

PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE SHARE THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF CURRENT EVENTS

Singapore | 21 August 2015

Special Feature:

Findings from Latest Surveys from Thailand on the “Proposal to Establish Casinos for Government Revenue” and “Comparing NCPO 2014 Coup with CNS 2006 Coup”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In collaboration with Thailand’s National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA),¹ which conducts regular surveys in Thai society on a variety of issues, ISEAS’s Thailand Studies Programme² publishes selected survey findings for *ISEAS Perspective* readers, which offer snapshots of Thai politics and society. This issue carries the findings of two different surveys – on the Proposal to Establish Casinos for Government Revenue and Comparing NCPO 2014 coup with CNS 2006 coup.
2. Members of the National Reform Council recently proposed establishing casinos to generate government revenue. A slight majority (54.96%) of Thais disagreed with the proposal, believing gambling to be immoral. Casinos, they felt, would lead to addiction, especially amongst the young. Moreover, they are apprehensive about their impacts on law and order such as crime and theft.
3. Of the Thais who agreed with the proposal, 36.51% wanted the government to collect concession fees and taxes from casinos while 32.01% wanted casinos to charge a high entrance fee and be located at international convention centres and/or integrated tourist destinations.



¹ For more information on NIDA, please contact Assistant Professor Dr. Suvicha Pouaree, Director of NIDA Poll, at nida_poll@nida.ac.th. The surveys relied on random sampling from NIDA Poll’s master sample database. Data were collected through telephone interviews.

² The co-ordinators for ISEAS’ Thailand Studies Programme are Michael Montesano and Terence Chong. For more information, please visit <http://www.iseas.edu.sg/country-studies/country-studies-programme/thailand-studies>.

4. When asked to contrast the 2006 CNS (Council for National Security) coup with the 2014 NCPO (National Council for Peace and Order) coup, 71.28% of Thais believed that the 2014 NCPO coup had led to better outcomes. These outcomes were, namely, greater peace and harmony in the country and a better attempt at solving national problems. Many also felt that the NCPO coup did not result in bloodshed, thus benefitting from experiences in 2006.
5. Nevertheless, the Thai public's confidence in the new government's ability to proceed with national reform was generally low. 31.28% of respondents stated that they are not quite confident, and 24.64 % stated that they are not confident at all.
6. Finally, when asked if they had seen an end of politicians abusing power and military coups d'état after the next elections, 35.36 % stated that they were not quite confident, while 31.60 % did not have any confidence at all that things would change after the elections.

INTRODUCTION

ISEAS's Thailand Studies Programme collaborates with Thailand's National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) in publishing in *ISEAS Perspective* findings of surveys conducted by NIDA. NIDA surveys provide snapshots of contemporary Thai politics and society. The present issue carries the findings of two separate surveys.

1. Survey on Proposal to Establish Casinos for Government Revenue.

Recently a group of National Reform Council (NRC) members proposed the establishment of casinos in order to generate revenue for the government. These NRC members pointed to the attractiveness of casinos in neighbouring countries and suggested Pattaya as a possible location for casinos in Thailand. Arnun Watcharothai and Kriangkrai Phumlaochaeng, the representatives of this group, announced that the casino-revival plan was backed by a dozen NRC members. They believed that the country would reap benefits such as additional spending and tax revenue from foreign visitors and high-rollers. "Past governments, including the Thaksin_Shinawatra administration, had floated the prospect of granting concessions to investors to develop such entertainment and gaming complexes in Thailand, but the proposal ran into strong domestic opposition".³ This most recent suggestion was greeted with mixed reactions. A survey was conducted from 17 to 19 June 2015 to ascertain the public's response to this proposal. The survey sampled 1,501 respondents who cut across religious, class and regional divides.

Question 1: Do you agree or disagree with the National Reform Council's (NRC) proposal to establish casinos to generate revenue for the government? (Compared to survey conducted in 2011.)

Table 1

Response	Percentage Survey 2015	Percentage Survey 2011
Disagree	54.96%	61.47%
Agree	37.04%	31.79%
Not sure/no answer	8.00%	6.74%
Total	100%	100%

As seen in Table 1, 54.96% of respondents stated that they disagreed with the proposal. When asked to elaborate, they explained that this was because they believed gambling to be

³ <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/politics/NRC-group-proposes-legalising-casinos-30262402.html> (accessed 10 July 2015).

illegal and immoral. Casinos, they felt, would lead to gambling addiction, especially amongst the young. Moreover, they were apprehensive about its impacts on law and order such as increased crime and theft. 37.04% agreed with the proposal. They noted that Thailand already has illegal gambling dens. Gambling should thus be legalized so that Thais would not have to travel abroad to gamble. Moreover, countries surrounding Thailand have legalized casinos even though some of these countries are scrupulously religious. 8.00% did not specify a view or were unsure.

According to Dr Arnond Sakworawich, Graduate School of Applied Statistics, NIDA, Thai citizens like to gamble. Dr Arnond notes that this was recorded in the chronicles of *Du Royaume de Siam* during the era of Ayutthaya kingdom and in the Thai literary classic *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*. When Nang Thong Pra Sri, the mother of Plai Kaew, came to request that Nang Prim be married to her son, Nang Sri Pra Chan asked her, “How good is your son? Isn’t he gambling, drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana, smoking opium?” Dr Arnond also explains that legal casinos have existed throughout Thai history and were also abolished many times because gambling was believed to have negative effects on Thais. During the early Rattanakosin period, for example, casino operators were largely immigrant Chinese or Thais of Chinese descent who monopolized gambling dens in various areas, and the taxes from these gambling dens were the main revenue source for the Thai government at that time.

