up leadership at Seritham. Prachuab's move didn't sit well with former Chart Pattana friends and allies.

Other parties include the Social Action Party, the Solidarity Party, Palang Dharma (to which Thaksin formerly belonged), the Rassadorn Party and the Thai Motherland Party.

5. **Impact of Election:**

The impact of the election on any further consolidation of democracy in Thailand can be analyzed by considering two aspects. Firstly, the future development of the political economy of elections and secondly the role of the newly elected Senate. With regard to the first point it can be concluded, that the election only partly fulfilled the initial hope of breaking up the previous practices of electoral politics. The circumstances of the elections have shown considerable "defects" in the
electoral regime of Thai democracy which seriously violate the principles of "meaningful" elections.\textsuperscript{16} The deliberate violations of the election law by a large number of candidates have proved once again that the attitudinal commitment of the political elite in Thailand towards the core principles of democracy is only weak. Although the trend towards an improvement in quality standards at both the elections to the Senate and the House can not be ignored, the old mechanisms and tactics for accumulating votes by candidates have proved to be effective and persistent.

Viewed from the perspective of democratization theory, two more aspects appear dubious about the latest election. Firstly, the decisions of the Election Commission to suspend results without having obtained sufficient proof against suspected candidates. This happened particularly with the regard to the Senate polls. On the one hand it has demonstrated the independence of the commission, even more so since many of the candidates in question were relatives or friends of leading members of government and politicians (Bangkok Post, March 21, 2000). As it can be concluded from statements of EC-members, this decision was politically motivated. Therefore the commission, on the other hand, had given up its political neutrality and started a well-directed attempt to keep “unwanted“ candidates away from the Senate. Although the media and civil society groups welcomed the EC’s actions, the commission created a problematic precedent to which a less reform-orientated commission with opposite intentions could refer to in the future. Moreover the commission’s strict interpretation of the election law caused a delay to the extent that the Senate could not convene for its constituent session until June 2000. As the Thai Constitutional Court judged in April 2000, the second chamber

could only assemble, when all 200 senators had been elected and the Election Commission had confirmed their appointment.\textsuperscript{17}

In more than a dozen rounds of elections and re-runs to the senate and the House of Representatives since March 2000, the EC has fully exercised the powers given to the agency by the Constitution and the Election Law. Not only those who were disqualified as candidates or punished for cheating have expressed doubt whether the EC has always acted fairly. A Senate committee wants the commission’s powers restricted to the supervision of polls whereas the courts should be in charge to discipline cheats\textsuperscript{18}. The Commission itself is more worried about the burden repeated rounds of elections pose for the electorate because the voter turn-out keeps dropping in each run-off (Bangkok Post, May 23, 2001). The debate about the role and power of the Commission might lead to a revision of its rights and duties.

Secondly, the exclusion of political parties has to be noted. It has often been mooted, that Thai parties lack social embodiment, that their responsiveness for societal demands and their ability to articulate social interests are only poorly developed and that all attempts to institutionalize a more representative, inclusive as well as programmatically differentiated party system have failed up to now. In this situation, any attempt to create a second, merit Socratic chamber in order to control the first chamber, could be a valid strategy for strengthening the democratic quality of political representation. But the Senate vote showed that the attempt to fill such a chamber through election can not cope with the

\textsuperscript{17} Bangkok Post, April 28, 2000
\textsuperscript{18} Bangkok Post, May 2, 2001
political conditions of the Thai society. In a given political environment, in which political parties are already established as electoral machines, parties and those candidates supported by them enjoy significant advantages in competing for votes over independent candidates not having this kind of support. It is unlikely that candidates, acting as rational vote seekers, abstain from making use of these advantages. The realization of the merit Socratic principle on the ground of general, competitive elections appears to be impossible from this perspective. Moreover the public discussion about the introduction of a “anti-partisan” Senate represents an obvious step backward to the debates of the seventies and the eighties, when party politics had been equated with corruption. The exclusion of parties from political competition hardly contributes to their strengthening and democratization.

6. Criticism:

Any electoral evaluation turns out to be ambivalent. On the one hand the elections marked a progressive step in the development of Thai democracy. On the other hand they demonstrated loopholes and remaining institutional shortcomings of the electoral system. First of all, despite all irregularities the elections to the House of Representatives produced a clear winner and the much-desired stable coalition government based on a solid majority of seats. Additionally, several established political families were defeated, others who were re-elected “found their parties reduced to local curiosities”\(^\text{19}\). But regional

differences are obvious. While 70 per cent of the MPs in Bangkok are new, practitioners of old-style money politics succeeded again in the Northeast where only 15 per cent of the elected MPs are first-time parliamentarians\textsuperscript{20}. According to Thai newspaper reports, however, many of the newcomers are actually family members, relatives or former canvassers of current MPs.

