A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Area Studies

Change and Continuity of Political Networks
through the Direct Local Elections:
Case Study of Ubon Ratchathani,
Udon Thani and Khon Kaen Provinces

地方首長直接選挙による政治ネットワークの
変遷と持続性
—ウボンラーチャターニー県、
ウドーンターニー県とコーンケン県の事例—

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List of Acronyms

BE	Buddhist Era
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MP	Member of Parliament
NCPO	National Council for Peace and Order
NGO	Non-Government Organization
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy (the Yellow-Shirt)
PAO	Provincial Administrative Organization
PPP	People's Power Party
PPRP	Phalang Pracharat Party
SAO	Sub-district Administrative Organization
TAO	Tambon Administrative Organization
TRT	Thai Rak Thai Party
UDD	United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (the Red-Shirt)

Abstract

The main purpose of this dissertation is to investigate and understand the change and continuity of political networks at local level caused by the adoption of direct local executive elections following decentralization measures. My research focused specifically on the political aspect, and set out to explain the dynamic of the political networks at local level, temporally and geographically. This study assumes that the main factors that caused the formation and change to political networks from 2004 to 2012 are the adoption of direct local elections following political and administrative decentralization, the domination of Thaksin Shinawatra and his allied parties over Thai politics, and the political polarization of Yellow and Red Shirts. Regarding the variation of factors over time, the effects of the direct elections of Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) executives in 2004, 2008, and 2012 on the local power structure were considered. This study investigated the change and continuity of the local political networks, the dynamics of Thai local politics and local democratization, and the possibilities for Thai politics at both national and local level in the near future.

Major arguments are as follows. There were significant changes in the pattern and method of political connections when the direct local executive elections were adopted. There was the formation of new local political networks among the main national parties, the national-level politicians and the candidates for the first-ever local executive elections. The 2004 PAO executive elections brought a significant change to Thai local politics. Due to the popularity of Thai Rak Thai at a local level, candidates from other parties began incorporating their party brands into their local election campaigns. Likewise, the political parties actively participated in local competitions with the aim of influencing the local government and solidifying their broad base of local support in order to ensure a triumph in the next general election, which would be held in 2005. If their candidates could win the PAO executive

elections, they would be able to exploit their networks in the 2005 general elections. The political parties were seeking locally ad hoc coalitions with powerful local politicians. The importance of partisanship rose rapidly in local elections. The party-candidate relations were firstly formed at the local level.

In the 2008 PAO chief executive elections, political polarization had a strong impact on both national and local politics. Thai politics have been polarized into the Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts groups. The polarization led to strong support for both pro- and anti-Thaksin parties. National politics had a powerful impact on the electorates' decisions at the local level. The candidates for the PAO chief executive elections used their party banners in their electoral campaigns. Thus, party politics still had a significant influence on local politics, although this was not the case in all constituencies.

However, the influence of party politics at local level declined in the 2012 local elections. The political parties played a less significant role. The number of non-partisan or independent candidates increased. The following reasons account for that change. (1) Local politicians became stronger and more independent. They could establish their voter base without any assistance from national politicians or even political parties. (2) Local politicians established their local political groups by themselves. Instead of political parties, independent groups played an increasing role in the local electoral arena as they could formulate the public policy themselves that directly responded to the locality's needs.

This study concludes that local democracy has been strengthened since the local decision-making is based on local concerns and has become more independent from national electoral politics.

要旨

　本学位請求論文は、タイで地方分権にともなって導入された地方自治体の首長直接選挙によって地方の政治ネットワークがどのように変化したのかを検討することを主たる目的としている。本研究は行政面よりも政治面を重視し、地方における政治ネットワークの動態を時間軸に沿いながら複数の県で比較検討しようと試みた。本研究では、2004 年から 2012 年にかけての時期に、政治ネットワークを形成したり変化させたりした要因として重要なのは次の 3 つであったと想定する。第一は、政治行政の地方分権にともなう自治体首長直接選挙の導入である。2004 年以後、首長は地方議員による互選に代えて住民の投票で選ばれるようになった。第二は、タックシン・チンナワットが率いるタイ愛国党が総選挙で圧勝して 2001 年以後国政を支配したことである。国政において政党の重要性が著しく高まっていた。第三は、国民が黄シャツ派と赤シャツ派に分かれて対立したことである。時間軸に沿った要因の変化については、2004 年、2008 年そして 2012 年に実施された県自治体首長選挙が地方の権力構造に与えた影響について考察した。本研究では、地方の政治ネットワークの変化と持続性、地方の政治や民主化の動態、国政と地方政治の近未来における展望について検討した。

　本論文における主たる主張は次の通りである。地方自治体首長の直接選挙が導入されると、政治的な人脈形成の様式や方法に大きな変化が生じた。主要政党、国政政治家、地方自治体首長選挙への立候補者の間で、新しい地方政治ネットワークが形成された。2004 年の県自治体首長選挙では、タックシンのタイ愛国党が地方でも人気があったため、他の政党からの立候補者も対抗して地方での選挙運動に政党名を用い始めた。同様に、政党の側でも地方自治体政府への影響力を獲得し、地方での支持基盤を強化することにより、2005 年に予定される次の総選挙での勝利を狙おうとした。政党は自党の候補者が県自治体首長選挙で勝利すれば、2005 年総選挙で首長のネットワークを利用することができると考えていた。地方において政党と候補者が初めて関係を取り結び、政党に所属することの重要性が地方選挙において急速に高まった。

　2008 年に県自治体首長選挙が実施されたときには、政治の二極対立の影響が国政でも地方政治でも大きかった。タイの政治は赤シャツ派と黄シャツ派に二極分化していた。

この二極分化は、親タックシン政党と反タックシン政党への強い支持につながった。そうした国政における動向が地方選挙における有権者の決定に大きな影響を及ぼした。県自治体首長選挙への立候補者は、選挙運動で所属政党名を用いた。必ずしもすべての選挙区がそうであったわけではないけれども、政党が地方政治で重要性を増した。

しかしながら、2012 年の首長選挙では政党の影響は低下した。政党の役割が減退し、政党に所属しない無所属の候補者が増えた。そうした変化が生じた理由は次の通りであった。第一に、地方政治家が強くなり、独立性を高めた。地方政治家は自前の支持基盤を構築して、国政政治家や政党への依存度を減らした。第二に、地方政治家が独自の地方政治グループを作り上げた。首長が率いる独立したグループは、地元住民の要望に直に応える政策を策定・実施することによって、政党に代わって、地方の選挙における役割を増した。

地方の民主政治は強化された。その理由は、地方での政策決定が地元の要望に立脚しており、地方政治が国政における選挙政治からの独立性を高めたからである。これが本研究の結論である。

Chapter I

Introduction

In recent decades, the concept of decentralization has been promoted in many countries. Thailand has also developed a decentralization policy with the aim of transferring functions, power, and budgets from the central government to local governmental organizations through the 1997 Determining Plan and Stage for Decentralization Act. According to the Act, the direct local executive elections have been adopted as one of the state's decentralization measures. This mechanism changed the relations between the central and local governments not only administratively but also politically. Since the chief executive of the local government was elected directly from the people in the area, the power of national-level politicians (members of parliament, or MPs) has dramatically changed because some power and authority that used to lie in the hands of the MPs has been transferred to the local-level politicians. This phenomenon has formed new relations between national and local-level politicians. However, direct local elections are not the only the factor that affected the dynamics of Thai local politics. The rise to power of Thaksin Shinawatra and Thai Rak Thai in 2001 is among the main factors changing the local political networks in Thai politics. It intensified the political partisanship in local politics. The eligible voters were expected to surrender their votes to the partisan candidates, especially the Thai Rak Thai Party. The local politicians, therefore, increasingly ran their election under the party labels. Moreover, the trend towards an increasing polarization of partisanship continued when the conflict between the pro-Thaksin (the so-called Red Shirts) and anti-Thaksin (so-called Yellow Shirts) groups emerged. This marked an acceleration of the party polarization not only at national level, but also in terms of local government. These

phenomena have affected the change of power relations or political networks among the main political actors at the sub-national level.

This is the starting point of this study, which attempts to understand the nature and pattern of change of the local political networks in Thai local politics. This chapter begins with a broad picture of the power relations among the political actors at Thai local level before 2001, the year that the Thaksin-led Thai Rak Thai Party came to the power and significantly changed the Thai political landscape. The literature review, main objectives and key questions, the hypotheses of this study, and research methodology will be mentioned in the latter part of this chapter.

1.1 The Political Structure before 2001 – The Relationship among the Political Actors

Before 2001, the pattern of linkage among the main political actors at Thai local level was characterized by vertical relations and the patronage-based system, in which each actor— political parties, national politicians, c*hao pho* (godfathers or influential people in specific provinces), civil servants and citizens—interacted hierarchically from top to bottom. The political parties played a weak role in the North and Northeast, since there were few regional representatives who played a leading role in the main political parties, and could encourage the cabinet for budget allocation for their own area development. This was in marked contrast to the Southern and central regions, where the influence of political leaders continued to dominate. The best example for this case is Chuan Leekpai, the former leader of the Democrat Party, for whom the people in the Southern area would cast vast numbers of votes, even for his networked candidates, who benefited from his imprimaturs. In the central region, Banharn Silpa-archa, the late leader of Chart Thai Party, also maintained long-term popularity in the constituency. Nishizaki (2005) described him as an unchallenged strongman in Suphanburi

province who could command genuine popular support from constituency voters.[1] However, in Northeastern Thailand, political parties were less influential in the constituencies. In terms of elections, there was no dominant party in the area before 2001. The electorate chose their representatives according to their candidate-based preference. The MPs had their own individual voter base. Moreover, defection to other political parties was common in the North.

Due to these factors, one of the political parties' strategies to attract votes in the North was to recruit candidates with strong electoral prospects, since voters tended to have more individual candidate–based rather than party-based recognition. The MPs themselves built their bastion for gaining electoral support by adopting patron-client ties, in which money plays a role and the election effectively becomes an auction for the support of the electorate.[2] Giving cash handouts to voters was standard practice. In addition, to guarantee that they would be reelected, MPs must make their presence known by creating other sources of patronage, both formally and informally, to maintain popularity in the constituency. In a formal sense, MPs might set and allocate the budget for economic development by prioritising infrastructure management, road construction or public services for their area. On the other hand, informal strategies included donating to local charities to demonstrate a connection to the community. This practice was sometimes adopted, though it was not mandatory. It was, however, recognized as an effective way to establish popular support for their next elections.

In another way, MPs gained popularity in their constituencies by providing the people tangible facilities, construction, welfare or public services that increased local development.

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[1] Yoshinori Nishizaki (2005). The Moral Origin of Thailand's Provincial Strongman: The Case of Banharn Silpa-archa, *South East Asia Research,* 13(2), pp. 185-186.

[2] Philip S. Robertson (1996). The Rise of the Rural Network Politician: Will Thailand's New Elite Endure? *Asian Survey,* 36(9), p. 925.

The 1968 constitution introduced a specific budget allocated from central government to each MP, designated "the provincial development budget". Mindful of the instability of the national government, the prime minister at that time used the budget as a tool to maintain MP's support and prevent factionalism.[3] This budget allocation was first implemented in 1970 and accounted for 300,000 baht per MP.[4] In 1980, the project was renamed "the provincial development project proposed by MPs" and the budget also increased to 1.5 million baht. It rose again, to 2.5 million baht, in the fiscal year 1981. Then, it escalated to 3, 4, and 5 million baht in the fiscal years 1989, 1990, and 1991 respectively. In the fiscal year 1994, prime minister Chuan separated this budget into two portions: 5 million baht for the special development project provided by the Office of the Prime Minister, and another 15 million baht for the rural development project whose budget was distributed to government agencies or state enterprise projects in each MP's constituencies (see Table 1).

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[3] Somkit Lertpaithoon, Boonsri Meewong-ukote & SakonWaranyuwathana (1998). *Raingan kanwichai rueang ngop phatthana changwat khong samachik sapha phuthaen ratsadon* (Report on the provincial development budget of the member of the House of Representatives). Retrieved from http://library2.parliament.go.th/ebook/content-er/11.pdf, p. 56.

[4] Kriangchai Pungprawat (2009). *Budgeting System in Thailand: Struggling for Money and Authority During Thaksin Era* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan, p. 56.

Table 1: Provincial Development Budget for Each MPs

Year	Special Development Project	Rural Development Project[5]	Total
1970	300,000	-	300,000
1980	1,500,000	-	1,500,000
1981	2,500,000	-	2,500,000
1982	2,500,000	-	2,500,000
1983	2,500,000	-	2,500,000
1984	2,500,000	-	2,500,000
1985	2,500,000	-	2,500,000
1986	2,500,000	-	2,500,000
1987	2,500,000	-	2,500,000
1988	2,500,000	-	2,500,000
1989	3,000,000	-	3,000,000
1990	4,000,000	-	4,000,000
1991	5,000,000	-	5,000,000
1992	5,000,000	-	5,000,000
1993	5,000,000	-	5,000,000
1994	5,000,000	15,000,000	20,000,000
1995	5,000,000	15,000,000	20,000,000
1996	5,000,000	15,000,000	20,000,000
1997	5,000,000	15,000,000	20,000,000

Unit: Baht

Source: Data based on Somkit, Boonsri, & Sakon (1998) and Kriangchai (2009), compiled by author.

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[5] The rural development project proposed by the MPs was initiated in the Chuan administration in 1993 to distribute to the state agencies' project within their constituency

This budget was advantageous for MPs, as they could launch development projects that might respond to people's needs and gain popular support in their constituencies. However, a report on the provincial development budget of the House of People's Representatives by Somkit, Boonsri and Sakon (1998) indicated that some MPs disagreed and proposed that the budget should be cut and transferred to the Tambon Administrative Organization after successful decentralization.[6] Under the B.E. 2540 (1997) constitution, the budget for provincial development projects was cut since MPs' involvement in budget allocation was prohibited.[7] This lessened the MPs' power in their constituencies. The reduction in the provincial development budget was one of the reasons pushing MPs to seek another source of funding for development projects in order to maintain their power and popularity in their constituencies.