Question 2: How should casinos in Thailand be established and in what way? (Applicable only to respondents who agreed with the proposal to establish casinos.)

Table 2

Response	Percentage
The government should collect concession fees and taxes from legalised casinos.	36.51%
Legalised casinos should charge high entrance fees and be located at international convention centres and/or integrated tourist destinations.	32.01%
The government should own all casinos.	27.16%
Casinos can be established in any form.	1.44%
Did not specify /Were unsure.	2.88%
Total	100%

As seen in the table above, 36.51% of respondents stated that the government should collect concession fees and taxes from casinos. Meanwhile 32.01% wanted casinos to charge a high

entrance fee and be located at international convention centres and/or integrated tourist destinations. 27.16% stated that the government should be the owner of all casinos. 1.44% of respondents noted that the casinos can be in any form. 2.88% of respondents did not specify an answer or were unsure.

Dr Arnond explains that many Thais already gamble in neighbouring countries. This demand had led to proposals to legalize gambling in the country. However support is still weak as the majority still disapproves of casinos, and it may really require strong political will to push the proposal through. For Dr Arnond it was important to strike a balance between positive and negative effects such as more state revenue as against the social ills suffered by gamblers and their families. If there were good management, strict law enforcement, it might then be possible to reduce social problems and addiction amongst Thai gamblers.

2. Survey Comparing NCPO 2014 coup with CNS 2006 coup

In September 2006, the Royal Thai Army staged a coup d'état against the elected caretaker government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The coup was Thailand's first non-constitutional change of government in 15 years. The army postponed the upcoming elections, revoked the Constitution, dissolved Parliament, banned protests and other political activities, and arrested Cabinet members. The Council of National Security (CNS) was formed.

A survey was conducted on 27 and 28 May 2015 to compare public perception of the CNS coup and the May 2014 coup by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). Respondents were Thai citizens aged 18 years old and above residing throughout the country, cutting across region, education level, and occupation. The total sample was 1,250.

Question 3: How do the outcomes of the coup d'état by NCPO in 2014 compare with those of the Council of National Security (CNS) in 2006?

Table 3

Response	Percentage
The outcomes of the coup d'état by NCPO are better.	71.28%
The outcomes of both coup d'état are the same.	18.08%
The outcomes of the coup d'état by NCPO are worse.	7.20%
Both coups d'état are bad because they do not benefit the nation.	0.16%
Not specified/uninterested.	3.28%
Total	100%

From the table above, 71.28% of the respondents believe that the 2014 NCPO coup d'état was better. When asked why they believed so, they noted that the NCPO had been courageous in performance and decision-making. Moreover, the country is in peace and harmony and the NCPO is solving national problems clearly and earnestly. There have been substantial changes and these have been better than those in 2006. Additionally, NCPO organized the coup d'état without incurring any losses, thus learning from experiences in 2006.

At the same time, 18.08% of respondents stated that the coup d'état by the NCPO had similar outcomes as those by CNS in 2006, while 7.20% of respondents stated that the outcomes from the coup d'état by the NCPO were worse because they had adversely impacted the economy. More importantly, the CNS only seized power for a few months before returning power to the people, while allowing greater rights and freedom in expressing public opinions than at present. 0.16% of respondents stated that the outcomes from both NCPO and CNS are both bad, and there should be no coup d'état because it does not benefit the nation. 3.28 % of respondents did not specify an answer or were not interested.

According to Associate Professor Dr Phichai Ratanatilaka Na Bhuket, School of Social and Environmental Development, NIDA, many of these respondents were likely to evaluate outcomes based on peace, and law and order dimensions. Assoc Prof Phichai explained that people believed that the coup d'état had reduced violence, thus preventing the loss of lives and property. Moreover, respondents probably believed that the NCPO could tackle the problem of political deadlocks which had hampered the Yingluck Shinawatra government. He also noted that another possible explanation is that after the coup d'état, the government was able to suppress influential individuals in various sectors, especially those who had illegally acquired public lands, and those that had connections with human traffickers and corrupt government officers.

Question 4: How confident are you that the next government will continue national reform after elections?

Table 4

Response	Percentage
Highly confident	19.12%
Somewhat confident	22.00%
Not quite confident	31.28%
Not confident at all	24.64%
Don't know	2.96%
Total	100%

Public confidence in the next government's ability to proceed with national reform is generally low. 19.12 % of respondents stated that they are highly confident while 22.00% are somewhat confident. However, 31.28% stated that they are not quite confident, with 24.64 % stating that they are not confident at all. 2.96% of respondents did not specify and answer or were uninterested.

According to Assoc Prof Phichai, respondents may have less confidence in national reform because traditional politicians with good campaign tactics, offering populist promises and buying votes, may win at the elections, and may not carry out reforms.

Question 5: How confident are you that the cycle of people abusing power and military coups d'état will end after elections?

Table 5

Response	Percentage
Highly confident	12.40%
Somewhat confident	18.16%
Not quite confident	35.36%
Not confident at all	31.60%
Don't know	2.48%
Total	100%

Finally, public confidence in Thailand not repeating the cycle of political malaise is not high. While 12.40% and 18.16% of respondents had 'high' and 'somewhat high' confidence, respectively, that there would be no abuse of power, political conflict or military coups after the elections, the majority was more sceptical. 35.36 % stated that they were not quite confident and 31.60 % did not have any confidence at all that things would change after the elections. 2.48 % of respondents did not specify an answer or were uninterested.

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