More significant in terms of institutional reforms were the Senate elections. They opened up the last institutional “reserved domains” of the military and the bureaucracy in a democratic way. The Thai press and civil society groups welcomed the outcome of the elections as a step towards the strengthening of democracy. In defiance of their fearing the infiltration of the Senate by partisan candidates, the political aims have been reached at least in Bangkok. Most of the elected candidates have been known for their socio-political engagement and their integrity\textsuperscript{21} (Bangkok Post March 9, 2000; March 12, 2000). However, all in all only three per cent of the first round winners came from this walk of life. The national result did not live up to expectations. In partial contrast to the trend of the House elections, still 38 per cent of all new senators elected in the first round were members of “political families” (politicians and their relatives); 34 per cent have been retired civil servants and 15 per cent belong to the group of businessmen. At a cautious estimate about 40 per cent of the winners had close contacts to political parties, notwithstanding prohibiting clauses in the election law. The second round


\textsuperscript{21}Bangkok Post March 9, 2000; March 12, 2000
of voting in some provinces changed this picture only slightly. From the suspended 78 candidates, 45 won again. Violations of the election law were reported in 30 of 35 provinces. The restrictive regulations concerning campaigning and vote-buying have been disregarded again, so that the Election Commission decided to fix even a third election round (June 2000) in 9 provinces for a total of 12 seats\(^\text{22}\).

At the same time however both Senate and House elections can be regarded as cautious step towards more “election quality”\(^\text{23}\). For the first time ever Thailand’s electoral history,

\begin{itemize}
  \item the legal requirements were brought into effect;
  \item results were annulled because of irregularities;
  \item candidates who had been suspected of breaking the election law were prosecuted and sentenced;
  \item The organs responsible for conducting the elections proved to be relatively independent from political pressure on the part of the government and the political establishment.
\end{itemize}

This has all to be judged positively. But some problematic aspects remain. While many rules were obeyed, other provisions of the Thai election could hardly be implemented. While in the case of the Senate election at least in Bangkok the ban on campaigning mostly had the intended effects and socially engaged candidates were able to successfully translate their good reputation into votes. In rural areas,

\(^{22}\) The Nation, May 30, 2000
where nearly 80 per cent of the national electorate live, the ban had the opposite effect, though. Since the established electoral machines of political parties and politicians could only be partially stopped, it was almost impossible for unknown and "new faces" to make themselves known to the voters.

Contrary to the intentions of the CDA and the Election Commission it is likely, that the representatives of the established political class subsequently profited by these rules in the Senate elections, as the high number of elected former parliamentarians and relatives or friends of incumbent members of government or MPs indicates. Although in the context of the suspension of the elections in 35 provinces the commission proved to be immune against the attempts of political influence-taking, this measure was not unproblematic. The partial suspension of the results took place on the basis of a weak legal foundation; only in five cases did the EC have sufficient ‘hard’ proof for suspending candidates from the second election run. Even if results had been objected to on the basis of violations against the election law, the question still remains, what were the criteria of assessment for the commission vis-a-vis differentiating valid results from void results within one single district. The consequent solution to this conflict would have been to suspend all results in the district in case of reported violations of the law. The elections to the Lower House were accompanied by many inconsistencies too. For example, it has remained an open question how many of the challenges to

24 Bangkok Post March 16, 2000; The Nation, March 29, 2000
poll results were genuine complaints by voters and how many came from unsuccessful candidates or parties or even from gambling syndicates.

8. **Political and Economical trends in Thailand after the General Election**:

The political trends touch on three areas:

1. the overall trends in Thai politics;
2. the general election which was held on the 6th of January 2001; and
3. The immediate future of the new Thaksin Shinawatra Government.

Overall, there is a belief amongst the Thai people that we are living through extraordinary times. There seem to be far reaching political changes brought about by the full implementation of the 1997 Constitution. However, there were a number of issues and events, which still remind Thais of their political past.