Chao pho, which refers to influential people in specific areas, cannot be ignored in explaining the political structure at the local level.[8] In the Thai political system, c*hao pho* acted as an informal power, who could even intervene and influence the formal power in pursuit of their own interests.[9] In other words, c*hao pho* maintained strong connections with high-ranking government officials, particularly powerful police and military figures, in order to further maintain their above-the-law status and their business interests, both legal and illegal.[10]

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[6] Somkit, Boonsri & Sakon, *supranote 3,* p.111.

[7] Kriangchai, *supranote 4,* p. 57.

[8] See Pasuk Phongpaichit & Sangsit Phiriyarangsan (1994). Corruption and Democracy in Thailand, Political Economy Centre, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University; Philip S. Robertson (1996). The Rise of the Rural Network Politician: Will Thailand's New Elite Endure? *Asian Survey,* 36(9); and Yoshifumi Tamada (1991). Itthiphon and Amnat: An Informal Aspect of Thai Politics. *Southeast Asian Studies,* 28(4).

[9] Yoshifumi Tamada (1991). Itthiphon and Amnat: An Informal Aspect of Thai Politics. *Southeast Asian Studies,* 28(3)*,* p. 455.

[10] Pasuk Phongpaichit & Sangsit Phiriyarangsan (1994). Corruption and Democracy in Thailand, Political Economy Centre, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, p. 52.

Nevertheless, sometimes *chao pho* themselves or their representatives ran for elections, exercising formal power to accomplish the above-mentioned purposes.

In contrast to *chao pho*, civil servants' status was always dependent on politicians in term of personnel management. The promotion or transfer of high-ranked civil servants, especially in the Ministry of Interior, was usually the proviso of national-level politicians or the ministers in charge. The politicians regularly put their networked officials in strategic positions in order to support their administrations and political objectives. Relations of the civil servants and citizens can be characterized as top-down. Although public services provision is the responsibility of the civil servants, citizens are often expected to give money or gifts, in the form of bribes, in exchange for service provision.[11]

The links between actors in the local political structure before 2001 was in the form of a vertical relationship (see figure 1). The patronage-based, politician-voter connections existed on the principle of reciprocity between unequal actors. Principally, the villagers cast their votes for individual politicians, a very different dynamic to the situation after 2001, when the Thai Rak Thai Party led by Thaksin Shinawatra came onto the stage.

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[11] Philip S. Robertson (1996). The Rise of the Rural Network Politician: Will Thailand's New Elite Endure? *Asian Survey,* 36(9), p. 931.

Figure 1. The Relations among Actors in Local Political Structure Before 2001
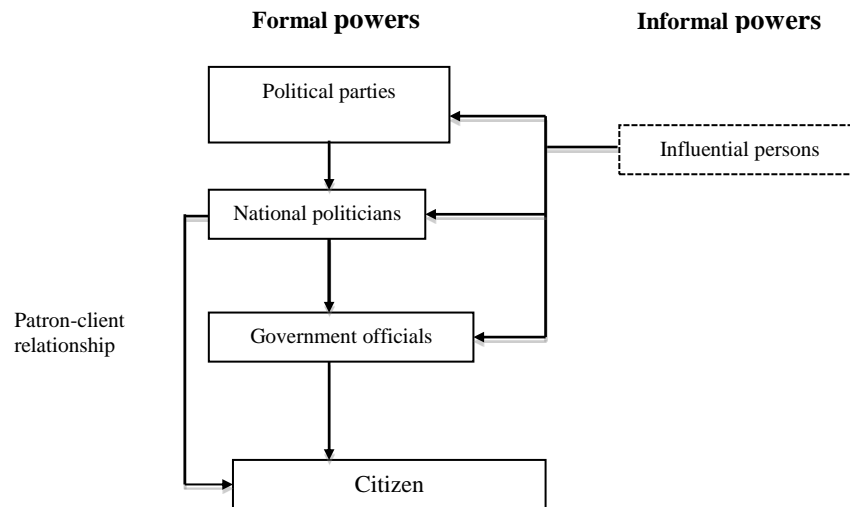
Source: Made by author

1.2 Questions and Main Arguments

As mentioned in the previous section, Thai local politics experienced strong patron-client relations among each political actor for an extended period. When general elections were held, votes were cast for the preferred candidates. Politicians were elected based on their participation in the patronage system.

However, after 2001 when Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai Party came to power, electoral preferences changed substantially, even in Northeastern Thailand, where the political party or the party brand had previously held little influence on the people in the area. The policies launched or promised by political parties became more important. When the first local executive elections were held in 2004, party logos featured heavily in the local election campaigns, and the link between local and national policies was emphasised. Local politicians attempted to associate themselves with national politicians and parties in order to gain votes

and win the local executive elections. This shows the formation of the new-style political networks at the local level.

This research will examine changes in the relations among political parties and politicians that have arisen from the adoption of direct local executive elections. The area of this research is three provinces in Northeastern Thailand, the most populous region in Thailand, which is a strategic area for the major political parties to gain electoral votes. The central research questions address how political networks among the political parties, and politicians form and change, especially after the adoption of direct local executive elections, and how these political networks explain the current state of Thai politics. Rather than examining micro-level politics in local government, the research attempts to draw a macro-political picture at the national level of Thai politics. In the conclusion, a change of political networks in Northeastern Thailand is presented that can explain and predict the political situation in Thailand.

The objective of this research is to analyze the transition of local politics in Northeastern Thailand, which has been a stronghold of the Pheu Thai Party in recent general elections, and has supported Thaksin-backed parties in every election since his first victory in 2001. Primarily, this study will focus on the elections of PAO chief executives as the upper-level local government organization where the largest source of wealth and power is concentrated, thereby attracting the involvement of political parties and national-level politicians. Rather than the influence of Thaksin-allied parties and the adoption of direct local elections as mentioned above, in this research, it assumes that the political polarization in 2005 that divided Thai politics into two groups; the Red Shirts and the Yellow Shirts, has been the major effect to the change of political networks in Thai local level. This research, therefore, aims to examine the change in relations among major political parties, national-level politicians

and local-level politicians after the adoption of direct PAO elections. The result of this study could further explain the situation of contemporary local politics in Thailand.

This research has found that major political parties attempted to play an active role in the first PAO chief elections held in 2004. They fielded their networked candidates to the elections in order to assert an influence on the local government and utilise their broad base of support to ensure success in the next general election. Furthermore, not only the political parties, but also the party factions—especially within Thai Rak Thai—sought to place their candidates in local posts in order that they might strengthen their faction's power and gain a hegemonic influence within the party. Following the 2004 PAO elections, Thai Rak Thai-supported candidates could dominate the seats at a local level, reflecting the national trend. However, some local electoral trends have changed since the PAO elections in 2008: the popularity of Thaksin-allied parties showed signs of decreasing, and voter behavior reverted to candidate-based preferences at the local level. The establishment of local political groups and political networks may have contributed to this phenomenon. It, therefore, might be argued that stronger local political networks can lessen the party-political influence and partisanship in local politics.

1.3 Research Methodology

The research comprises both document analysis and fieldwork. The study was scoped to explain the change and continuity of the local political networks from 2001 to 2014, starting from the year Thaksin and his party came to the political stage and ending with the year the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) launched a coup d'état and suspended local elections. Both primary and secondary documents were used in this study. These materials provide the framework, consequences and status of contemporary Thai local politics.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the pattern of local political networks, fieldwork was undertaken to conduct a comparison study. From the various methods of in-depth case study research, I opted to examine my cases based on their influence and similarity. Each case can show the various mechanisms and phenomena of political networks, and can be compared to each other by identifying factors that appear in some cases but not in others. Three sample cases were chosen to explore and describe the diversity of practice present in local politics in Northeast Thailand. As the research focuses on the roles of major political parties and national politicians in the direct local elections in order to examine the political networks in Northeastern Thailand, I prioritised the provinces of dominant influence in the region. I selected three of top four influential provinces: Udon Thani, Khon Kaen and Ubon Ratchathani.[12] Two are from the upper Northeast (*Isan Ton Bon* region), and one is from the lower Northeast (*Isan Ton Lang* region).

Although all cases are major provinces in the region with economic and social characteristics, each province represents a different set of political variables: the province-specific political environment, the impact of national electoral competition and the influence of political polarization. Udon Thani is characterized by a higher level of national political influence and political mobilization than Khon Kaen, while Ubon Ratchathani has the highest level of independence from those influences, even among other provinces in the region. These differences are valuable for analyzing contemporary local politics in Northeastern Thailand.

Field research was primarily conducted in two provinces: Ubon Ratchathani and Udon Thani. It was divided into two periods: February-March 2014 and August-September 2014. I found that Pheu Thai played a strong role in Khon Kaen's PAO elections, in contrast to Ubon

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[12] In terms of population, GDP and provincial budgets, the top four most influential provinces are Nakhon Ratchasima, Ubon Ratchathani, Udon Thani and Khon Kaen.

Ratchathani. Fieldwork in Khon Kaen was conducted in August 2015 in order to obtain a diversity of data and thus make a more effective analysis.

Some small provinces in the region are excluded from this study since it might be misrepresentative to compare their political influence with larger provinces in the region. However, major political parties or political groups currently attempt to influence local government in many provinces, therefore the leading provinces in the region arguably represent the political characteristics of the region as a whole, and provide us with a richer understanding of how national political parties and politicians influence local politics.

During the fieldwork, documents and official data were collected from the organizations such as the Department of Local Administration, the Ministry of Interior, the King Prajadhipok Institute, various universities, and PAO offices in each province. Furthermore, in-depth interviews with key figures in each province were conducted, including with national and local-level politicians, vote canvassers, government officers, local journalists, scholars and political activists.

Table 2: A General Data of Each Provinces in the Northeast Thailand

No.	Province	Population (2013)	MPs (2011)	PAO Budget (FY 2013) MB	Highest Municipality
	Upper Northeast				
1	Khon Kaen	1,781,655	10	2,646.82	City
2	Udon Thani	1,563,964	9	1,453.02	City
3	Roi Et	1,308,958	8	974.13	Town
4	Sakon Nakhon	1,134,322	7	926.93	City
5	Kalasin	984,030	6	937.63	Town
6	Mahasarakham	955,644	5	691.96	Town
7	Loei	632,205	4	742.63	Town
8	Nakhon Phanom	710,860	4	427.97	Town
9	Nongkhai	514,943	5	409.15	Town
10	Nongbua Lamphu	507,137	3	356.36	Town
11	Mukdahan	344,302	2	307.19	Town
12	Bung Kan	416,236	N/A	270.84	Tambon
	Lower Northeast				
13	Nakhon Ratchasima	2,610,164	15	3,753.67	City
14	Ubon Ratchathani	1,836,523	11	1,721.12	City
15	Sri Saket	1,462,028	8	1,059.05	Town
16	Chaiyaphum	1,135,723	7	1,487.52	Town
17	Yasothon	540,383	3	1,045.15	Town
18	Buriram	1,573,438	9	935.98	Town
19	Surin	1,388,194	8	815.54	Town
20	Amnat Charoen	374,698	2	396.37	Town

Source: Department of Provincial Administration, http://stat.bora.dopa.go.th/stat/y_stat56.html
Election Commission of Thailand, http://www.ect.go.th/newweb/upload/cms10/download/2360-1402-0.pdf
Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior.

Figure 2: Map of 20 Provinces in Northeastern Thailand
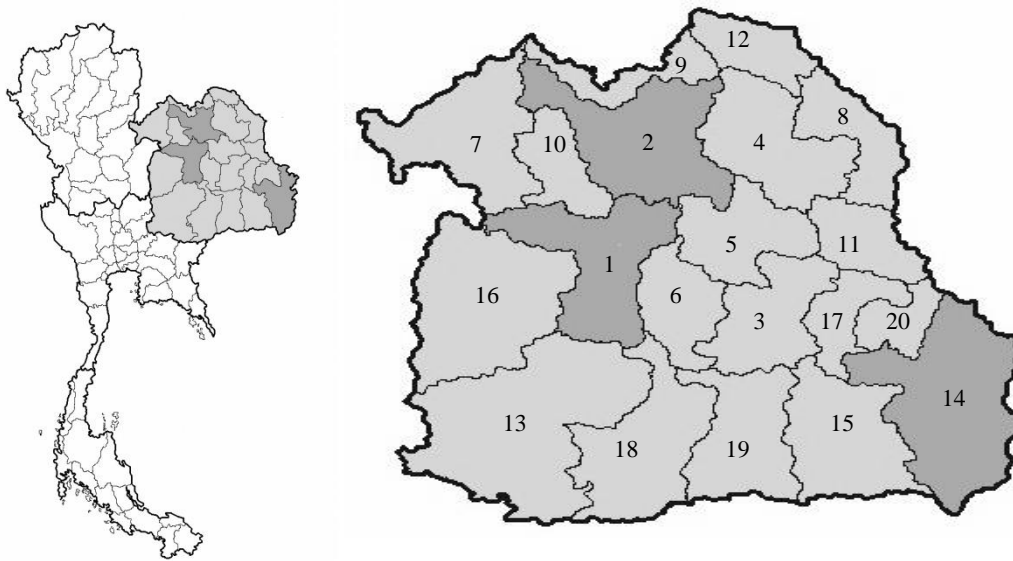
Source: Made by author

1.4 Literature Review

In the literature dealing with local elections, there are many works concerning Thai national and local politics, though there are few works focused on the change of political networks at the local level. This literature review will instead provide some general background to this study. It covers literature concerned with political networks including 1) the concept of political networks and the study of political networks in Thailand, and 2) local elections and their impact. However, the literature relating to decentralization, the rise to power of Thaksin and Thai Rak Thai, and political polarization will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

The Concept of Political Networks and the Study of Political Networks in Thailand

Political networks is a board concept. Essentially, it involves the power relationships that Knoke (1990), whose work presents the political network concept as part of a coherent theoretical perspective, defines as asymmetrical actual and potential interactions in which one

actor exerts greater control over another's behavior. [13] A political network has two basic components: the *political actors* including individuals, political groups and the state, and *the set of relations* between these political actors.

