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Thailand’s 20 December 2020 Provincial Elections: A Contest among National Political Parties and a Quasi-Party? Evidence from the Andaman Coast

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Voters across Thailand will go to the polls on 20 December 2020, to elect chairmen of provincial administrative organisations and members of the councils of those organisations.
- At a time of deep-seated political crisis in the country, observers have assumed the “nationalisation” of Thai provincial politics, and the central relevance of political parties to that process.
- Consideration of political parties’ decisions on whether formally to contest the 2020 provincial elections and close scrutiny of races for the post of provincial administrative organisation chairman in four provinces on the Andaman Coast of South Thailand suggest that this relevance, along with the role of parties, remains minimal.
- In 2020, provincial-national dynamics in Thai politics, as mediated by political parties, thus demonstrate little change from patterns of the recent past.
- Even the much-noted effort of the Progressive Movement led by Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit to nationalise provincial polls does not seem to defy this pattern.
- Thai political parties may rely on local structures of power, respect and influence in fighting national elections. But to see candidates in provincial elections simply as torch-bearers for national parties is to adopt a flawed understanding.

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INTRODUCTION¹

Voters across Thailand will go to the polls on 20 December, in the country's first sub-national elections since the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) junta's *coup d'état* in May 2014. They will cast their ballots for the chairmen of provincial administrative organisations (PAOs) and for members of those organisations' councils.²

Thailand is a unitary state in which provincial governors and district officers are civil servants whom the Ministry of Interior dispatches from Bangkok to exercise paramount authority at the sub-national level. At the same time, the country's system of limited decentralisation features "local" election³ at four levels: the sub-district,⁴ the municipality, the province and Bangkok. As a "special local government area",⁵ the Thai capital enjoys the unique right to elect its governor, but voters there will not go to the polls this month. Nor has the government of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha scheduled municipal- or sub-district-level elections. Just as the NCPO under General Prayut's leadership delayed the national elections that — when finally held in March 2019 — would lead to the junta's dissolution and the installation of an elected government, so has that government tarried in holding long-promised "local" polls;⁶ perhaps it feared the "referendum effect" of elections. As rather grudgingly conceded in October,⁷ elections will finally take place, but exclusively at the provincial level — in, that is, 76 Thai provinces.

Elected sub-national authorities in Thailand enjoy budgetary and administrative powers in such domains as public health, primary and secondary education, sanitation and infrastructure. The transfer of some budgetary resources to the purview of those authorities, including PAOs, following the promulgation of the country's 1997 Constitution brought a new division of power between elected and appointed officials in provincial Thailand.⁸ Despite the Bangkok state's resistance to the substantive devolution of administrative authority, not least during the 2014-2019 NCPO dictatorship,⁹ even limited decentralisation has expanded the space for, and increased the stakes in, active participation in electoral politics at the sub-national level.¹⁰ It has, logically, also led to interest in the role that national political parties play in that space.¹¹

Many observers in Bangkok — and many of those reliant on metropolitan perspectives for their understanding of Thailand — have assumed that political parties' will play a significant role in the 20 May provincial elections. This paper seeks to evaluate this assumption. It first examines the decisions of Thai political parties and other actors on "nationalising" the coming polls by running candidates in numerous provinces under a common umbrella, along with some of the consequences of those decisions. It then reports briefly on contests for the post of PAO chairman in four provinces on the Andaman Coast of South Thailand in order to explore those decisions in local contexts.

NATIONAL PARTIES AND THE 2020 PROVINCIAL POLLS

Article 34 of the 2019 Act on the Election of Members of Local Councils and Local Administrators prohibits members of parliament, senators and other political and state officials from unfairly using their positions to support candidates in sub-national elections.¹² Ostensibly a measure adopted to ensure clean politics and to curb the abuse of

power, the act also reflects a determination to weaken Thai political parties by restricting their activities. The Phalang Pracharat Party, the core member of the coalition on which the current Prayut government depends for support, has taken the act's strictures, and the risk of being found to violate them, seriously.¹³ It announced in late October that it would not as a party contest the December provincial polls or field candidates in those polls under its umbrella.¹⁴

Phuea Thai, the largest party and main opposition party in parliament, has chosen a contrasting approach. Affirming that it could run candidates in its name without falling afoul of the 2019 law on sub-national elections, the party has embraced the legacy of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's original Thai Rak Thai Party in improving economies and raising incomes in the provinces. In early November it announced the names of Phuea Thai candidates for PAO chairman in 25 provinces, or about a third of the total.¹⁵