The following are some extraordinary changes that have taken place, or have been taking place, in Thailand. Firstly, Thailand has finally gained a fully elected senate with far reaching powers, especially in appointment and dismissal. Secondly, we have eight independent institutions to guarantee people’s rights and freedom; greater accountability and transparency of governance; and the rule of law. The

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25 POLITICAL TRENDS IN THAILAND : M. R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra  
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main independent institutions are the Constitutional Court, the Election Commission and the Counter-Corruption Commission. Both changes occurred for the first time in Thailand’s history.

The 6 January 2001 election saw changes within the political system. Many political “dynasties” were thrown out, especially in some outskirt provinces of Bangkok. For the first time in Thai history, Thailand seemed to be moving towards a two-party system. Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai Party and the Democrat Party won nearly 70 percent of the votes for the party list candidates and over 60 percent of the votes for constituency MPs.

The second major change occurred within the Thai media, who have relished greater freedoms. However, the independence of the media, especially that of certain television channels such as Channel 3 and I-TV, was questioned. Both channels are closely linked with the Thai Rak Thai Party in a business sense. On the other hand, some elements of old style politics remained. The elected Senate was involved in a series of scandals. There were several rounds to elect the senate after disqualifications and, in some cases, it took some five rounds of elections for the Electoral Commission to accept the results. Some were dismissed for cases involving sex crimes and bribery. In some ways the newly elected Senate, which was supposed to embody the new values of Thai politics, was seen as no better than the Lower House. The Lower House was seen in the past to embody the worst things in Thai politics. During the last election, the Election Commission failed to live up to its expectation of stamping out electoral fraud and vote-buying. In fact, these problems were probably more extensive than in the previous election. Another case was Dr Thaksin’s pledge that he would engage in new thinking and new action. However, some old faces remained in his
coalition government who had been discredited in the past, especially because of their involvement in the Chavalit Yongchaiyudh Government in 1996-1997.

Although the overall trends appeared confusing, a clear feature was the extraordinary performance by the Thai Rak Thai Party in the General Election held on 6th January 2001. The Thai Rak Thai Party won 248 seats out of a total of 500 seats, 48 out of 100 party list MPs and 200 out of the 400 constituency MPs. It won more than nearly twice as many votes and twice the number of MPs as the nearest challenger, the Democrat Party. The Thai Rak Thai Party also destroyed many small and medium-sized political parties. The Democrat Party won an overall 128 seats, out of which, 31 were from the party list and 97 from the constituency elections. This performance saw the Democrat Party securing the most number of seats in its 54-year history. The other parties that secured seats were the Chart Thai party with 41 seats, the New Aspiration Party with 36, and the Chartpattana with 29.

Reason for the Victory of Thai Rak Thai Party:

It was the general public’s fatigue with the Democrat Party and its party leader, Chuan Leekpai. The fatigue with the Democrat Party played a very important part in the resounding defeat at the hands of the Thai Rak Thai Party. People were upset with the Democrat Party on two counts. The Democratic Party failed to revive the economy in a manner that was both evident and rapid in the eyes of the general public. However, the Democratic Party believed that it has laid down the foundations for a full economic recovery, and for a longer term, sustainable growth. The second factor is that the Thai people generally
lose interest in things when they have too much of it. Hence, they lost interest in the Democratic Party which was in office for nearly six years (September 1992 to November 2000). Chuan Leekpai was the Prime Minister for nearly six years out of eight.

The second reason for the Thai Rak Thai Party’s resounding victory was its marketing strategy. The current political situation has become one of marketing-led politics. The Thai Rak Thai Party obfuscated the small print and packaged the ideas that would appeal to a broad spectrum of people. In the process, the media seemed to have almost been co-opted into repeating the Thai Rak Thai’s positions.

The third reason was the Thai Rak Thai’s success at the grassroots level. The expanding cells tactic — an old Communist Party tactic — was significant in the victory of the Party with the countryside. It worked with one person finding ten new party members, and those ten find another ten more.

The last reason had to do with funding. The Thai Rak Thai Party had more money than other political parties. It also had the largest amount of funds in Thailand’s political history. Officially, the Thai Rak Thai Party had more than three times the amount of donations given to other parties.

After the election, Dr. Thaksin set up a government of more than 350 MPs. There remained a lot of uncertainty about the near future. Five factors determine Dr Thaksin’s and the Thai Rak Thai Party’s stay in office.