Knoke also divided forms of power into two fundamental dimensions: *influence* and *domination.* He defines *influence* as a relationship in which an actor "intentionally transmits information to another that alters the latter's actions."[14] In this relationship, "communication channel must exist between influencer and influencee."[15] To exert influence effectively, "the target of influence must believe the information to be credible and/or the source to be trustworthy."[16]

Domination is a relationship in which, as defined by Knowles, "one actor controls the behavior of another by offering or withholding some benefit or harm."[17] It is used to gain compliance. An actor can dominate another by providing the latter with resources that alternative suppliers are not able to provide. Bureaucratic networks and patron-client networks are examples of domination relationships.

Knoke argued that the most important elements of political power are the relationships of influence and domination among social actors. When analyzing power relations, influence and domination relations should be analyzed separately since each relation produces a distinct structure. Although his work focuses on structural analysis of politics that aims to explain the

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[13] David Knoke. (1990). *Political Networks: The Structural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[15] *Ibid*.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.,* p. 4.

distribution of power among actors in a social system, it also helps us to understand the concept of political networks.

Only a few works focus on Thai political networks at the local level. One among those is Pisit and Chaiyapong (2013).[18] Their work focuses on the change of local politics through local elections as mechanisms providing local residents the bargaining power. The study finds that electorates at the local level gain bargaining power through network building among various interest groups. Local people then create a new form of relationship with the state. Furthermore, local elections allow local politicians to entrench their relationship with local residents.

Another work concerning political networks is that of Viengrat Netipo. Viengrat (2015) has studied the dynamics of electoral politics and how local politics has been transformed since the 1997 constitution.[19] The study focuses on the involvement of political parties and politicians, the connections between national and local politicians, and the pattern of relationships between politicians and strongmen as well as voters. She argues that patron-client networks cannot always explained electoral politics at the local level. Electorates have more diverse voting decisions than the typical picture of vote-buying. Viengrat itemises the changes in local politics after the 1997 constitution as follows. The relations between national politicians and political parties can be considered through the process of candidate recruitment. The study found that the relationship among them is still uncertain because it depends on the

[18] Pisit Nasee & Chaiyapong Samniang (2013). Kan lueaktang: Kansang khrueakhai lae saiyai kwamsamphan nai kanmueng radap thongthin (Elections: network building and the web of relationship in local politics in Thailand). *King Prajadhipok's Institute Journal*, 11 (3), pp. 77-109.

[19] Viengrat Netipo (2015). *Hipbat kap bunkun: Kanmueang kanlueaktang lae kanplianplaeng khrueakhai uppatham* (Ballot and favor: electoral politics and change to patronage networks). Chiang Mai: Center for ASEAN Studies, Chiang Mai University.

negotiation between each candidate and the executives of the political party. The relationship between national and local politicians was changed after the rise to power of Thaksin Shinawatra. In some areas, stronger connections between local politicians and Thaksin-led parties led to stronger voter bases in each local area. Moreover, the local community is considered an essential voter base for the local elections. The study also points out that the patron-client relationships of national and local politicians are distinct. National politicians take responsibly for laws and regulations, consultation, and coordination relating to bureaucracy. On the other hand, local officers deal with the affairs relating to the welfare of local residents.

The literature review has identified some gaps which this dissertation can fill. No previous study points out the change in the pattern of relationship among political actors through the local elections over time. This dissertation, therefore, analyzes the change of political networks through the PAO elections in 2004, 2008 and 2012 in order to investigate the dynamics of local politics over time.

Local Elections and Its Impact

In Thailand, the concept of local elections gained more attention when administrative decentralization measures and direct local executive elections were introduced under the 1997 Constitution and the 1999 Determining Plan and Process of Decentralization Act. Direct local elections have transformed the dynamics of Thai local politics, especially the party-local candidate relationship.

Among those who have studied the local elections and its impact, Indonesia is one of the most interesting cases since it started its first-ever direct local elections in the same period as Thailand and there are some works dealing with the change of electoral networks when the local election was first adopted, that can be compared with the case of Thailand. The

decentralization process in Indonesia took place after the reforming movement forced Suharto to step down in 1998. Choi (2004) examines elections for local executive heads post-Suharto, particularly in relation to party politics and the 2001 Yokyakarta mayoral elections.[20] Political connections and networks still played a powerful role in the entire process of local elections starting from the selection of candidates. Individuals who wanted to become successful candidates for mayor and deputy mayor might have a strong connection with the party. Even in the electoral campaign and vote, the candidates might need support from the party members since the mayoral candidates had to be voted from the local assemblies who were by convention the members of the political parties or factions. Indirect local elections were accompanied by money politics since the candidates always bought votes from local assembly members to win the elections. Although the changes since 1988 have introduced a greater degree of democracy, money politics still dominates Indonesia's politics. From June 2005, the political platform in Indonesia was changed because the first direct local executive elections took place. According to Choi (2007), the role of political parties influencing local elections changed.[21] She argued that while national parties still played a powerful role in screening the candidates to compete in local elections, their roles in electoral campaigns and victory declined. The campaigns were more focused on candidates themselves that the party's programs.

Buehler and Tan's work (2007) supports Choi's argument. They examined the party-candidate relationship in regional elections and argued that direct local elections have weakened the political parties. Although the party-candidate relationship was strong in the past,

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[20] Nankyung Choi (2004). Local Elections and Party Politics in Post-Reformasi Indonesia: A View from Yogyakarta. *Journal of Contemporary Southeast Asia,* 26(2), pp. 280–301.

[21] Nakyung Choi (2007). Local Elections and Democracy in Indonesia: The Riau Archipelago. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 37(3), pp. 326-345.

the candidates in the local elections became independent from their parties after direct local elections were adopted.[22] The case of Indonesia shows that the system of direct local elections has contributed to the decline of the party-candidate relationship. The potential candidates did not need to seek support from the strongest party in order to be elected. Instead, the candidates were significantly more important than their parties. The reason behind this phenomenon was that the direct local elections had empowered voters and they generally picked the candidates based on their credibility and promises to further the voters' interests, as demonstrated by Mietzner (2010).[23] Politics at the local level, thus, become more independent from national politics.

As many scholars, including Nelson (2005), have pointed out, Thai local politics was always associated with influential persons in the area called *chao pho*.[24] He pointed out that Thai local politics had a unique characteristic as many of the local politicians were regarded as *chao pho*. When the PAO elections were first held, the MPs in each area asserted their influence on the election by sending their informal political group's members to join the campaign. The way national politicians used to dominate local politics was through 'their own people' (*phuak*), not through their political parties. These personal connections were a more important factor for local elections than the candidate's charisma or the party's brand. However, local

[22] Michael Buehler & Paige Tan (2007). Party-candidate Relationship in Indonesian Local Politics: A Case Study of the 2005 Regional Elections in Gowa, South Sulwesi Province, *Indonesian*, 84, pp. 41–69.

[23] Marcus Mietzner (2010). Indonesia's Direct Elections: Empowering the Electorate or Entrenching the New Order Oligarchy? In Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy (Ed.), *Sueharto's New Order and Its Legacy: Essays in Honour of Harold Crouch* (pp. 173-190). Retrieved from http://press.anu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/whole.pdf#page=193.

[24] Michael H. Nelson (2005). Analyzing Provincial Political Structure in Thailand: Phuak, Trakun, and HuaKhanaen. *Working Papers Series of the Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC) of the City University of Hong Kong*. Retrieved from
http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/APCITY/UNPAN027664.pdf.

elections were still important for political parties. Given that *phuak* or informal clans might field their members to general elections at the national level, PAO elections could be an indicator to show the extent of their voter bases.

Relating the party-candidate relationship in local elections, Nagai (2008) argued that political partie were formally involved in PAO executive elections in some areas.[25] Although the local executive elections differ from general elections since the candidates are not required to belong to a political party, there were some cases in which political parties supported candidates to compete in the elections. Moreover, in some areas, more than one candidate was fielded by the same political party. This shows that the PAO executive elections welcomed political parties' involvement in local government in some areas.

The local executive elections also involve contests between the two main political parties—Thai Rak Thai and the Democrat Party—and also competition among the members of each party faction. In relation to this point, McCargo and Ukrist (2005) pointed out that the PAO elections were seen as proxy contests between members of opposing Thai Rak Thai factions.[26] Most of the literature on contemporary politics tends to agree that Thai Rak Thai and other Thaksin-allied parties dominated Thai politics, even in the local level. Local politicians affiliated with Thai Rak Thai won the PAO executive elections in most provinces. Local politics therefore may become increasingly party-politicized. This politicization applies not only to PAO elections, but also municipal elections and those of local assembly members.

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[25] Fumio Nagai (2008). *Bunkenka go no Tai chihojichi - jichaitaishuchochokusetsukosen* (Thai local government after decentralization - direct local executive elections). *The Japanese Chamber of Commerce Bangkok*, 550 (February), pp. 70–79.

[26] Duncan McCargo & Pathnanand Ukrist (2005). *The Thaksinization of Thailand*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is composed of six chapters. The details of each chapter are as follows.

Chapter I: Introduction contains this introductory chapter, which provides background on the political structure before 2001. It explains the relations among each political actor: national and local politicians, political parties and *chao pho*. It lays out the significance of the study, the methodology and the case selection. Then, the chapter states the study's questions and main arguments. It also examines the literature on local elections and their impact, as well as the political networks at the local level.

Chapter II: Decentralization and the Rising Power of Thai Provincial Politics deals with the historical development of decentralization in Thailand. It explains how Thai governments promoted decentralization and local governance. It also gives some background on how they adopted the first-ever direct local elections. This chapter then shows the change of political structure in Thai national and local politics.

Chapter III: The Factors Affecting the Change of Political Networks mainly focuses on the factors causeing the change of local political networks. I outline two main factors that caused the change: 1) Thaksin Shinawatra and Thai Rak Thai changed voters' electoral preference from candidate-based to party-based, and 2) the political polarization between the Red Shirt and the Yellow Shirt groups that also directly affected voters' electoral decisions.

Chapter IV: Case Studies: Ubon Ratchathani, Udon Thani and Khon Kaen Province provides data collected from field research in these three selected provinces. The collected data was to analyze the change of local political networks in the next chapter.

Chapter V: Change and Continuity of Local Political Networks discusses the change in local political networks through the direct local elections in 2004, 2008 and 2012. Data in this chapter demonstrates the decline of major political parties' influence on voters at a local level. It also discusses the causes of the decline: power splits in the major parties, the adaptability of electoral strategies, the influential MPs in each province, and the formation of local political cliques.

Chapter VI: Discussion and Conclusion provides a summary of all previous chapters. It also discusses the change of local political networks and its impact. Further analysis on national politics is also provided in this chapter.

Chapter II

Decentralization and the Rising Power in Thai Provincial Politics

2.1 The Historical Development of Decentralization and Local Governmental Reform in Brief

Thai state administration is divided into three levels: central, regional and local administration according to the State Administration Act, B.E. 2534 (1991). The central administration system is composed of ministries and departments whose work concerns national security and the public interest; for instance, internal security, national defense, higher education, public health and various development programs. The central government can also delegate work to 'provincial administration' branch offices in provinces and districts. Another form of state apparatus directly in charge of the public affairs at local level is called 'local administration'.

Local administration adopted a three-tier system comprising PAO, municipalities and the Sub-district Administrative Organization (SAO). The functions and responsibilities vary for each type of local government organization. Decentralization to local government has progressed since the 1990s. The local administrative level plays a more significant role in state administration since local authorities shoulder further responsibility for public services—such as infrastructure management, promotion of resident's life quality, commerce, tourism, natural resources and environment including local art, culture and tradition and so on—that have gradually been transferred from central government The balance of power shifted away from central government and local power has been gradually strengthened. Understanding the historical context of local administration enables us to assess the political perspective of contemporary local government in Thailand.

2.1.1 The Situation of Local Administration Before 1932 (B.E. 2475)

Historically, the development of a decentralization policy began in 1892, in the period of King Rama V. This was the first attempt by the Kingdom of Siam to modernize its state administration, based on the western model. Power from central government was divested to remote areas known as *monthon* in order to maintain national sovereignty, as a strategy to negate the (perceived) threat of western colonization. The provincial administrative unit—*thesaphiban*—was established by Prince Damrong Rajanupab.[27] The provinces were directly controlled by the central government, which could appoint the heads of each province, and formulate policy via the provincial administration on behalf of the King. This system was recognized as a mechanism to centralize power to the King.[28] In 1897, a new form of local administrative unit, called 'sanitary district' or *sukhaphiban,* was initially established to maintain each area's cleanliness and public health, which became major problems in Bangkok. At first, sanitation was implemented only in Bangkok. In 1905, *sukhaphiban* was expanded to other local areas, starting with Thachalom district in Samut Sakhon province. It was the first time that the government allowed people to participate in their local administration.[29] Sanitation was then expanded to other local areas in Siam following the Sanitary District Act 1908. This policy maintained cleanliness in each area, prevented and treated diseases, and managed the roadways. Although it was recognized as the first local administrative

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[27] Tej (2005) used the term 'local administration' to describe the situation when the Kingdom of Thailand separated its power to *thesaphiban*, but some sources describe *thesaphiban* as a provincial/regional administration (King Prachathipok Institute, 2004).