It is not the law governing sub-national elections that has brought grief to the Phuea Thai Party's effort to contest sub-national polls this year. Rather, that effort has stumbled against realities that are almost inevitable when a national political party hastily involves itself in provincial elections. Late November saw prominent Red Shirt leader Jatuporn Prompan slam the party's endorsement of a candidate for Chiang Mai PAO chairman. He alleged that it had turned its back on a former holder of that office who had supported the party, who had opposed the NCPO dictatorship, and who was now left to run on the ticket of a local political group.¹⁶ In the aftermath of this blow-up, Phuea Thai Party strategist and veteran Thaksinite Sudarat Keyuraphan announced her departure from the party. The "last straw" in precipitating this break was Sudarat's backing for provincial candidates different from those formally backed by the party.¹⁷

Trailing only Phuea Thai and Phalang Pracharat in Thailand's March 2019 elections, the Future Forward Party captured the third highest number of parliamentary seats in those polls. Future Forward articulated a fundamental challenge to the country's political order; the Constitutional Court dissolved it in February 2020. The court's verdict also banned Future Forward's leaders Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, Piyabutr Saengkanokkul and Pannika "Cho" Wanich from voting, holding political office, or founding or even becoming members of a political party for a period of ten years.¹⁸ Absorbing a majority of the dissolved party's elected legislators, the Move Forward Party¹⁹ emerged as the vehicle for continuing the Future Forward's work in parliament. For their part, Thanathorn, Piyabutr and Pannika established the Progressive Movement²⁰ to further that work outside of parliament.²¹

Thanathorn made clear a determination to see his new movement play a prominent and potentially transformative role in electoral politics at the sub-national level.²² The movement would seek to bring national issues — above all the political dominance of the military, the power of vested interests and the extreme centralisation of the state — directly into the sub-national political arena.

The Progressive Movement initially announced plans to field candidates for the post of PAO council chairman in 32 provinces.²³ This roster expanded to cover 42 of Thailand's 76 provinces, and in Thanathorn's messaging the movement began to marry the local

concern of transparency in provincial government to the national concerns that it had theretofore stressed.²⁴

While it remained unclear how many Progressive Movement candidates could go toe-to-toe with established figures in the provinces in which the new quasi-party was competing, the hype with which Thanathorn invested its campaign for the 20 December elections caught on with some observers.²⁵ However, like Phuea Thai's decision to field candidates in those elections, that hype may also have backfired. Accusations that Thanathorn and others associated with the former Future Forward Party seek to undermine the Thai monarchy, along with an inability to tolerate the challenge to the established order that he and his supporters represent, has merged with panic over norm-shattering student demonstrations in Bangkok and elsewhere to confront Thanathorn's determination to nationalise his movement's campaign with opposition rooted in national rather than provincial concerns.

Thanathorn, Piyabutr and Pannika have travelled the country to show support for Progressive Movement candidates. In the second week of January, Thanathorn's travels took him to Nakhon Si Thammarat in the South, where "royalist mobs" flooded the streets of both the provincial capital and the important centre of Thung Song to obstruct his campaigning.²⁶ Similar episodes soon followed, in Nakhon Ratchasima and Surin Provinces in the Northeast and in Rayong Province on the Eastern Seaboard.²⁷ Thanathorn vowed not to succumb to these attempts at physical intimidation, which may have reflected the machinations of Progressive Movement candidates' local electoral rivals and not simply been spontaneous expressions of citizens' opposition to what Thanathorn and his followers stand for. Whatever the case, the movement's outspoken effort to link its provincial campaigns to national concerns had provided its opponents with a pretext for obstructing its activities.

Another threat to both the Progressive Movement and its candidates — also exemplifying the way in which the movement's effort to nationalise the coming provincial elections may be backfiring — has joined this pattern of ugly harassment. The Election Commission has opened an investigation into whether the movement effectively operates as a political party and whether Thanathorn, Piyabutr and Pannika have somehow violated the Political Party Act by campaigning for the movement's candidates in the approaching provincial polls.²⁸ Coming in the legal arena rather than on the streets, and in ironic recognition of the Progressive Movement's effort to nationalise its campaign in provincial elections, this threat recalls that which resulted in the dissolution of the Future Forward Party just ten months ago.