The first factor was Thaksin’s alleged non-declaration, or less than comprehensive declaration, of his assets. The National Counter-Corruption Commission forwarded Dr Thaksin’s case to the Constitution
Court for consideration. If found guilty, Dr Thaksin would be ineligible for holding political offices for five years, including the appointment of Prime Minister. To date, there was still no verdict. However, in its short history, the Constitutional Court has never gone against the verdict of the National Counter-Corruption Commission. Some astrologers were already predicting another political change in April this year, around the time of the Thai New Year, falling on 13 April. Such predictions could turn out to be self-fulfilling prophecies.

The second factor that would determine the Thai Rak Thai Party’s success in governance was the government’s performance, particularly in two areas. They were economic recovery and countering corruption. The Thai Rak Thai Party made five promises on economic recovery. Four were obvious ones. One was to establish a fund of one million baht for each village of the 79,000 villages in Thailand over the next year. This amounted to 80 million baht. The second promise was to provide a debt moratorium for farmers. The third promise was to guarantee that all patients paid only 30 baht for any medical treatment. Presumably, the treatment could range from being for an ordinary cold to cancer. The fourth promise was the establishment of a central asset management company to reduce the NPL problem and to generate greater lending on the part of the banks. But there was a fifth promise which was deemphasized over the last few weeks. It was to not borrow any more money in order to avoid an increase in the public debt.

There were many legitimate questions as to the feasibility of fulfilling all these promises at the same time. First of all, although the one-million baht fund could eventually be found, the public debt would still have to be increased to cover the debt moratorium for all farmers.
The new government cannot finance its campaign promises without borrowing more money. Indeed in some ways, the new government had been retracting its election promises by emphasizing that there was “small print” in their election campaign promises. For example, it was recently announced that the promise for debt moratorium did not apply to all farmers, but, in fact, small-scale farmers. However, the word “small-scale” did not appear in the election campaign.

Another such example was the recent announcement that people had to make a contribution of 100 baht a month for a whole year in order to enjoy the subsidized cost of 30 baht for medical treatment. Hence questions remained on the government’s ability to fulfill its campaign pledges, especially where economic recovery was concerned. In fact many are predicting that the public debt may go up to as high as 80 or 90 percent.

Currently, it stands at about 60 percent of GDP. Financing all the new government’s promises will be a very difficult task indeed. The second area that will be difficult is in the handling of corruption. In government, there existed intra-coalition politics and potential conflicts of interest. This made it difficult for Dr Thaksin to dismiss any suspicious member of his government, despite his earlier announcement to do so. The main problem was the potential conflict of interest for the businessmen in the new government — not the least of all being Dr Thaksin who is the wealthiest capitalist of them all. He would have to prove that his policy, for example, on telecommunications, was fair, equitable and beneficial to people at large and not just beneficial to the Shin Corporation and Shin Group which he is closely related to in a business sense. The difficult task is to simultaneously manage conflicts of
interest and to eliminate what could be seen as corruption within the current ruling elite.

The third factor was the government’s relationship with the press. Currently, it seems to be something of a honeymoon period. In the past few months, the Thai Rak Thai Party demonstrated impatience with even small criticisms and one hopes that this will not be a trend for the future. The longer a government stays in office, the more criticism it will attract.

Displays of impatience will generate a vicious cycle of criticism. The fourth factor is the drug problem. This point in some ways should be separated from the government’s performance because it has its own dynamics. The drug problem cannot be seen as a partisan or political problem because the opposition has given its full backing to the government to stamp out the increasingly serious drug problem. However, the manner in which the government handled the problem became connected to Thailand’s foreign relations with its neighbours — hence it as

Become a political problem. There were two main political issues within the drug problem. The first is with methamphetamine drugs. Most of it is produced in neighbouring countries, such as Myanmar, and imported into Thailand. Last year, about 700 million tablets were distributed in Thailand but the authorities only managed to recover 100 million. Although the figure of 100 million was the biggest amount recovered in history, the amount of methamphetamines entering Thailand kept increasing. It seems that we in Thailand are fighting a losing battle. A second issue is the discussion on carrying out arbitrary search and arrest in certain areas of the country. If these measures were carried out it would create problems with nongovernmental organizations, the press,
and ultimately with other countries, especially western countries. If the
government could reduce the drugs problem, it would be applauded. But
there are reservations with the way the government may handle the
problem. If this confusion is added to other causes of confusion, the
immediate future of the new government may come into question.