[28] Supasawad Chardchawarn (2010). *Local Governance in Thailand: The Politics of Decentralization and the Role of Bureaucrats, Politicians, and the People.* Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization, p. 9.

[29] This was accomplished by establishing administrative committees chaired by sub-district headmen and assisted by village headmen.

organization in Thailand, *sukhaphiban* was not an absolutely self-autonomous unit as administrative committees were formed by civil servants appointed from central government, not elected representatives.[30]

2.1.2 The Promotion of Local Administration through the Regime Change (1932-1957)

After the revolution undertaken by the People's Party in 1932, the state's political system shifted from absolute to constitutional monarchy. The six main principles of the Party were used as the main policies of the first cabinet in Thailand.[31] The focus was on re-systemizing the political and economic structure to correspond with the democratic regime. Under these circumstances, the government set about educating the populus on the newly adopted democratic regime, and re-systemizing and modernizing the state administration to be consistent with the new regime.

Phraya Manopakon Nitithada, Thailand's first Prime Minister, set the decentralization policy as one of his cabinet's top priorities. The policy declaration states that "the administration of municipalities would be one means to accomplish the six main principles laid down by the People's Party." In the following year, the State Administration of Siam Act 1933 (B.E. 2476) was promulgated. According to the act, state administration was divided into three

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[30] Supachai Yawapraphas & Piyakorn Wangmahaporn (2012). *Nayobai satharana radap thongthin Thai* (Public policy at local level in Thailand). Bangkok: Judthong.

[31] The six main principles were as follows: 1) to maintain and secure national independence, for example political, juridical, and economical independence; 2) to maintain internal security and reduce crime; 3) to increase living standards by providing jobs for everyone, and to set up a national economic plan to protect against starvation; 4) to allow equal rights for the people; 5) to give the people other freedoms which did not conflict with the above-mentioned principles; and 6) to provide basic education for the people.

levels: central, regional and local administration. That was the first time that the local administration was officially mentioned in law.

The municipalities were also established following the Municipality Act 1933 (B.E. 2476). This aimed to promote municipalities, as only type of local administrative organization that allowed people to participate in their own area management. It also functioned as a unit for educating the people on the new regime following the revolution. Municipalities were divided into three types: city, town and sub-district (*tambon*). The structure consisted of the executive branch led by the mayor, and the legislative branch that compose of the municipality council whose members were elected from people who had the right to vote within each jurisdiction. However, according to this act, the functions of municipalities were widely scoped, especially city and town municipalities' work such as maintaining peace and order; waste management; preventing and containing communicable diseases; fire prevention; provision of elementary education; managing graveyards, waterways, slaughterhouses; and so on. These policies continued for almost a decade, until Prime Minister Plaek Pibunsongkhram's administration of 1942.

Due to the economic and political upheaval of World War II, decentralization was put on the back burner, while national security, economic recovery and international relations were emphasized instead. However, decentralization was revived by Thawan Thamrongnawasawat's government in 1946. By that time, the administration of municipalities was in disarray and the municipalities could not generally exercise full authority to support their functions. Local authorities therefore required increased capacity, and local administrative development policies continued incessantly even during the coup d'état in 1947.

When Plaek Phibunsongkhram returned to power in 1948, decentralization became his government's flagship internal affairs policy. In his second term, his military government

sought public credibility and acceptance. Phibun attempted to restructure the municipalities by establishing other types of local government organization aimed at increasing administrative efficiency. The PAO, SAO and sub-district councils were established under this regime. The government supported local administrations' affairs since they were recognized as an engine to promote the democratic regime, giving the national government at least a veneer of democratic legitimacy. The State Administration Act 1952 had little effect on local administration, though the Municipality Act 1953 led to a rearrangement of municipalities. The government adopted a council-mayor system. Each municipality was henceforth composed of a municipal council, from which commissioners were selected. Following the Act, the Ministry of Interior and governors were also strengthened, being granted powers to control local government.

Table 3: The Number of Municipalities (1933-1957)

Year	Number of Municipalities
1933	35
1935	48
1936	76
1937	95
1939	100
1940	110
1944	114
1945	117
1946	117
1952	117
1957	120

Source: Thanes (1997), pp. 102, 120

Furthermore, the Provincial Administration Act 1955 separated provincial administrations into provinces (regional adminstration) and PAO (local) with their own assets and manpower allocated through provincial budgets. In this period, the sub-district administration was also developed. Phibun thus set the ground for modern local administrative organizations. However, since he had little confidence in autonomous local government, he empowered the Ministry of Interior and governors to control and supervise them.[32] Thus, although local administration was significantly developed, the power of central government was still very strong in this period.

2.1.3 An Attempt at Centralization under Authoritarianism (1958-1973)

After the 1958 coup d'état, the state was governed by an authoritarian regime led by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikhajorn.[33] Between 1958 and 1973, the government attempted to decelerate the decentralization process and return power to central government. The junta regarded local administration as ineffective, especially given the lack of local executives' ability and knowledge. The authoritarian government attempted to empower the central and regional administrations to exercise control over local government. Following the Revolutionary Council Decrees No. 34, 40 and 55, talented officials from central and regional governments were appointed to fill provincial and municipal councilor vacancies. The governors were empowered to appoint mayors and municipal commissioners. Local government was brought under the bureaucratic system, and its administration was placed under the control of permanent civil servants from central and regional government.

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[32] Surasawadee Photchaphan (2004). *Prawat kanpokkhrong thongthin Thai* (History of local government in Thailand). Nonthaburi: King Prajadhipok' Institution.

[33] Gen. Marshal Sarit centralized the state's power to himself. In addition to the position of prime minister, he was also military commander-in-chief, chief of police, and Minister of National Development.

Under the Thanom Kittikhajorn administration, local government structures and categories were further reorganized. In 1963, sub-district councils and sanitary districts were merged to become sub-district council committees whose members came from both election and selection. However, this was implemented only in the so-called 'Accelerated Rural Development Area.'[34] In 1971, however, the sub-district administrative system was abolished, and sub-district councils were reinstated. They had no juristic status, and were not categorized as local governmental units. The reason behind this policy was that the government regarded ineffective sub-district administration as a threat to provincial development. In the same year, the government emphasized metropolitan administration. Nakhonluang Krungthep Thonburi was merged with other local government organizations in Bangkok, creating a Bangkok metropolis categorized as a new provincial administration.

2.1.4 The Revitalization of Democracy and the Emergence of Special Local Authorities (1973-1991)

After the revitalization of democracy in 1973, local government was emphasized and recognized as an organ to promote democracy. However, after the 1976 coup, the development of ordinary local government organizations was ignored, in favor of the establishment of a new type of local authority. The Constitution B.E. 2517 (1974) was the first constitution that clearly addressed local administration. Articles 214-217 cover local autonomy, the structure of local government organizations, and the election of local councilors. Following the constitution, several acts related to local administration were promulgated. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) Act B.E. 2518 (1975) categorized the BMA as a local government organization, and its responsibility covered the metropolitan area. The BMA governor was still

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[34] The Accelerated Rural Development Area is the border area in the North and Northeast.

appointed rather than elected. A revision of the Act in 1985 granted the BMA independence from central government control. The BMA councilors and governor were elected rather than appointed. Based on this model, the Pattaya City Administration Act B.E. 2521 (1978) granted special status for Pattaya as an administrative region because of its rapid economic growth.[35] The 1978 constitution did not include any major changes to local government, though the 1991 constitution introduced fiscal decentralization, granting local governments autonomy in collecting and managing revenues.

2.1.5 The Demand for Democratization and Recent Decentralization (1992〜)

The idea of root-and-branch local governmental reform and decentralization emerged in mid-1992. Local autonomy and decentralization were proposed as one of main ways to revitalize democracy after the Black May incident. Chuan Leekpai's administration prioritized decentralization, and it was introduced to replace a proposed system of electing provincial governors, which would have caused resentment among civil servants in the Ministry of Interior.

Demand for elective provincial governors was strongly supported by scholars and political parties. The idea of electing provincial governors was raised in the electoral campaign by the political parties after 1992 to give people the power to choose their own governor in

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[35] "Pattaya town does not only grow in terms of infrastructure, and land development; the town also shows its growth from its migration of population, which is higher than other local areas. Apart from that, the potential of the town from all angles of development shows the significant need for speculation from the government." Retrieved from www.pattaya.go.th.

each province.[36] However, after forming the government, Prime Minister Chuan U-turned, and argued that direct governor elections might affect the security of the state.[37] Moreover, the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Interior also proposed direct elections for PAO chief executives and other local administrative officials instead of the provincial governor. As a method of democratic rule, local elections were expected to drive democratization and the decentralization process in Thailand.

This idea was opposed by both politicians and the civil service, as the position of governor was regarded as a plum job offered as a promotion to Ministry of Interior civil servants. The provincial governor was head of both provincial and local administrations: he was head of the provincial administration and also PAO chief executive. The governor had full authority to control affairs in his province. It was felt that making the position of governor electable would lessen the motivation for civil servants to attain promotion. Moreover, elected politicians who took charge of the Ministry of Interior also put members of their networks in this position, as governors could help them coordinate and conduct the government's policies smoothly.

The proposal of direct election of provincial governors was thus rejected, to avoid conflict among Ministry of Interior officials. Instead, the reform of *kamnan* and village headman appointments, the status of juristic persons for sub-district councils, and power expansion of municipalities including the direct election of PAO chiefs were proposed by the

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[36] Supasawad Chardchawarn (2012). *Kanmueang nai krabuankan krachaiamnat: Sueksa phan botbat nakwichakan kharatchakan nakkanmueang lae prachachon* (The politics of the decentralization process: a study through the roles of scholars, bureaucrats, politicians and people). Bangkok: Thammasat University.

[37] Takashi Hashimoto (1999a). *Tai ni okeru chiho seido kaikaku no doko to ka dai ichi* (Local government reform in Thailand 1), *The Doshisha Hogaku,* 50(4), p. 21.

Ministry of Interior.[38] The government then put forward a policy to strengthen the roles and responsibilities of local government. The reform of sub-district SAOs was the first attempt to support the decentralization process and divert public attention from the idea of electing provincial governors.[39] The most significant change in recent decentralization to local government was the promulgation of the Sub-district council and Sub-district Administrative Organization Act. This act was drafted in 1994, but became effective in 1995 in Banharn Silpa-archa's administration. The Act enabled local government organizations to provide public service to resident in all areas, especially in the rural locations. Sub-district councilors henceforth became juristic persons, and the councils were elevated to SAOs if they maintained revenues of at least 1.5 million over three consecutive years. Moreover, the Provincial Administrative Organization Act 1997 codified the conditions of becoming PAO chief executive. Henceforth, governors as ex officio government officials were no longer PAO chief executives. Instead, PAO chief executives were elected by council members (legislative bodies), who were themselves directly elected by residents of the administrative area. Following an amendment of related laws in 2003, the direct election of PAO chief executives was first adopted in December 2003, and implemented nationwide in 2004. Similarly, at the sub-district level, SAO chief executives also became directly elected by the local residents.

The 1997 constitution was considered a turning point as it clearly promoted decentralization to local government. Chapter V of the constitution laid down the principles for local autonomy and decentralization policy implementation, the plan for decentralization including the division of functions, powers and responsibilities between central and local

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[38] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[39] Achakorn Wongpreedee (2007b). *Decentralization in Thailand, 1992–2006: Its Effect on Local Politics and Administration* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan, p. 35.

government and local authorities. The direct election of local executives and local councilors at all levels was also stipulated in this constitution.

Decentralization to local government received another boost after the promulgation of the Determining Plan and Stage for Decentralization Act 1999, and the revision of several laws related to each type of local administrative organization. The Act provided a concrete process of decentralization and local administration empowerment. For instance, it established a Decentralization to Local Government Organization Committee to organise the transfer of authority and functions for local services and taxes, etc. A fiscal decentralization target was also set: article 30, section 4 of the Act stipulated that the percentage of local taxation should meet 20% within 2001, and 35% within 2006. Although it accomplished the fiscal target in 2001 with 20.68% of local revenue, it could not reach the target in 2006 (see *table 4*). In fact, the increase was achieved by increasing local and shared taxes, not revenues.[40]

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[40] See Fumio Nagai, Kazuyo Ozaki & Yoichiro Kimata (2007). *Analysis from a Capacity Building Development Perspective: JICA Program on Capacity Building of Thai Local Authorities*. Japan: Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Table 4: The Percentage of Local Revenue (1997-2012)

Year	Percentage
1997	13.10%
1998	13.10%
1999	13.79%
2000	13.31%
2001	20.68%
2002	21.88%
2003	22.19%
2004	22.75%
2005	23.50%
2006	24.05%
2007	25.17%
2008	25.20%
2009	25.82%
2010	25.26%
2011	26.14%
2012	N.A.

Source: The official website of the Office of the Decentralization to the Local Government

Organization Committee, Thailand, http://www.odloc.org/

However, decentralization in Thailand was not a straightforward process whereby central government transferred power and responsibilities to local authorities. Instead, the government and the Ministry of Interior divested power and authority (*baengamnat* or deconcentration) from provincial administrations to local government. Provinces, districts and sub-districts transferred their functions and responsibilities to PAOs, municipalities and SAOs

at the local level. 245 functions were transferred in this way, categorized into six groups: infrastructure, quality of life (education and public health), communal and social order, investment and tourism, natural resource management, and local expertise. To ease the process of decentralization, the Ministry of Interior established new a new Department of Local Administration to monitor and supervise local government agencies. The former Department of Provincial Administration became responsible for governmental units of each ministry at provincial levels.