EVIDENCE FROM THE ANDAMAN COAST: TRANG, KRABI, PHANG NGA, PHUKET

The Progressive Movement has not fielded a candidate for PAO chairman in Trang. But one of the three candidates vying for the post, Phupha Thongnok, coordinated the Future Forward Party's campaign for the March 2019 elections there.²⁹ While continuing to stress the need for Trang to break from the politics of the past, Phupha notes that his current

campaign and the Trang Kao Mai group that he leads have not conducted activities jointly with either the Progressive Movement or the Move Forward Party.³⁰

Little exemplifies the order that Phupha seeks to challenge so clearly as the identities of the other two candidates for the post of PAO chairman in Trang. The first candidate, Bunleng Losathaphonphipit, is running on the ticket of the Kitpuangchon team. He has taken the baton from former Trang PAO chairman Kit Leekpai — the elder brother of former Democrat Party leader, two-time former prime minister, and current speaker of parliament Chuan Leekpai. Bunleng is himself the younger brother of former Democrat member of parliament for Trang Somchai Losathaphonphipit — whose seat Somchai's daughter Sunatcha won in the March 2019 general elections.³¹

The second of Phupha's electoral rivals is Sathon Wongnongtoei — a veteran Democrat Party campaigner, former political aide to Chuan, and leading figure in the 2014 People's Democratic Reform Committee protests in Trang against the government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. Running at the head of the Trang Phatthana Mueang Trang team, Sathon is also the younger brother of a prominent Democrat member of parliament and former minister in the government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, Sathit Wongnongtoei. Sathon has actively served Sathit in liaison work with constituents in the province.³²

Last June, as part of his effort to prepare the Progressive Movement for anticipated sub-national polls, Thanathorn visited Krabi, to the immediate north of Trang, to meet with the movement's leadership in the province.³³ In a development that perhaps reflects its difficulty in recruiting suitable candidates, however, the movement has fielded no candidate for PAO chairman there. Krabi numbers among three provinces in which the 2020 race for that post is uncontested.³⁴ Six- or seven-time Krabi PAO chairman Somsak Kittithonkun will, as head of the Rak Krabi slate, retain the post.³⁵ A long-time promoter of Krabi's world-renowned tourism sector, Somsak also serves as chairman of the Association of Provincial Administrative Organisations in Thailand.³⁶ While Somsak is not running on the ticket of a national political party, his brother-in-law and PAO vice chairman contested last year's general elections as a Bhumjai Thai Party candidate.³⁷

As in Trang, three candidates are contesting the race for PAO chairman in Phang Nga, bordering Krabi on the Andaman Coast.³⁸ And in this province, the Progressive Movement has fielded a candidate: the prominent local figure Sutthichok Thongchumnum. Sutthichok, a businessman, is the former deputy mayor of Phang Nga Municipality, the former chairman of the provincial chamber of commerce and a currently serving member of the board of the Thai Chamber of Commerce.³⁹

Thanathorn has campaigned in several districts of Phang Nga. On 13 November, having learned that the Progressive Movement leader was at a hotel in the *mueang* district of the province during an electioneering visit on behalf of Sutthichok, a man arrived in a pick-up truck with several children in the back. The entire group began shouting that, because of his role in ongoing political disturbances in Thailand and his alleged support for reform of the Thai monarchy, Thanathorn was not welcome in Phang Nga. The confrontation became national news, and a video showing this additional episode of naked hostility toward the Progressive Movement's leaders as they campaigned in the provinces circulated widely.⁴⁰

The most important of Suttichok's two competitors in the coming polls is a businessman and the most recent holder of the post of Phang Nga PAO chairman, Bamrung Piyanamwanit of the Ruam Phattana Phang Nga group.⁴¹ Current Democrat Party leader, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Commerce Jurin Laksanawisit has long been Phang Nga's most distinguished political figure. As PAO chairman, Bamrung had considerable contact with Jurin;⁴² he is reportedly close to the Democrat Party.⁴³

Following his confrontation with royalists in Phang Nga, Thanathorn crossed the Sarasin Bridge to Phuket in order to launch his slate of candidates in the races there and to discuss the Progressive Movement's policy platform with them. However, the controversy that now attached to him led the owner of the site reserved for these activities to cancel the movement's booking, leaving Thanathorn to meet with its candidates in a pizza restaurant that operated as part of a PTT filling station.⁴⁴