The last factor is intra-coalition politics. Despite the Thai Rak Thai
Party’s pledge that it would engage in new thinking and new actions,
there were many “old faces” within the government. To his credit, Dr
Thaksin had excluded many so-called “unacceptable figures” from the
Cabinet. Although the Thai Rak Thai Party had by far the most votes
within the Parliament, intra-coalition government politics may ultimately
undermine the stability of the government.

To conclude, we are living in extraordinary times in Thailand.
There are many drastic changes occurring. At the same time, there
remained some reminders from the political past that have implications
for the immediate future of the new Thai government. The most
important factors are the government’s performance in the two areas
mentioned above and the question of a conflict of interest arising between
the “public” and “private” spheres in cabinet decision making.

The research results in many interesting findings about eligible
voters and the general election as follows.

Firstly the general election was an important political phenomenon
and drew considerable public attention. Most respondents, especially
those in the North and the Northeast, were highly interested in and had
much knowledge about the then upcoming election. Most respondents
remembered the names of 2-3 candidates in their constituency, could
name 3-5 political parties that were running in their constituency and
identified 2-3 similar names of candidates and parties. The high attention
and the good knowledge about the election resulted directly from people
following up election-related news through public relations channels,
especially television and vote campaigns.

Secondly Thai people cast their votes with the high hope that, with
a high turnout, they could make a difference. However, most people think
that sometimes they do not understand political issues and do not believe
that common people can have any influence on political developments.
They also think that government officials do not care about their feelings.
The problem must be solved.

Thirdly there is the good sign that Thai people support the culture
of democratic government although they have yet to adjust their attitudes
to a certain degree to solve some cultural issues. In other words, most
people agree that politics concern everybody, not only any particular
group of people. They also agree that those who do not cast their vote fail
to perform their duty. Most people think that one’s fortune is the result of
hard work, not luck. All these views support the democratic culture.
Besides, most people express disagreement towards any culture that block
democratic development. For instance, most people disagree with the
idea that politics and government should rest only with politicians. The
majority refuses to accept that corruption is sometimes necessary to let
the government continue with its work.

Fourthly the meaning of democracy among Thai people is in line
with that of western democracy in the way that they seriously recognize
the importance of rights, freedom and equality. This confirms that the
current constitution (1997) is paving the right way. Meanwhile, quick consideration finds that Thai people support every dimension of democracy. That is most people are satisfied with the current democratic government of the nation and deny any direction that contradicts democracy.

However, if they are made to choose either democracy or economic prosperity, they will still prefer good living conditions.

**Fifthly** the intention of the constitution to create public participation in politics tends to succeed as most people begin to be interested in political participation especially in electoral activities. Although most people still take part in simple activities such as political talks with friends and family members, part of them are interested in attending vote campaign speeches. To increase public participation may depend on attempts to convince people of the use of electoral public relations such as persuasion for other people to cast their votes or the use of honest support for favorite candidates or political parties.

**Sixthly** there are a variety of factors behind people’s choices of candidates but most people focus on two factors: (1) the qualifications or capabilities of candidates such as their visions and recognized honesty and (2) the family backgrounds of candidates and their bonds with localities. Most people consider very carefully whether candidates have contributed to their communities and are able to solve the problems of communities. People also consider candidates’ family backgrounds and the long records of their families contributing to localities.

**Songkhla Province :**
The general election in Thailand is the main research study undertaken in this thesis. For knowing the impact of general elections, people reaction after the election, problems faced in the election etc. we have further taken Songkhla province as special reference for this study. Here brief background of the province is given and the next chapter contains the survey result of the province.

Songkhla is a border province in southern Thailand, adjoining the state of Kendah in Malaysia. It has been known as a principal sea port and coastal trading post from time immemorial. As a historic town, Songkhla has inherited ancient ruins, arts, and places of cultural importance in addition to its unique tradition, dialect, and folk entertainment, a reflection of its rich cultural heritage for later generations to appreciate.

Songkhla has fine beaches, enchanting waterfalls, and a tranquil lake-a manifestation of its abundant natural resources. While Songkhla is noted for its fishery industry, Hat Yai serves as a transportation and communications hub of the South, with this bustling town linking with various destinations in the neighboring provinces and in Malaysia. Only 30 kilometers apart and with contrastive characteristics, Hat Yai and Songkhla can be ideal places for the tourist to visit: Hat Yai, a fast booming city in trade and business, while Songkhla remains a sleepy town still able to maintain its unique identity of ancient and historical flavors.
Map 4.1

Highlighted Songkhla Province
Songkhla covers an area of 7,939.9 square kilometers (approximately 1,848,472 acres). It is divided into 16 administrative Amphoe (districts), i.e. Amphoe Muang, Amphoe Hat Yai, Amphoe Chana, Amphoe Ranode, Amphoe Bangklam, Amphoe Namom, Amphoe
Khlong Hoykhong, Amphoe Nathawi, Amphe Thepha, Amphoe Sabayoi, Amphoe Sadao, Amphoe Rattaphoom, Amphoe Singha Nakhon, Amphoe Khuanniang, and Amphoe Krasaesin. The population of the province is 1,156,672.