The capacity of local administrative organizations is a major problems of local administration. Laws and regulations related to local administration allow the establishment of local authorities to sufficiently respond to people's needs, which significantly increased the number of local government organizations. At present, there are 7,853 in total, most of which are small-scale local authorities—SAOs—which cannot implement the functions of central government due to the decentralization process, and provide the public service to the resident in the area efficiently. For that reason, the Department of Local Administration under the Ministry of Interior has sought an effective way to enhance the capacity of these local government organizations.

Focusing on the empowerment of local government, the Ministry of Interior failed to establish an effective monitoring mechanism. It allowed local bosses and entrepreneurs to abuse their power as local chiefs. Elected local politicians gained greater power and authorities, having almost complete control over the allocation of resources and patronage. It was common for developers, for instance, to enter local government, after which they could use their power nepotistically to secure licenses or contracts for their families and networked businesses.

Rather than binding relationships with national politicians, the local politicians paid more attention to link their networks with local politicians at lower levels.[41]

The PAO, as the highest form of local government whose authorities covered entire provinces, comprised abundant political and economic resources and became the main target for political parties and national politicians to place networked candidates into office. Particularly, in major provinces, the PAO budget was in excess of 1 billion baht. It is arguable that despite its substantial budget, the PAOs' responsibilities are too few compared to lower-tier local government organizations such as municipalities and SAOs. Its responsibilities do not directly provide public services to the people, but rather support the municipalities or SAOs if they are unable to provide such services due to their limited capacity. The PAO budget was, therefore, used for many projects. The PAO set the budgets and allocated resources to local authorities that request support. Sometimes, the budget was used to reward the heads of lower-tier local government, who supported them in PAO elections.[42] The budget allocation was thus used to strengthen their negotiating power, expand their influence and build their networks downwards with lower local authorities. This made the position of PAO chief executive highly attractive for both candidates and their supporters. It also made the PAO elections highly competitive.[43]

At the 2004 direct local elections, the popularity of major political parties attracted local candidates to stand for office. Likewise, Thai Rak Thai and other political parties actively participated in local elections with the aim of influencing the local government and solidifying

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[41] Prajak Kongkirati (2013). *Bosses, Bullets and Ballots: Electoral Violence and Democracy in Thailand, 1975–2011* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, p. 133.

[42] Achakorn, *supranote 39*, p. 65.

[43] *Nation Weekly*, February 23–29, 2004, p. 20.

their broad base of local support in order to ensure a triumph in the next general election, to be held in 2005. If their candidates could win the PAO executive elections, they would be able to exploit their networks and advance to the electoral campaign in the 2005 general election. This led to the rapidly rising importance of partisanship in local elections.

2.1.6 The Adoption of Direct Local Elections

As a method of democratic rule, local elections were expected to drive democratization and the decentralization process in Thailand. This concept stemmed from the 1997 Constitution and the 1999 Determining Plan and Stage for Decentralization Act. Under the Chuan administration, the government and the Ministry of Interior wholeheartedly supported and moved forward with the decentralization process, and subsequently the direct election of local executives was first implemented in the Thaksin administration. At the PAO level, direct elections adopted from the presidential system replaced the former electoral system, in which the chief executive was selected from among members of the PAO council, as this had caused lobbying problems among councilors.[44] By introducing a system of direct local elections, voters are able to directly cast a ballot for the representative of their choice, who is expected to formulate public policies that respond to voters' needs and interests. The PAO elections were, then, firstly held in Buriram province, and subsequently rolled out to 74 other provinces in 2004.[45]

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[44] Interview with local official, Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, September 04, 2014.

[45] Following the third amendment of the PAO Act passed in November 2003 that allows the chief executives of PAOs in 75 provinces to be directly elected by the people in the area. Due to the expiration of administration terms, the election for the PAO chief executive was held in Buriram province in December 2003.

2.2 The Rising power in Thai Provincial Politics

2.2.1 Power Transition at National Level

After the overthrow of absolute monarchy in 1932, during the reign of King Prajadhipok, the *Khana Rasadorn* or People's party, which was established by an elite group, of educated government officials and military officers, was appointed to lead the country. Although direct elections were introduced, the military influence was dominant. Over the next decade, most MPs were military officers. In that time, only two short terms of civilian governments were elected to Parliament, namely Prime Minister Thawi Bunyaket from August-September 1945, and Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong from March-August 1946.

During the 1930s to 1970s, although the electoral system and parliamentary institutions were introduced, the role of the military and bureaucracy was still strong in the Thai political arena, including the election process. Politics in that period consisted of competition and power sharing amongst the bureaucracy.[46] The modern bureaucratic system had been developed and reformed since the period of King Rama V, whilst political institutions were established after the revolution in 1973. The nascent political institutions, therefore, were not stable enough to support a democratic regime. This instability allowed military officers and bureaucrats to increasingly usurp political and administrative power. Riggs (1967) called this phenomenon "Bureaucratic Polity,"[47] in which state power entirely resided within the bureaucratic elites. The non-bureaucratic actors played minor roles in the political system. Businessmen, especially in the capital city, could only indirectly enjoy political power by binding their personal networks with bureaucrats for their mutual benefit. The bureaucrats were able to abuse

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[47] Fred W. Riggs (1967). *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*. Honolulu: East–West Center Press.

their power to protect their business interests, especially the monopolies that needed to secure licenses or government contracts. In turn, businessmen gave them financial support for political purposes. Under the so-called bureaucratic polity, elected MPs had limited power because the administrative power was centered in bureaucratic system. Prior to 1973, it was not specified in the constitution that the cabinet or even the prime minister must be elected MPs. This had allowed any person, especially leading civil servants or military offices, to assume cabinet positions. Therefore, cabinets were dominated by bureaucratic elites in the pre-1973 period, and the Thai state consequently fell into authoritarianism.

However, during the early to mid 1970s, the domination of military dictatorships under authoritarian regimes was temporarily brought to an end, and replaced by the establishment of democracy. In October 1973, a wide-scale movement led by students toppled the autocratic government led by the 'three tyrants', Thanom Kittikhajorn, Praphas Charusathian and Narong Kitikhajorn.[48] The King appointed Sanya Thammasak as Prime Minister. The students' uprising was a paradigm shift in the political situation of the period.[49] Meanwhile, electoral politics had also developed. The rising influence of democratic elements such as political parties, public intellectuals and civil society organizations, in contrast to the military-bureaucratic elites' political influence, established a new framework, which Anek (1988) called 'semi-democratic polity.'[50] Political institutions became more competitive and a free electoral

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[48] See Saneh Cammarik (2001). *Kanmueang Thai kap kanpatiwat tulakom* (Thai politics and the October revolution) in Charnwit Kasetsiri and Thamronsakdi Petchlertanand, eds. *Jak 14 tulathueng 6 tula* (From 14 October to 6 October). Bangkok: The Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, pp. 1-48.

[49] Anek Laothamatas (1988). Business and Politics in Thailand: New Patterns of Influence. *Asian Survey,* 28(4), p. 452.

[50] *Ibid.*

system was established. This encouraged business leaders to enter politics and participate in the policy-making process to ensure that their business interests were represented by the state.[51] Business leaders could achieve this more easily than other groups, as they had money and capital that facilitated access to politics. The relations between business and politics then became closer. The balance of power shifted away from bureaucracy and, although the bureaucratic elements still had some influence on the political system, the role of non-bureaucrats became increasingly significant.

Under the so-called semi-democratic regime, political influence by business increased through direct participation in parliament and membership of the cabinet. Positions in office afforded them political power. Elections, therefore, became a channel for businessmen to obtain status, power and wealth. They also attempted to establish their own political succession, by a variety of means. Some businessmen were only indirectly involved in national politics, providing financial support to political parties in order to strengthen the irconnections with the government and their influence on policy-making. However, other participated in politics by directly involvement in political institutions. They sought parliamentary seats by running in general elections. Through this channel, they could gain and exercise power to secure their own business interests.

Another form of participation was the establishment of political parties by the business elites. They were involved in founding the three main political parties of the 1970s and 80s, namely the Chart Thai Party established by the business groups around Bangkok, the Democrat Party that drew many businessmen in the cities and towns of the South, and the Social Action

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[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 451-452.

Party with connections to banks and agribusiness conglomerates.[52] Business involvement in politics challenged the traditional political roles of military officers and bureaucrats to some extent. Thailand entered a new political period that entailed a political structural change at both national and local level.

2.2.2 Rising Power at Provincial and Local Level

The political involvement of business began in the metropolis and gradually expanded to the provincial and local level. Provincial businessmen developed themselves and extended their political role by fielding their networks to local offices. Many studies have demonstrated that, due to the rising significance of money politics in the provinces, *chao pho* emerged and played influential roles in Thai provincial politics.[53] An explanation of provincial political mechanisms would not be complete without reference to *chao pho*, the local power linking to other political actors in each locality. Ockey (1993) traced the origin and role of *chao pho* or godfather in Thai society.[54] He stated that *chao pho* had roots as both *nakleng* (gangsters) and *sia* (tycoons).

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[52] Pasuk Phongpaichit & Chris Baker (2000). Chao Sua, Chao Pho, Chao Thi: Lords of Thailand's Transition. In Ruth McVey (Ed.), *Money and Power in Provincial Thailand*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 30-52.

[53] See James Ockey (1993). CHAOPHO: Capital Accumulation and Social Welfare in Thailand. *Crossroads,* 8(1), pp. 48-77.; Pasuk Phongpaichit & Chris Baker (2000). Chao Sua, Chao Pho, Chao Thi: Lords of Thailand's Transition. In Ruth McVey (Ed.), *Money and Power in Provincial Thailand*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 30-52.; Sombat Chantornvong (2000). Local Godfathers in Thai Politics. In Ruth McVey (Ed.), *Money and Power in Provincial Thailand*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 54-55.; Hewison, Kevin, & Maniemai Thongyou. (2000). Developing Provincial Capitalism: A Profile of the Economic and Political Roles of a New Generation in Khon Kaen, Thailand. In Ruth McVey (Ed.), *Money and Power in Provincial Thailand (pp. 195-220)*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

[54] James Ockey (1993). CHAOPHO: Capital Accumulation and Social Welfare in Thailand. *Crossroads,* 8(1), pp. 48-77.

Nakleng acted as village protectors using a traditional leadership style, whilst *sia* had economic power in community and strong connections to the market. In contrast to Ockey, Sombat (2000) explained *chao pho* in terms of *nakleng* and *phu mi itthiphon* (influential people).[55] He argued that *nakleng* did not hold *amnat* or official authority and power, but had local *itthiphon* or influence instead.[56] The role of *nakleng* was to protect the village from rival *nakleng*, using violence if necessary. Rather than being seen as criminals running a protection racket, they were admired and respected by the community.

Under the Sarit government in the 1960s, the provincial economy grew rapidly due to the money for rural development projects flowing from central government. This led to rapid transformation in the provinces. The government allocated large proportions of budget for infrastructure construction in the countryside, tied to foreign direct aid during the Vietnam War. The rural-based agricultural economy was transformed and modernized.[57] This increased rural wealth and provided opportunities for capital accumulation for both legal and illegal businesses, leading to the emergence of provincial economic elites. Increasing his economic influence via his local business, the *nakleng* typically developed into *sia*, and eventually to *chao pho*.[58] They were involved in businesses with direct influence over the economies of their provinces, such as land ownership, mining, transportation, moneylending etc. Moreover, *chao pho*'s economic activities often related to monopolistic businesses requiring government

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[55] Sombat Chantornvong (2000). Local Godfathers in Thai Politics. In Ruth McVey (Ed.), *Money and Power in Provincial Thailand*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 54-55.

[56] See Tamada (1991) for detailed analysis of *itthiphon* and *amnat*.

[57] Duncan McCargo & Ukrist Pathmanand (2005). *The Thaksinization of Thailand*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, p. 3.

[58] See Pasuk Phongpaichit & Chris Baker (2000). Chao Sua, Chao Pho, ChaoThi: Lords of Thailand's Transition. In Ruth McVey (Ed.), *Money and Power in Provincial Thailand.* Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 30-52.

licenses.[59] In order to secure state contracts, *chao pho* established close connections with high-ranking government officials. Although the business was legal, the methods to secure their benefits involved corruption.[60] Economic wealth at the provincial level became more closely linked with political influence.

In the mid 1970s, when electoral politics was revived, *chao pho* entered alliances with politicians.[61] The politicians recognized that local connections were important to procure votes since local people voted for candidates recommended by *chao pho*.[62] Thus, politicians and *chao pho* cooperated to their mutual advantage.[63] As respected and influential local strongmen, *chao pho* could help politicians regarding electoral activities. They provided vote-canvassers and financial support for election campaigns. As mediators who could establish relations upwards to high-ranking officials and downwards to the villagers, *chao pho* had potential to create broad-based networks to support electoral campaigns. The powerful *chao pho* could help politicians by organizing and funding the operation of vote buying. They could also use criminal elements to coerce government officials, police, and rival candidates.[64] In turn, *chao pho* won support from politicians who awarded government contracts. Moreover, politicians could protect *chao pho*, shielding them from government officials and police investigations

[59] Sombat, *supranote 55*, p. 56.

[60] *Ibid.*, pp. 58-65.

[61] Ockey, *supranote 54*, p. 55.

[62] John T. Sidel (2005). Bossism and Democracy in the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia: Towards an Alternative Framework for the Study of 'Local Strongmen'. In John Harriss, Kristian Stokke, and Olle Tornquist (Eds), *Politicising Democracy: The New Local Politics of Democratisation* (pp. 51-74). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 59.

[63] Ockey, *supranote 54*, p. 76.