As its candidate for Phuket PAO chairman, the Progressive Movement has fielded Sarawut Palimaphan, a member of a family that has reportedly been involved in politics in the province for a long time and the organiser of a local campaign to call for Prime Minister Prayut's ouster. If he seeks now to build on the Future Forward Party's success in winning significant numbers of votes in Phuket in March 2019, Sarawut faces two strong opponents among the four other candidates for PAO chairman there. Chirayut Songyot — an unsuccessful Phuea Thai and Bhumjai Thai candidate for parliament in the past, a real estate developer and the manager of the FC Phuket football club — is running with the support of the Khon Ban Rao group. Having served as an advisor to the group's now deceased leader when the latter was Phuket PAO chairman, Chirayut now evidently aims to leverage the support of that group in his own campaign for the post. In turn, Rewat Arirop apparently aims to draw on the Democrat Party's support base in the province. While running as the candidate of the Phuket Yat Dai team⁴⁵ rather than with the party's formal endorsement, Rewat is a two-term former Democrat member of parliament. Failing to win re-election last year, he has served most recently as secretary to the Democrat deputy minister of public health.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

Thanathorn returned to the Andaman Coast in early December. As he campaigned for Sarawut in a Phuket night market, a crowd of protestors confronted him, shouting that he should leave.⁴⁷ What is the significance of such confrontations for our understanding, first, of the nationalisation of Thailand's 2020 provincial elections and, second, of the role of political parties — and of a quasi-party like the Progressive Movement — in those elections?

Slightly more than half the respondents to a National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) survey released in early November stated that the approaching elections were local affairs, that national concerns would have no impact on their choices at the ballot box.⁴⁸ For the remaining respondents, the opposite was at least to some degree true. One ambitious study has sought to gauge the extent to which the country's political parties will benefit from the support of voters in that latter group. It concludes that, of the 332 candidates for PAO chairman in contested races, only 69 candidates may

be running in the name of political parties, but another 157 have ties or prior relationships with one party or another.⁴⁹ To explain parties' unwillingness openly to endorse these latter candidates, the study points to Article 34 of the 2019 Act on the Election of Members of Local Councils and Local Administrators. It argues that the data that it presents demonstrate the centrality to the 2020 provincial polls of political parties and of ties to parties. If provincial elections in Thailand have been nationalised this year, it thus contends, national parties figure prominently in the story.

The present paper takes a different, more ambiguous, view. The experiences of the Phuea Thai Party and of the Progressive Movement suggest that efforts to nationalise provincial elections have, for example, done more harm than good to those undertaking such efforts. In the case of Phuea Thai, misapprehension of local political realities helps explain that harm. Scrutiny of races for PAO chairman in four Andaman Coast provinces of South Thailand, in national politics a traditional Democrat Party bailiwick, reinforces this ambiguous view as it relates to the Progressive Movement. The possibility that this quasi-party can capture the post of Phang Nga PAO chairman, for example, may well say more about the stature in the province of the candidate whom the movement has succeeded in recruiting, Sutthichok Thongchumnum, than about support for its broad programme or about the effectiveness of Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit's dropping in from Bangkok to campaign on Sutthichok's behalf. To be sure, the protestors who have confronted Thanathorn in Phang Nga and Phuket have cited — as the reasons for their hostility toward him and the Progressive Movement — Thailand's ongoing political crisis and the challenge to the Thai monarchy that it has occasioned. But one also does well to keep in mind the possibility that local interests and the stakes in political contests at the local level also lie behind these confrontations. Similarly, it is inevitable that the next chairman of the Trang PAO will be a man with close ties to the Democrat Party. But whether that man is Bunleng Losathaphonphipit of Yantakhao District or Sathon Wongnongtoei of Huai Yot District, his victory will be that of one of two prominent Trang political families and its networks rather than that of the Democrat Party itself.⁵⁰ The provincial-level contest between these families bespeaks the weakness of and disarray in the party with which both are aligned rather than that party's relevance to the approaching provincial polls.

Drawing on extensive field research into sub-national electoral politics in Thailand in the period before the 2014 coup, James Ockey argued for the continued primacy of provincial politicians, rather than of national political parties, in that politics.⁵¹ Of course, those politicians and the parties may enjoy mutually beneficial relationships. And, as the case of Trang Province makes clear, the closest of family ties often link politicians active at the provincial level to those serving in the national parliament. But evidence from up and down the Andaman Coast suggests that the situation described by Ockey continues to obtain even in the revolutionary year of 2020. The Progressive Movement's success in recruiting locally esteemed figures may yield victory in some contests on 20 December. Boredom with old guards may also determine some electoral outcomes. But political parties' — and even Thanathorn's — efforts to penetrate the Thai provinces organisationally are likely to pale in significance next to provincial structures of power, respect and influence, on the one hand, and voters' concern with national issues independent of the stances of national political parties, on the other.