- **Boundaries**
  
  On the North Is Nakorn Si Thammarat province  
  On the South Is the state of Kendah in Malaysia.  
  On the East Is Patthalung province and Satun province  
  On the West Is Pattani province and Yala province

- **History**

  Songkhla or in its correct Malay form Singgora was the seat of an old Malay Kingdom with heavy Srivijayan influence. In ancient times (200 - 1400 AD), Songkhla formed the northern extent of the old Malay Kingdom of Langkasuka. The city-state became a tributary of Nakhon Si Thammarat, suffering destructions at attempts to gain independence several times. Since the 18th century it has been firmly under Thai suzerainty.

  In the 18th century many Chinese immigrants, especially from Guangdong and Fujian, came to the province. Quickly rising to economic wealth, one of them won the bidding of the major tax farm of the province in 1769, establishing the Na Songkhla family as the most wealthy and influential one. In 1777 the family also gained political power, when the old governor was dismissed and Luang Inthakhiri (Yiang, Chinese name Wu Rang (吴俍)) became the new governor. In 1786
the old governor started an uprising, which was however put down after four months. The post was inherited in the family and held by 8 of his descendends until 1901, when Phraya Wichiankhiri (Chom) was honorably retired as part of the administrative reforms of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab. The family's house is now used as the Songkhla National Museum.

In 1909, it was annexed by Siam as part of Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 negotiated with the British Empire.

Songkhla hadn't been affected by the recent outbreak of Pattani Separatism started in 2004, however three bombs exploded during the 2005 Songkhla bombings on April 3, 2005 create concern the violence might spread into this province as well.

- **Climate**

  Songkhla's weather conditions are hot and humid. There are two seasons, rainy and summer. The rainy season begins in June and lasts till January, and the summer is from February through May.

- **Songkhla Election Commission**

  The working process of the Election Commission evaluate the success of the new election system whether or not it achieve the objective of the current constitution. the roles of the Election Commission have an affect on the change in patronage system, canvasser system, roles of the political parties and candidates, as well as the election behavior of the public. In Songkhla, the influence of new electoral institutions and process is presented only in certain aspects and at certain levels,
especially in the campaign to encourage people to vote, and the roles in election coordination and administration as stipulated in the constitution. However, the effects on the people’s voting behavior and the election campaigns conducted by various parties are rather unclear.

In the province, the new electoral system was successful to a certain extent since it was able to encourage people to have more interest and participate more in the election. The election process helped promote the belief that people have major roles in the political development. The roles of the Election Commission, which was an institutional mechanism of the electoral system used in election administration in province, was distinguished and satisfactory. However, its roles in changing the election behavior of the public and politicians were not clear. On the contrary, in practice, there were still many weak points to be improved.

In the study on the operation of the Songkhla Election Commission, which was the institute to direct and coordinate the election, several operational and personal problems were found.

Therefore, its role in efficient administration of the election was not clear. Besides, the problems of Provincial Election Commission also affected the work of Constituency Election Commissions, and hence problems occurred in the overall system as illustrated in the turbulence occurring in various constituencies. The fact that as much as 76.9% used their right to vote was partially caused by the law stipulating that voting in an election was a duty, as well as various agencies’ continuous campaigns encouraging people to vote. As or the roles of Non-Government Organizations in monitoring the election, there were problems in preparation of manpower and information due to the lack of coordination from the Election Commission. Thus, their performance was
rather unsuccessful. The case study in Songkhla Province reflected the fact in the operation of the overall system of the Election Commission. The institutional role in coordination of Songkhla Provincial Election Commission was not successful because of several weaknesses, especially the problems similar to those of Pattani, which included management, leadership, office administration, and personnel management.

The next chapter is based on the research survey undertaken in the year 2003-2004. The Songkhla province has been selected for the field study. General election that took place in the year 2001 still left memories with the general people on Songkhla province.

Furthermore, the chapter discusses about that problems in election system.