[64] James Ockey (2000). The Rise of Local Power in Thailand: Provincial Crime, Elections and the Bureaucracy. In Ruth McVey (Ed.), *Money and Power in Provincial Thailand (pp. 74-96).* Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p. 85.

into their illegal businesses such as drug-dealing, gambling, underground lotteries and smuggling.[65]

Chao pho corruptly cooperated with government officials in local politics for many years. However, through local economic development, they could strengthen their power in the locality and challenge the prolonged influence of bureaucracy.[66] The *chao pho* gained the upper hand in their relationships with officials by making close connections with national-level politicians who were able to rotate the appointed officials in each area. Through these relationships, they could gain power over government officials at the provincial level, and tipping the scales in local elections to threaten the career paths of civil servants. They directly participated in elections both by fielding their networked candidates and even running the elections themselves. They sought legitimacy through elections, as elections were recognized as the path to power to secure political and economic influence in the area. Many *chao pho* won elective offices at local, provincial and national level, and developed a patron-client relationship with local residents in their own constituencies.

However, in the 1990s, the next generation of *chao pho* dynasties did not resemble their fathers. They were well educated and sometimes sent to overseas universities. They sought profits from legal businesses rather than crime, to restore the reputation of the family name. Even when entering politics, they chose legitimate means rather than the manner of previous *chaopho*. They became directly involved in politics by supporting candidates and then political parties in elections. The traditional *chao pho* decreased their own political roles and instead provided financial support for their families' political activities.

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[65] Sidel, *supranote 62*, p. 59.

[66] Ockey, *supranote 64*, p.83.

In addition, decentralization and local elections produced fresh political entrepreneurs who were independent from the old influence of *chao pho*, thus reducing the role of *chao pho* in local constituencies.[67] Through direct local elections, local politicians could directly meet residents, rather than using patron networks through *chao pho*. They became more powerful than village heads (*phuyaiban*) and sub-district chiefs (*kamnan*). Local elections also created new political networks that wrested power from the state and provincial levels to the locality.[68] The political role of *chao pho* declined, and was replaced by provincial politicians. However, the characterization and pattern of *chao pho* varied from area to area.

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[67] Nithi Eowsriwong. (2012). *Phiphak san* (Judge the court).Bangkok: Matichon. p.164.

[68] Somchai Phatharathananunth. (2016). Rural transformations and democracy in northeast Thailand. *Journal of Contemporary Asia, 46 (3)*, p. 516.

Chapter III

The Factors Affecting the Change of Political Networks

From 2001 to 2014, two main factors affected the change in political networks at the local level: the emergence of Thaksin and his aligned-parties, and the country's ensuing political polarization.

3.1 Thaksin, Thai Rak Thai and the Change in Electoral Preference (power structure and balance) at National Level

Politics in Thailand has been undergoing a dramatic transition for more than a decade. Critical to this transformation was the Thai Rak Thai Party's victory in Thailand's 2001 general election. It was the first election held under the 1997 constitution, in which a new electoral system and the independent entities were introduced. Constituency elections had been adopted since 1996, and to this the 1997 constitution added party list elections that empowered the political parties. Members of the House of Representatives were elected under two systems: 400 members from constituency elections and 100 members from the party list. The constitution also introduced elected senators for the first time in the country's history. Following this new system, the Thai Rak Thai Party, contesting its first election, proposed populist policies to appeal to grassroots voters. The 2001 election was a landslide victory for the Thai Rak Thai Party, as it was able to gain 248 of the 500 parliamentary seats,[69] establishing itself as the most successful party in Thai political history.

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[69] In the 2004 election, Thai Rak Thai's majority increased to 250 seats.

Table 5: The 2001 and 2005 General Election Results Categorized by Region

Party	Northeast		North		Center		South		Bangkok		Constituency in total		Party list		Total	
	2001	2005	2001	2005	2001	2005	2001	2005	2001	2005	2001	2005	2001	2005	2001	2005
Thai Rak Thai	69 (50%)	126 (92.64%)	54	71	47	80	1	1	29	32	200	310	48	67	248	377
Democrat	6 (4.35%)	2 (1.47%)	16	5	19	7	48	52	8	4	97	70	31	26	128	96
Chat Thai	11 (7.97%)	6 (4.42%)	3	-	21	10	-	1	-	1	35	18	6	7	41	25
New Aspiration	19 (13.77%)	-	1	-	3	-	5	-	-	-	28	-	8	-	36	-
Chat Patthana	16 (11.59%)	-	2	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	22	-	7	-	29	-
Seri Tham	14 (10.14%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	-	-	-	14	-
Ratsa don	1 (0.72%)	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	-
Social Action	1 (0.72%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
Thin Thai	1 (0.72%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
Maha chon	-	2 (1.47%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
Total	**138**	**136**	**76**	**76**	**95**	**97**	**54**	**54**	**37**	**37**	**400**	**400**	**100**	**100**	**500**	**500**

Source: The Election Commission, compiled by author

Nopparat (2007) identified four main factors that propelled Thai Rak Thai to its unique position of political dominance: historical circumstances deriving from the economic crisis and the 1997 political reform, the charisma and potential of the party leader, the weakness of rival political parties after the 1997 general elections, and the party's populist policies.[70]

Thai Rak Thai was founded in 1998 soon after the 1997 economic crisis and the promulgation of the 1997 'people's constitution' (so called because of its relatively democratic character in comparison to previous charters). Its initial focus was rescuing Thai businesses from the financial crisis and offering itself as a breath of fresh air to change the Thai political

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[70] Nopparat Wongvittayapanich (2007). *Kankokamnoe tratthaban phak diao nai kanmueang Thai: sueksa korani phak Thai Rak Thai* (The formation of one-dominant party government in Thai politics: a case study of the Thai Rak Thai Party) (Unpublished masters thesis). Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand.

environment. The timing of the party's establishment was crucial. The economic crisis and prolonged corruption from previous governments created a demand among Thai society for political reform. The people also demanded a new generation of politicians to surmount the economic crisis.[71] As a successful and charismatic businessesman, Thaksin Shinawatra won the overwhelming support of the electorate.

The party widened its popularity by promoting populist policies, which were recognized as its main selling point. These proposed policies could directly respond to social demands, leading to electoral success in 2001.

'Populism' can be defined as policies that appeal to the mass of the people with the expectation of popular support in return, without consideration of the overall economic effect. Populism, however, is not new in Thai political history. Looking back to 1975, the Kuekrit Pramoj administration launched a 'money relocation' project, in which the government distributed the budget through sub-district councils, hiring villagers for road construction, waterway maintenance, bridge construction and so forth. The scheme aimed to improve the villagers' quality of life, creating new jobs and developing infrastructure in rural areas, and Kuekrit's popularity increased as a result. After gaining only 18 seats in the 1975 general election, he won 45 seats in the 1976 election.[72] However, although this populist policy increased the popularity of Kruekrit's party, it did not bring about a wider paradigm shift in Thai politics.

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[71] *Ibid*., p. 104.

[72] Although Kuekrit gained only 18 seats, he formed a coalition with eight other political parties with 135 seats in total, and could thus form a government.

The implementation of populist policies and public services was a central plank of Thaksin's administration. Populist policies, which Pasuk & Baker (2009) called the "three-point rural platform"—namely, affordable healthcare, agrarian debt relief and village funds—were used as one of the main strategies of TRT to gain the popular support in the general election, especially in rural areas.[73] Furthermore, these policies were implemented with extraordinary speed as soon as TRT came to power. Patients were required to pay only 30 baht per hospital visit. 2.27 millions farmers, who owed around 88,510 million baht in total, participated in the debt-relief project,[74] and were offered either a moratorium on past debt repayment or a reduction of interest payments. The urban and village fund program also allocated 1 million baht to each of the 74,872 targeted villages, allowing villagers to borrow up to 20,000 baht per debtor.[75] By implementing those policies, TRT party could gain great electoral support from the people in the North and Northeast in particular.

Apart from the campaign of populist policies, candidate recruitment was also a key strategies leading the party to succeed in the 2001 election. Thai Rak Thai was a new political party contesting its first general election, and voters generally elected their representatives based on their preferred candidates, so many of TRT's candidates were former MPs, who had proven electoral prospects from the previous elections. According to Somchai (2008),[76] 52 former MPs were recruited to compete in the 2001 election in the Northeastern region. Most

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[73] Pasuk Phongpaichit & Chris Baker (2009). *Thaksin.* Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, p. 84.

[74] The cabinet resolution, March 19, 2002.

[75] The cabinet resolution, April 2, 2002.

[76] Somchai Phatharathananunth. (2008). The Thai Rak Thai Party and Elections in Northeastern Thailand. *Journal of Contemporary Asia,* 38(1), p. 111.

of them came from the New Aspiration Party led by Pol. Gen. Chawalit Yongjaiyuth, whose candidates previously played an active role in the electoral politics in the region.[77]

Among the 138 Northeastern constituencies, it was notable that around 60 new MPs, who had never been elected before, accounted for approximately 40 percent of the total elected because of the popularity of the TRT party. This was a new phenomenon for elections in the region, as the candidates outside of the established clientelism networks previously had less chance to be elected. This group of new MPs can be categorized into two groups. The first group were members of existing electoral networks such as politicians' relatives, vote canvassers, members of local councils, etc. For many decades, this group's role had been to help MPs win elections. In 2001, however the group shifted themselves from supporters, who were out of power, to attain formal status as politicians. The second group was businessmen, civil servants and other candidates who used "the TRT fever" to gain popularity.[78]

Not surprisingly, after the 2001 election, TRT became a magnet for candidates who wanted to win the next election. TRT's strength led to defections from rival parties. In the 2005 general election, 41 Northeastern TRT MPs had defected from other political parties.[79] Thai Rak Thai won 126 of the 136 seats in the Northeast in that year. Moreover, although TRT itself did not contest the 2011 election (having been dissolved by the Constitutional Court), it remained the dominant influence and continued its impact on voters' electoral decisions.

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[77] According to Somchai (2008), of the 52 former MPs recruited by TRT for the 2001 election, 34 former MPs had been members of other parties in the 1996 election, as follows: New Aspiration Party (22), Chart Pattana Party (4), Thai Citizen Party (3), Social Action Party (3), and the Democrat Party (1). While this shows a high instance of defection to TRT, it should also be noted that TRT itself did not exist in 1996, thus its candidates were to some extent chosen from the existing pool of MPs.

[78] *Nation Weekly*, 450, 2001, pp. 28-30.

[79] Somchai, *supranote 76*, p. 118.

Siripan (2011) notes that electoral votes were largely split between Pheu Thai and the Democrat Party—Thailand's oldest political party—in the party list electoral system. Pheu Thai thus became one of the 'two dominant parties'[80] in Thai electoral politics.[81]

The success of TRT's strategies made a tremendous change in local political structure. It drew previously disenfranchised villagers, particularly from the Northeast, into the political arena, and changed their electoral preference. Previously, villagers had voted for candidates associated with the patron-client relationship in the constituency. However, after the coming of TRT, electoral preferences shifted from candidate-based to party-based due to the populist policies that directly connected with villagers. The policies of the political parties became paramount as factors influencing electoral outcomes, creating new expectations for policy platforms. Villagers became more engaged with party policies since they recognized their newfound ability to influence the direction of the state through their support for political parties offering populist policies. This phenomenon accelerated in the 2005 election, as all major political parties modified their campaigns to promote populist policies as enticements to voters. This also changed the pattern of the patron-client relationship at the local level. Populist policies, and Thaksin's personal appeal, could create stable loyalties to TRT and long-term changes in voting patterns. Pasuk & Baker (2009) noted that "[i]n the party's heartlands of the north and northeast, it probably spent less than before on vote-buying because it could rely on

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[80] This was similar to the 1996 election, when the Democrat and New Aspiration parties dominated the House of Representatives.

[81] Siripan Nogsuan Sawasdee (2011). *Raingan chabap sombun kanlueaktang samachik sapha phuthaen ratsadon phutthasakkarat 2554: sueksa botbat phakkanmueang lae phruettikam lae kantatsinchai lueaktang khong prachachon nai sathanakan khwamkhatyaeng thang kanmueang* (The final report on the 2001 general election for Thailand's House of Representatives: studies of the roles of political parties, voters' political behavior, and electoral decisions under political conflict situations). Retrieved from http://www.tdw.polsci.chula.ac.th/?q=Elected_members_of_parliament, p. 341.

the popularity of the leader, the party and the candidates."[82] The patron-client ties shifted directly to the relations between the villagers and the political party (TRT). This reduced the role of constituency MPs to mere middlemen between villagers and the party. Moreover, the party could cement its relations with villagers directly through its policies. This can be called a 'neo patron-client relationship' that exists in the contemporary local political structure, which explains the current state of the local politics and local elections.

Thaksin's leadership was influential on both national and local levels. When the first round of the PAO chief executive elections was held in 2004, competing candidates in the same constituency vied for official TRT support.[83] Photographs of Thaksin standing side-by-side with the candidate, with the TRT logo visible, were used in the electoral campaign. The more they claimed intimacy with Thaksin or TRT, the more chance candidates had to gain votes in the constituency, especially in the areas of the TRT's influence. This scenario, at least, can prove that the electorate's decisions were based on the political party or so-called party-based preference. Thaksin and his party became a valuable product on the political market and a powerful influencer to voters at time.

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[82] Pasuk Phongpaichit, & Baker, Chris. (2009). *Thaksin.* Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books. P.236.

[83] Wasan Luangprapat. (2008). *Public Sector Reform in Thailand: Causes and Consequences (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).*Kobe University, Kobe, Japan. p.134.