¹ The author thanks James Ockey for his comments on an earlier version of this paper. Any errors of fact or interpretation are the author's own.

² That is, นายองค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด and สมาชิกสภาองค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด. Note that each voter will cast a ballot in two races, one for PAO chairman and one for member of the PAO council representing the electoral district in which the voter is registered as a resident. The numbers of members of different provinces' councils vary with provinces' populations.

³ That is, การเลือกตั้งท้องถิ่น.

⁴ That is, ตำบล.

⁵ That is, องค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่นรูปแบบพิเศษ.

⁶ "PM Promises Local Elections This Year, But No Money for Them Yet", *Khaosod English*, 15 June 2020 (<https://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2020/06/15/pm-promises-local-elections-this-year-but-no-money-for-them-yet/>, downloaded 10 December 2020), and "Six Years after Coup, Local Elections Still Not in Sight", *The Nation Thailand*, 8 June 2020 (<https://www.nationthailand.com/news/30389243>, downloaded 10 December 2020).

⁷ "Provincial Organisation Elections to Be Held Nationwide on Dec 20", *The Nation Thailand*, 13 October 2020 (<https://www.nationthailand.com/news/30396112>, downloaded 10 December 2020).

⁸ It also made the study of decentralisation a growth industry among scholars. The focus of some of those scholars has been on the innumerable technical questions of public administration that even modest efforts to decentralise the Thai polity have raised. See, for example, the work of Achakorn Wongpredee and Tatchalerm Sudhipongpracha, including "The Politics of Intergovernmental Transfers in Northeast Thailand", *Journal of Developing Societies* 30,3 (2014): 343-363; "Disequalizing Equalization Grant: An Assessment of the Relationship Between Equalization Grant and Local Fiscal Capacity in Northeast Thailand", *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 42,1 (2015): 1-21; and "Decentralizing Decentralized Governance: Community Empowerment and Coproduction of Municipal Public Works in Northeast Thailand", *Community Development Journal* 51,2 (2016): 302-319.

⁹ See Viengrat Netipho, "Thailand's Politics of Decentralization: Reform and Resistance before and after the May 2014 Coup", pp. 224-253 in Michael J. Montesano, Terence Chong and Mark Heng, *After the Coup: The National Council for Peace and Order Era and the Future of Thailand* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2019).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹¹ For one important assessment, see James Ockey, "Team Work: Shifting Patterns and Relationships in Local and National Politics in Thailand", *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* XXXII,3 (November 2017): 562-600.

¹² "กต.เคลียร์ปม ม.34 เลือกตั้งอปท. หลังพรรคการเมืองพวส่งคนชิง" [Election Commission unties the knot of Article 34 of Act on the Election of Members of Local Councils and Local Administrators after parties afraid to field candidates], *Matichon*, 30 October 2020 (http://www.matichon.co.th/politics/news_2419099, downloaded 10 December 2020). The act covers not only support for candidates in sub-national races but also conduct that may be deemed efforts to oppose such candidates.

¹³ Note that the language of the act focuses on individuals and not on parties, and that it does not specify punishment for violations; *ibid.* But the act's lack of clarity and the recent history of dissolution of Thai political parties for alleged electoral malfeasance on the part of their members or leadership have seemingly proved sufficient to make it a factor in this year's provincial elections.

¹⁴ "Palang Pracharat not to field candidates for local election", *The Nation Thailand*, 29 October 2020 (<https://www.nationthailand.com/news/30396957>, downloaded 10 December 2020). Also see "เปิดข้อมูลการเลือกตั้งนายกและสมาชิกองค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด 2563" [Presenting data on the election of chairmen and members of provincial administrative organisations, 2020], *The Momentum*, 4 December 2020 (<https://themomentum.co/elections-provincial-administration-organisation/>, downloaded 11 December 2020), which notes that —perhaps out of a similar fear of

being found to break the law — another party in the ruling coalition, Bhumjai Thai, forbade the use of its logo in campaigning for the 2020 provincial elections.

¹⁵ “เพื่อไทย พร้อมทำตามพรบ.เลือกตั้งท้องถิ่น เปิดตัวผู้สมัครพรรค 25จว.ชิง ‘นายกอบจ.’