Figure 3: New Relationship among Local Political Actors after the Rise of Thaksin
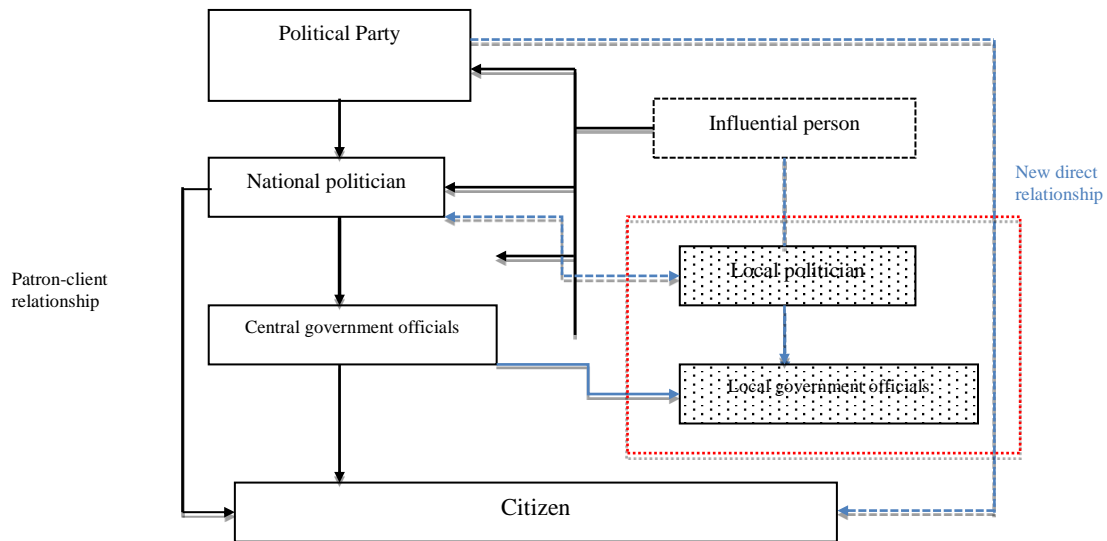
Source: Made by author

3.2 The Beginning of Political Polarization: The Conflict of Political Ideologies

In March 2005, the Thai Rak Thai Party remained popular and again won a landslide election victory with 19 million votes. It accounted for more than 60 per cent of all votes cast nationwide and formed a majority in parliament. Soon after that, the collection of groups opposing Thaksin began actively rebelling against the government. Through the rapid expansion of the anti-Thaksin movement, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) was established. The PAD was a widespread coalition between various sections and organizations in society. An investigation conducted by Pye & Schaffar (2008) demonstrated that the coalition extended to opposition politicians, business rivals, NGO activists, the urban middle class, intellectuals, journalists, bureaucrats and military leaders. The alliance had a mutual

agenda to oust Thaksin and his government.[84] They combined with those who had lost benefits and power through unfair treatment resulting from Thaksin's state policies.

Most significant amongst the protest's leadership was the media mogul Sondhi Limthongkul. Formerly, he had good relations with Thaksin, as a recipient of government support for indebted business after Thaksin came to power.[85] However, Sondhi and Thaksin fell out after his state support for his business ceased and his *Thailand Weekly* program was removed from state television. Sondhi became a vocal critic of Thaksin and his administration, accusing Thaksin of authoritarianism and corruption, and increasing pressure on his government. This attracted support from anti-Thaksin voters. In the meantime, a protest against government's FTA policies was also held.

However, the turning point that intensified the anti-Thaksin movement was the sale of Shin Corporation's shares in January 2006. Thaksin's family sold its shares to a Singapore state investor, Temasek Holdings Company for US$1.88 billion. Thaksin paid no tax on the deal, as his government had altered the tax law shortly before the sale. Thaksin faced public criticism over the ethics of this sale since the business included a satellite, an asset of national importance. Thaksin's critics accused him of tax evasion, and thr anti-Thaksin movement gained popularity in Bangkok. In February 2006, the demonstrations garnered widespread support and transformed into the PAD.

Government corruption was initially the main rallying cry of the movement. However, their grievances soon widened, as the PAD accused Thaksin of disrespect towards the King in

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[84] Oliver Pye & Wolfram Schaffar (2008). The 2006 Anti-Thaksin Movement in Thailand: An Analysis. *Journal of Contemporary Asia,* 38(1), pp. 38-61.

[85] See Kasian Tejapira. (2006). Toppling Thaksin. *New Left Review, 39*, pp. 5-37.

numerous ways.[86] Raising the monarchy as a point of criticism was a precarious strategy, but succeeded in intensifying a series of angry protests and evolving into a mass mobilization. The protest defined Thaksin and his successors as enemies of the nation, the religion and the monarchy. Sondhi claimed loyalty to the monarchy, and declared that the PAD was ready to protect and fight for the King and the royal family. As yellow represented the day of the King's birth, the PAD protesters wore the yellow shirts at their rallies, becoming known as the 'Yellow Shirt' movement. The protest spread to other cities across the country, especially in the south, a Democract Party stronghold. The movement then became larger and more powerful.

In response to this opposition, Thaksin unexpectedly dissolved parliament and set a snap election for April 2006. The main opposition parties, namely Democrat, Chart Thai Party and Mahachon, stood with the PAD's by boycotting of the election and campaigning for 'no vote.' The opposition parties claimed that Thaksin was not sincere in his commitment in political reform. Furthermore, they argued that the snap election was an attempt to divert public attention from the controversial tax-free sale of his family's business, and that there was not enough time for candidates to prepare.

Due to the opposition boycott, Thai Rak Thai gained 460 of the 500 seats at the election. The PAD ignored the election outcome and vowed to continue their protests until Thaksin resigned. To reduce political tension, a few days after the election Thaksin announced his refusal to stand as Prime Minister, and assigned Deputy Prime Minister Chidchai Vanasatidya as caretaker Prime Minister until a new head of government could be appointed. However, the PAD leaders backed by the Democrat Party repeatedly called for royal intervention to remove Thaksin, asking the King to replace Thaksin with a royal-appointed Prime Minister. Another

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[86] See Hewison, Kevin. (2008). A Book, the King and the 2006 Coup. *Journal of Contemporary Asia, 38(1),* pp. 190-211.; Ukrist Pathmanand. (2008). A different coup d'état?. *Journal of Contemporary Asia, 38(1)*, pp. 124-142.

political turning point came when the King gave a speech to judge from the Administrative and Supreme Courts on April 25, 2006. The King commented that the call for a snap election within thirty days, in which the opposition parties did not field the candidates, was not appropriate. In an unusually direct intervention, the King said:

Another point is whether it was right to dissolve the House and call for snap polls within 30 days. There was no debate about this. If it's not right, it must be corrected. Should the election be nullified? You have the right to say what's appropriate or not. If it's not appropriate, it is not to say the government is not good. But as far as I'm concerned, a one party election is not normal. The one candidate situation is undemocratic.[87]

The PAD had called for a royally-appointed prime minister, citing article 7 of the constitution, though the King refused to make such an appointment, arguing that it was beyond his authority as a constitutional monarch. Instead, he requested the judges to work together to resolve the political crisis:

I affirm that Article 7 does not empower the King to make a unilateral decision. It talks about the constitutional monarchy but does not give the King power to do anything he wishes. If the King did so, he would overstep his duty. I have never overstepped this duty. Doing so would be undemocratic. You have the duty to perform and consult with the people who are informed. People call to "rescue the

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[87] Quoted from *The Nation*, April 27, 2006, HM the King's April 26 Speeches (Unofficial Translation). Retrieved from http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2006/04/27/headlines/headlines_30002592.php.

nation". Whatever they do, they call "rescue the country". What do you rescue? The country has not sank yet. We have to prevent it from sinking, we do not have to rescue it. You have to think carefully how to solve this problem. If you can, please consult with each other.[88]

The King's speech brought the political situation to a new stage of tension. The Constitution Court later nullified the April 2006 general election, declaring that it was unfair and violated voter privacy.[89] The court also ordered a new election, which Thaksin set for October 15, 2006.

Thaksin's attempt to prolong his premiership was curtailed after the armed forces staged a coup d'état on September 19, 2006. As Yoshifumi (2008) has shown, military coups are standard practice in Thailand.[90] The timing of the coup, coming five weeks before a scheduled election, indicates a military interference in the electoral process. Previous coups were either carried out to overthrow governments from bureaucrats or to resolve conflicts among military factions. However, under the electoral system, Thaksin and Thai Rak Thai had grown in strength over years. His opponents were not able to compete with him at the ballot box, as seen in the election results of 2001, 2005 and nullified election in 2006. Thaksin could retain the long-term support of a majority of voters, and was likely to be victorious again in the proposed October 2006 election.

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[88] *Ibid.*

[89] The Court ruled that some voting booths had been incorrectly positioned, meaning that votes were not cast in private.

[90] Tamada Yoshifumi (2008). *Myths and Realities: The Democratization of Thai Politics*. Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, p.69.

Lacking an alternative approach, the only strategy available to his opponents was to change the rules of the game. The coup was, therefore, engineered to topple Thaksin and his followers from power. The PAD ceased their activities, announcing that the coup had accomplished their goals. On the other hand, the overthrow of the elected Thai Rak Thai government by the military coup was adding fuel to the pro-Thaksin protesters' fire.

The so-called 'Red Shirt' social movement was established to confront the PAD in early 2006. The group represented a wide range of interest groups, ranging from supporters of Thaksin and his alliances to activists who fought for full Thai democracy. Many scholars, along with the media and anti-Thaksin protesters, characterized the Red Shirts as the grassroots and the poor. Along similar lines, Naruemon and McCargo (2011) argued that many Red Shirts were 'urbanized villagers' who overlapped the boundaries between urban and rural areas, and between farming and non-farming activities.[91] Moreover, Nithi (2013) asserted that a large part of the Red Shirts were lower middle-classes who had transitioned from agriculture to agriculture-related business.[92] Their average income levels were lower middle class, though they were not truly poor as many observers claimed. Besides the pro-Thaksin's supporters who benfited from his populist policies, the Red Shirt protesters shared a common view that the coup was unjust and the military-controlled government was unacceptable.

After the coup toppled the elected Thaksin-led government, the Red Shirts' main focus became their opposition to the junta. Many protesters attended anti-coup rallies in 2006 and 2007 when the military was in the power. Rallies were held to oppose the 2007 military-sponsored constitution. The Red Shirts became a more organized social movement in mid 2007

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[91] Naruemon Thabchumpon, & McCargo, Duncan. (2011). Urbanized Villagers in the 2010 Thai Redshirts Protests: Not Just Poor Farmers?.*Asian Survey, 51(6)*, pp. 993-1018

[92] Nithi Eowsriwong. (2013). *Ling lok phrai*. Bangkok: Matichon.

when they were officially established as the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD).

Clashes between the ideologically opposite PAD and UDD became common place. The UDD accused the PAD of laying the groundwork for the coup and military-led government. However, the UDD ceased their protests after the newly-established People Power Party (PPP), effectively a reincarnation of Thai Rak Thai, won the 2007 general election. On the other hand, the PAD resumed their protest to embark on what its leaders termed 'the last war' opposing the PPP government led by Thaksin's allies. The PAD's campaign included occupations of Government House and Suvarnabhumi airport. In response, the UDD remobilized their protest to counter the PAD, leading to further political crises in 2007 and 2008.

Since late 2005, Thai politics had become polarized between Red and Yellow Shirts. The two sides held fundamentally different views on democracy and politics. The Red Shirts believed in majority rule and democratic elections. Their supporters were mainly rural voters, who—as the country's largest demographic—were confident that the victory of political parties in elections depended on their votes. Rural votes could sway an election. On the other hand, the Yellow Shirts believed that a democratic government should not rely on the rule of majority, arguing that majority rule is not always fair. They felt that votes from rural people could be sold to corrupt politicians. In their view, such votes were did not reflect the electorate's true will.

Secondly, both sides had different views on equality. The Red Shirts embraced the rule of equality and believed that all people are equal, arguing that their votes in elections were absolutely equal to those for the opposition. Having a lower economic status, they saw elections as a validation of their democratic rights and an opportunity to influence state policy. However, the Yellow Shirts argued that rural people were poor and uneducated, and therefore that their

votes could be disregarded. They argued that votes from urban citizens were superior, and that the votes of educated and qualified people should have more value that those of uneducated rural people.

Thirdly, the Red Shirts argued that only governments who won competitive elections have legitimacy to rule the country. They espoused representative democracy, under which the government is elected from the majority of the people nationwide. Nevertheless, the Yellow Shirts countered that although elected governments have democratic legitimacy, the corrupted governments are unacceptable. They maintained that if there are insufficient checks and balances on the dominant party, this may lead to corruption. As a preventative measure, they proposed that *khon di* (moral people) should lead the country, rather than representatives who came from majority votes.

Fourthly, in the Red Shirts' view, governments should prioritize the grassroots to whose votes they owe their electoral victories. Government should therefore, they claim, introduce policies that raise living standards for the grassroots majority of the country, leading to social equality. However, the Yellow Shirts criticised the substantial expenditure required for populist policies. They argued that, as a largely middle- and upper-class movement, their taxes were misappropriated to effectively bribe the poor. For them, populist policies are political strategies to garner votes for the next election, and cannot resolve the current political and economic problems.

Finally, the Red Shirts respected democratic rule and recognized democracy as an aspiration for contemporary Thailand. Democracy, they believed, bring equal rights regardless of economic status. The Yellow Shirts, on the other hand, claimed that Thailand does not need to follow the international community, regarding the USA as a hegemonic power that imposed

democratic regimes to many countries after the Cold War. Thailand should have its own way, they argued, and there should be a Thai-style democracy.