ชูแคมเปญหาเสียง6ด้าน” [“Phuea Thai” ready to follow law on local elections, announces party’s candidates in 25 provinces competing for “PAO Chairman”, to campaign on six issues], *Siam Rath*, 9 November 2020 (<https://siamrath.co.th/n/195869>, downloaded 10 December 2020). The provinces in which the Phuea Thai Party is fielding candidates are, in the North, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Nan, Lampang and Phrae; in Central Thailand, Suphanburi, Rayong, Nakhon Nayok, Prachinburi, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Songkhram, Samut Sakhon, Prachuap Khirikhan, and Singburi; and in the Northeast, Chaiyaphum, Maha Sarakham, Nong Khai, Nong Bua Lamphu, Kalasin, Nakhon Phanom, Udon Thani, Ubon Ratchathani, Yasothon and Mukdahan. The party is fielding no candidates for the position of PAO chairman in South Thailand.

¹⁶ “UDD Colleagues in Pheu Thai Dispute”, *Bangkok Post*, 30 November 2020

(<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2027367/udd-colleagues-in-pheu-thai-dispute>, downloaded 11 December 2020).

¹⁷ “Sudarat Strikes Back with New Party”, *Bangkok Post*, 2 December 2020

(<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2028475/sudarat-strikes-back-with-new-party>, downloaded 11 December 2020).

¹⁸ “FFP Dissolved, Executives Banned for 10 Years”, *Bangkok Post*, 21 February 2020

(<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/1862769/ffp-dissolved-executives-banned-for-10-years>, downloaded 16 December 2020).

¹⁹ That is, พรรคก้าวไกล.

²⁰ That is, คณะก้าวหน้า.

²¹ On the Future Forward Party, its origins, operations, performance and fate, see Duncan McCargo and Anyarat Chattharakul, *Future Forward: The Rise and Fall of a Thai Political Party* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2020).

²² “Thanathorn Eyes Half of Local Administration Seats”, *Bangkok Post*, 4 July 2020

(<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/1945792/thanathorn-eyes-half-of-local>, downloaded 11 December 2020), and “Thanathorn: Send a Message through the Ballot Box”, *Bangkok Post*, 18 November 2020

(<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2021795/thanathorn-send-a-message-through-the-ballot-box>, downloaded 11 December 2020).

²³ “Progressive Movement to Contest at Least 32 Provincial Elections”, *Bangkok Post*, 9 October 2020

(<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/1999531/progressive-movement-to-contest-at-least-32-provi>, downloaded 11 December 2020).

²⁴ “ตรวจสอบรายชื่อ - หมายเลข 42 ผู้สมัคร นายก อบจ. ‘คณะก้าวหน้า’ – ‘ธนาธร’ ปลุก

#20ธันวาคมกลับบ้านไปเลือกตั้ง” [Examining the roster and election numbers of 43 PAO chairman candidates of the “Progressive Movement” – “Thanathorn” launches hashtag

#gohometovoteon20december], *Khao sot*, 8 December 2020

(https://www.khaosod.co.th/politics/news_5490603, downloaded 11 December 2020). The provinces in which the Progressive Movement is fielding candidates for PAO chairman are, in the North, Phayao, Phitsanulok, Phrae, Uttaradit, Phetchabun, Phichit, Kamphaengphet, Nakhon Sawan and Tak; in Central Thailand, Chachoengsao, Rayong, Prachinburi, Chonburi, Nakhon Pathom, Nonthaburi, Ayuthaya, Lopburi, Singburi, Ang Thong, Samut Songkhram, Samut Sakhon, Samut Prakan, Saraburi and Ratburi; in the Northeast, Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat), Bueng Kan, Mukdahan, Roi Et, Nongkhai, Nong Bua Lamphu, Yasothon, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, Amnat Charoen, Udon Thani, Ubon Ratchathani and Surin; and in the South, Phang Nga, Suratthani, Phuket, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Narathiwat.

²⁵ See, for example, “กระแส ก้าวหน้า สนามเลือกตั้ง ‘ท้องถิ่น’ สะท้อน การเมือง” [The current for the Progressive Movement in “local” elections reflects political conditions], *Khao sot*, 7 December

2020 (https://www.khaosod.co.th/politics/analysis-today-politics/news_5479251, downloaded 11 December 2020).

²⁶ “Angry Royalist Mob Forces Thanathorn to Scrap Meet”, *Bangkok Post*, 12 November 2020 (<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2018011/angry-royalist-mob-forces-thanathorn-to-scrap-meet>, downloaded 12 December 2020), and “Cops Bend to Royalist Mobs”, *Bangkok Post*, 13 November 2020 (<https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2018611/cops-bend-to-royalist-mob>, downloaded 12 December 2020).

²⁷ “คณะก้าวหน้า ลุยฟ้องใหญ่ นักการเมือง รมต. สื่อ ชาวบ้าน อ้างคุกคาม หาเสียงอบจ. โจมตีธนาธร ล้มสถาบันฯ” [Progressive Movement makes major complaint against politicians, ministers, media, local people; accuses them of threatening its PAO campaigning and of attacking Thanathorn for wanting to overthrow the monarchy], *TNEWS*, 30 November 2020 (<https://www.tnews.co.th/politic/539153/คณะก้าวหน้า-ลุยฟ้องใหญ่-นักการเมือง-รมต-สื่อ-ชาวบ้าน-อ้างคุกคาม-หาเสียงอบจ-โจมตีธนาธร-ล้มสถาบันฯ>, downloaded 12 December 2020).

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³¹ “เปิดรายชื่อผู้สมัคร นายก อบจ. ทั่วประเทศ 335 คน” [Publishing roster of 335 PAO chairman candidates across the whole country], *Khom chat luek*, 6 December 2020 (<https://www.komchadluek.net/news/scoop/451033>, downloaded 12 December 2020); author’s interviews with Somchai and Sunatcha Losathaphonphiphit, Yantakhao, 15 January 2019; Michael J. Montesano, “The Approach of Elections in Trang, South Thailand, 2019 — Part I: Context and Competition”, *ISEAS Perspective* 13/2019, 13 March 2019 (https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_13.pdf, downloaded 13 March 2019); and “สื่อบหน้า 1 : สายเลือด-ศักดิ์ศรี ตีชิง ‘นายกอบจ.’ ตรัง-เชียงใหม่” [Page 1 scoop: bloodlines-dignity in Trang-Chiang Mai “PAO chairman” battles], *Matichon*, 9 November 2020 (https://www.matichon.co.th/politics/news_2433255, downloaded 13 December 2020). Note that in the 2019 polls Sunatcha bested her own first cousin on her father’s side, a Phalang Pracharat candidate.

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- ³⁵ “เปิดรายชื่อผู้สมัคร นายก อบจ. ทั่วประเทศ 335 คน”, op cit.; “รับสมัคร นายกอบจ.-ส.อบจ.กระบี่ วันแรกคึกคัก” [Busy first day of registration for PAO chairman - PAO councillors in Krabi], *Ban mueang*, 2 November 2020 (<https://www.banmuang.co.th/news/region/211213>, downloaded 13 December 2020); and “ไม่ประมาทแม้ไร้คู่แข่ง อดีต นายก อบจ.กระบี่ 7 สมัยลงพื้นที่หาเสียงต่อเนื่อง” [Not taking it easy even though he has no competitor, former 7-time Krabi PAO chairman is out campaigning continuously], *Ban mueang*, 11 November 2020 (<https://www.banmuang.co.th/news/region/212285>, downloaded 13 December 2020).
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- ⁴⁰ “หนุ่มขนเด็กขึ้นกระบะ สีโไล่ ธนาธร เผชิญหน้า ลั่นไม่ชอบไม่ต้องเลือก แต่อย่าคุกคาม” [Man brings children in a pick-up truck to drive Thanathorn out, meets him fact to face, Thanathorn tells him that if he does not like him, he does not need to vote for him, but that he should not threaten him], *Khao sot*, 15 November 2020 (https://www.khaosod.co.th/politics/news_5327255, downloaded 13 December 2020), and “ไม่รอด! ‘ธนาธร’ แอบมาพังงา ช่วยผู้สมัครนายก อบจ.คณะก้าวหน้าหาเสียง ถูกหนุ่มพังงาพาลูกหลานตะโกนไล่” [It doesn’t work! “Thanathorn” sneaks into Phang Nga to help Progressive Movement candidate for PAO chairman campaign, but a Phang Nga man brings his children to yell at him to get out], *MGR Online*, 13 November 2020 (<https://mgronline.com/south/detail/9630000117568>, downloaded 13 December 2020). The starkly contrasting perspectives of these two articles in themselves illustrate the manner in which the provincial campaigning of the Progressive Movement has become a subject of contentiousness at a time of national crisis. See the video capturing the incident at “ธนาธรลงพื้นที่ช่วยหาเสียงนายก อบจ.พังงา โดนตะโกนไล่” [Thanathorn goes into the field to help campaign for Phang Nga PAO chairman, confronts yelling to drive him out], *Thai rat*, 15 December 2020 (<https://www.thairath.co.th/clip/466645>, downloaded 13 December 2020).
- ⁴¹ “3 ผู้สมัครลงรับเลือกตั้งนายกอบจ.พังงา กองเชียร์ร่วมให้กำลังใจเนื่องแน่น”, op cit.
- ⁴² See for example a report noting Bamrung’s having joining those who gathered at the Phuket airport in June 2019 to congratulate Jurin on becoming party leader; “‘จรินทร์’ ไป ‘ภูเก็ต-พังงา’ ยืนยัน ปชป. ร่วมรัฐบาลหวังฟื้นรายได้เกษตรกร” [“Churin” goes to “Phuket – Phang Nga”, confirms that DP will join government and hopes to revive farmers’ incomes], *Voice TV*, 7 June 2019 (<https://voicetv.co.th/read/wfv5Sqj0r>, downloaded 13 December 2020).
- ⁴³ “เปิดข้อมูลการเลือกตั้งนายกและสมาชิกองค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด 2563” and the data on which it draws, available at <https://tinyurl.com/pao-candidates> (downloaded 13 December 2020). The third candidate for Phang Nga PAO chairman, Tharathip Thongchoem of the Ruam Sang Phang Nga group, appears to have no established ties to a national political party. He is a seven-time member of the PAO council and its former deputy chairman; “3 ผู้สมัครลงรับเลือกตั้งนายกอบจ.พังงา กองเชียร์ร่วมให้กำลังใจเนื่องแน่น”, op cit.
- ⁴⁴ “‘ธนาธร’ ซุ่มเงียบไป ‘ภูเก็ต’ พบผู้สมัครนายก อบจ.คณะก้าวหน้า ก่อนรีบกลับ” [“Thanathorn” lurks quietly to “Phuket”, meets Progressive Movement candidate for PAO chairman before

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⁴⁵ That is, ทีมภูเก็ดยัดได้.

⁴⁶ “ฝ่ามรสุม ‘ธนาธร’ เลี่ยง คีจ อบจ.ภูเก็ต” [Weathering a storm, “Thanathorn” risks the battle in Phuket PAO race], *Khom chat luek*, 2 December 2020.

(www.komchadluek.net/news/scoop/450616, downloaded 13 December 2020). For a list of all five candidates in Phuket, see “เปิดรายชื่อผู้สมัคร นายก อบจ. ทั่วประเทศ 335 คน”, op cit.

⁴⁷ “โดนอีก! ชาวภูเก็ตฮือไล่-ตำ ‘ธนาธร’ ลั่นตลาดนัดสี่ก้อ (คลิป)” [Struck again! Phuket people chase away and scold “Thanathorn” at the Si Ko night market (video)], *Thai Post*, 2 December 2020 (<https://www.thaipost.net/main/detail/85677>, downloaded 14 December 2020).

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⁵⁰ In fact, and unlike its coalition partner Phalang Pracharat, the Democrat Party has officially endorsed candidates for PAO chairman, but, curiously, only in two provinces: Satun to the immediate south of Trang and Songkhla on the West Coast of South Thailand. See “เปิดข้อมูลการเลือกตั้งนายกและสมาชิกองค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด 2563”, op cit. Political families, family ties and their role in electoral politics in Thailand, as well as the implications of that role for the quality of Thai democracy, have emerged as major foci of study in recent years. See, for example, James Ockey, “Thai Political Families: The Impact of Political Inheritance”, *TRaNS: Trans –Regional and –National Studies of Southeast Asia* III, 2 (July 2015): 191–211; and Yoshinori Nishizaki, “New Wine in an Old Bottle: Female Politicians, Family Rule, and Democratization in Thailand”, *Journal of Asian Studies* LXXVII, 2 (May 2018): 375–403, “Ironic Political Reforms: Elected Senators, Party-List MPs, and Family Rule in Thailand”, *Critical Asian Studies* LI, 2 (2019): 210-231, and “Birds of a Feather: Anand Panyarachun, Elite Families and Network Monarchy in Thailand”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* LI, 1-2 (June 2020): 197-242.

⁵¹ See Ockey, “Team Work”, especially pp. 592-594.

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