Political polarization had a strong impact on both national and local politics. It led to strong support for political parties representing the two contrasting ideologies, namely pro-parties and anti-Thaksin parties. Party-political polarization also had a powerful impact on the electorates' decisions at the local level. The electorate tended to vote for pro-Thaksin or anti-Thaksin candidates, and candidates for PAO chief executive elections, therefore, attempted to bind their connections with the major pro- or anti-Thaksin parties depending on the constituency. These party banners were used in the electoral campaigns, showing that party politics still played a role at the local level despite the political polarization

Chapter IV

Case Studies: Ubon Ratchathani, Udon Thani and Khon Kaen Province

4.1 Ubon Ratchathani

Ubon Ratchathani is one of the oldest provinces in Northeastern Thailand. It is the region's easternmost province, and has borders with Amnat Charoen, Yasothorn, Sri Saket, Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Kingdom of Cambodia. Ubon Ratchathai is 630km from Bangkok, and subdivided into 25 districts (*amphoe*), which are further subdivided into 219 sub-districts (*tambon*). Ubon Ratchathani has one of the largest provinces in terms of area (932,712km[2)]) and population (1,826,920, according to the 2012 census), ranking third largest in the country and the second in the region. The 2012 Gross Provincial Product (GPP) was 98,640 million baht (56,847 baht per capita).[93] The agricultural sector accounted for 26.47 percent of GPP, versus 73.53 percent non-agricultural.

In addition to its large in territory and population, Ubon Ratchathani is also one of the provinces of dominant political influence in Northeastern Thailand, as many of its politicians (such as Kriang Kantinun from Pheu Thai, Suthat Nguenmuen and Issara Somchai from the Democrat Party, Sitthichai Khowsurat from Pheu Phaendin) also play leading roles in the country's major political parties. The province boasts an above-average 11 parliamentary constituencies seats, giving it further political significance in the region. Its political landscape

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[93] Data from the National Statistical Office of Thailand. Retrieved from http://service.nso.go.th/nso/web/statseries/statseries15.html.

is also distinct from other Northeastern areas, in that it has been never dominated by single a party. In the 2011 general election, 6 MPs were from Pheu Thai, 3 from the Democrat Party and 1 from Chart Thai Pattana. This reflects the non-concentration of power in the province.

Table 6: The Number of MPs in Ubon Ratchathani, Classified by Political Party

	TRT/ PPP/ Phue Thai	Democrat	Chart Thai	Mahachon	Chartthai Pattana	Phue Phaendin
2001	9	1	1	-	-	-
2005	7	2	1	1	-	-
2007	4	3	-	-	2	2
2011	6	3	-	-	1	-

Source: Election Commission of Thailand, and complied by author

The origins of MPs in Ubon Ratchathani changed over time. Suchao and Kitirat (2006) point out that in the first 40 years after the 1932 revolution, most of the province's MPs were high-ranking civil servants who had served as schoolteachers or government officers. [94] They, therefore, were well known and gained support from the electorate. In the last 40 years, however, most politicians came from the business elites in the province. What has remained consistent, though, is Ubon Ratchathani MPs' strong relations with both political parties and influential national politicians ever since 1932. The most well-known MPs in the first period were Thong-in Phuriphat, Liang Chaiyakan and Fong Sitthitham, all of whom were close to Pridi Bhanomyong and Field Marshall Plaek Phibunsongkhram. After 1975, when business

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[94] Suchao Meenongwa & Kitirat Seehaban (2006). *Nakkanmueang thin Changwat Ubon Ratchathani* (Ubon Ratchathani province's local politicians). Nonthaburi: King Prachadhipok's Institute., p.137.

leaders began to enter the political arena by running in general elections, the candidates did not belong to any single party, but changed their affiliations depending on the national political tendency of the time.[95]

Regarding local politics in Ubon Ratchathani, the PAO executive elections from 2004 involved contests between the two main leading families, namely Kantinun and Khowsurat, and were depicted by the press as more or less battles between two camps connected to construction businesses: S. Khemmarat Construction of Khowsurat, and Ubon Worrasit Construction of Kantinun.[96]

The Kantinan Family

One of the best-known families in the province is the Kantinun. The head of the family, Kriang Kantinun, is a longstanding MP who has a strong influence in the province. He began his political career as a provincial councilor, before being persuaded by Suthat Nguenmuen and Issara Somchai, the best-known patriarchs in the province, to join the Democrat Party. He was first elected as an MP in 1995, defeating Chaisiri Ruengkanchanaset, a longstanding MP with a business empire and strong political connections in the region. In the following year, after a conflict with Suthat, Kriang defected to the New Aspiration Party, led by Chawalit Yongjaiyut. After the founding of Thai Rak Thai, he shifted again and continued his political career with TRT as the party was gaining high popularity.

In 2007, the Constitutional Court dissolved Thai Rak Thai Party and banned 111 executive party members including Kriang from any political activity for five years. During

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[95] *Ibid.*, pp.139-140.

[96] *Nation Weekly*, 16(831), May 2-8, 2008, pp. 20-21.

the ban, he still asserted his influence in local politics by supporting his family members to run for both national and local elections. At the municipality level, he supported his wife, Rotchana, to compete in the municipal election, and she became mayor of Ubon Ratchathani city municipality. He also brought his younger brother, Karn—who was twice elected chief executive of Ubon Ratchathani PAO—into politics. At the national level, he supported his son, Worrasit, as Palang Prachachon MP in the 2007 Samak administration, and Pheu Thai MP in 2011. After his political ban ended, Kriang returned to front-line politics as deputy chief of Pheu Thai.

The Khowsurat Family

Besides the Kantinuns family, another influential family in Ubon Ratchathani is the Khowsurats, led by Sitthichai Khowsurat. Like Kriang Kantinun, Sitthichai also started his political career as a provincial councilor, and became a Democrat MP in 1995. Also like Kriang, he eventually defected to TRT, joining its Wang Phayanak faction,[97] led by Phinit Jarusombut, the former Deputy Prime Minister, and Preecha Laohaphongchana, the former Deputy Minister of Commerce and Foreign Affairs in the Thaksin administration. In mid 2007, Suwit Khunkiiti founded the Pheu Phaendin Party and persuaded Sitthichai and other members

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[97] TRT's 13 political factions were: 1) the Wang Namyom, led by Siriya Juengrungruangkit and SomsakThepsuthin; 2) Wang Buaban, led by Yaowapha Wongsawat and Warathep Rattanakorn; 3) Lam Takhong, led by Suwat Lippataphanlop; 4) Wang Namyen, led by Sanoh Thienthong; 5) Newin Chidchob; 6) Sonthaya Khunpuem 7) Wang Khangkhao, led by PrachaMaleenont; 8) Phichit, led by Phongsak Raktaphongphaisan; 9) Wang Thonglang, led by Sudarat Keyuraphan; 10) Kitsangkhom, led by Suwit Khunkitti; 11) Wang Phayanak, led by Phinit Jarusombut and Preecha Laohaphongchana; 12) Ban Rim Nam, led by Suchart Tancharoen; and 13) Ban Jun Song La. Data from *Matichon*, May 3, 2012.

of the Wang Phayanak faction to defect. Sitthichai presided as deputy chief of Pheu Phaendin, and in 2007 he became Deputy Minister of Interior, the highest position in his political career.

Figure 4. The Competition and Political Network of Pornchai and Karn in Ubon Ratchathani Province

Preecha Laohaphongchana (Leader of Wang Phayanak group)	**Yaowapha Wongsawas** (Thaksin's sister)

National Level

Sitthichai Khowsurat Phue Phaendin executive	**Kraisak Chunhawan** Democrat MP (PL)	**Suthas Nguenmuen** Influencing ex-MP	**Withoon Nambutr** Democrat MP	**Kriang Kantinun** Phue Thai executive

Constituency MPs

Suchart Tantiwanitchanon (Phue Thai MP)

Supon Fongngam Phue Thai MP

(Democrat MP)
Issara Somchai
(Chart Thai MPs)
Tun Jintawej
Sakchai Jintawej
Ratthakit Phaleepat

Worasit Kantinun (PAO Councilor, and MP)

PAO

Pornchai Khowsurat
- Kunnatham (Moral) Group
- S. Khemmarat Construction company

Karn Kantinun
- Ubon Ratchathani People Power group
- Ubon Worrasit Construction company

City Municipality

Sompatthana Wikraijerdcharoen

Rotjana Kantinun

TAO

Chaloemchai Khowsurat (Chief Executive of Warinchumrap TAO)

Other chief executives of TAOs

Other chief executives of TAOs

The 2004 PAO election

With the aim of asserting their dominance at both national and local level, the major political parties attempted to field their networked candidates in the first PAO chief executive election. [98] Various political factions also supported their allies or family members as candidates in order to strengthen their intra-party negotiating power. [99] Thus, Sitthichai Khowsurat asked his nephew, Pornchai Khowsurat, to run for the PAO election under his Wang Phayanak team. Pornchai also received support from Preecha Laohaphongchana and the members of Wang Phayanak group.

Kriang Kantinun also attempted to extend his network of influence at the local level by placing his family members in key positions of local government organizations. He supported his brother, Karn, to stand against Pornchai in the PAO elections. As Karn was the former chief executive of Ubon Ratchathani PAO, and had been elected by local councilors,[100] he was in a strong position. Besides, Kriang has a close connection to Thaksin's sister, Yaowapha Wongsawat, giving Karn strong support from some Thai Rak Thai MPs and party members.Although Karn was the favorite to become Ubon Ratchathani PAO chief in March 2004, Karhen unexpectedly lost the election by approximately 20,000 votes. Pornchai won the seat with 336,183 votes, while Karn received 315,637. Despite this, the Kantinuns still dominated the PAO council, as most of the PAO councillors came from Karn's side. Moreover, Worrasit Kantinun, Kriang's son, was elected as chairman of PAO council.

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[98] *Nation Weekly*, 12(612), February 23-29, 2004, p. 20

[99] Interview with a journalist, Ubon Ratchathani local media, Ubon Ratchathani, August 20, 2014

[100] Before the decentralization reform, the Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAO) were constituted by indirect elections. The electorates elected their assembly representatives or provincial councilors who, in turn, elected the chief executive and deputy chief executives of the PAO.

Table 7: Result of the Ubon Ratchathani PAO election in 2004

	Name	Career	Voters	Voter turnout	Votes	Percent
1	**Pornchai Khowsurat**	Businessman	734,247	61.24	**336,183**	**45.79**
2	Karn Kantinun	Politician			315,637	42.99
3	Sodsai Punyasan	Nurse			15,720	2.14
4	Thayakorn Phonphanit	Medical doctor			7,537	1.03
5	Chawengsak Setthamat	Lawyer			13,424	1.83
6	Weera Wasuthada	Freelance			2,407	0.33

Source: King Prajadhipok Institute. (2004).

The 2008 PAO election

The competition between the two families became more intense in the 2008 PAO elections as more actors came to support each side. At that time, Pornchai established his local *Kunnatham* (moral) group to run a campaign focusing on local development by local governments. The group used pink in its campaign color scheme, after the pink lotus (a symbol of the province). This was intended to show their 'neutral' status—neither red nor yellow—in the face of the political polarization of the period.[101] This was a major selling point for Pornchai's electoral campaign, as he frequently claimed his neutrality from both Yellow and Red Shirts and boasted of his ability to coordinate and work with anyone from any group:

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[101] Interview with Suchao Meenongwa, lecturer at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajabhat Ubon Ratchathani University, Ubon Ratchathani, August 20, 2014.

I have attempted to stay above the political polarization and focus on only

k*an Ban* (local affairs), not k*an Mueng* (politics). I have coordinated with

every clique and party. Executives of the PAO come from a variety of parties

and groups. We do not fight for power, but for local development. [102]

Similar to Pornchai, Karn also had his own local political group, *Phalang Prachachon Ubon* (Ubon People Power), which used the same name as Thaksin's re-established political party (PPP). The group clearly alligned themselves with Thaksin and his party.

In 2008, Pornchai was still supported by the Wang Phayanak group, which had become part of the Pheu Phaendin Party led by Suwit Khunkitti, the Khon Kaen veteran MP and former Minister of Natural Resources and Environment under Thaksin. Aside from Preecha Laohaphongchana and Sitthichai Khowsurat, the other members of the group included Udorn Thongprasert, Adul Nilprem, Suchart Tantiwanitchanon, Kiitphong Thiemsuwan, and Adisak Phokhakunlakanon. They and some failed 2011 Pheu Phandin general election candidates all supported Pornchai in the PAO election.[103]

In addition to this political capital, Pornchai's campaign also emphasised his personal performance and policies from his time in the PAO office. There were three outstanding policies that were particular selling points for Pornchai:

1. *1669 emergency ambulance* – The 1669 emergency service was firstly implemented by the Ubon Ratchathani PAO as a pilot and expanded to other PAOs nationwide.

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[102] Interview with Pornchai Khowsurat, chief executive of Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani, February 21, 2014, and his vote canvasser, Ubon Ratchathani, August 6, 2014.

[103] *Siam Rat*, June 6, 2008, p. 23.

The policy involves emergency patients being transported by more than 60 public ambulances service via an 1669 emergency call. In its pilot phase, it was a collaboration between four main organizations: Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani provincial office, the National Institute for Emergency Medicine and the provincial office for public health. Recently, this policy has involved more than 200 local government organizations including city and *tambon* municipalities and TAOs.[104] The policy has been successful, and made Pornchai well-known among the heads of local authorities and local residents.

2. *Infrastructure management* - Pornchai provided financial support for many lower-level local authorities for infrastructure management. Moreover, it was not only restricted to his networked TAOs: any TAOs could request financial support for infrastructure management.[105] The PAO also provided funds for construction equipment if it exceeded the budgets of small-scale local authorities.

3. *Community development* - Many policies were launched for community development such as career development, agricultural expansion, cultural promotion, etc.

Karn Kantinun's campaign was supported not only by MPs from PPP, of which Karn was a member, but 10 Chart Thai and Democrat Party MPs also endorsed him. Remarkably, the Democrat MPs in the province divided against each other. On one side, Withoon Nambutr,

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[104] Interview with Nimmala Itthiphinyophap, Head of Public Health Section, Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani, August 4, 2014.

[105] Interview with Sathit Sena, Head of Plan and Policy Section, Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani, August 4, 2014.

the Democrat executive and leader of Southern Isan MPs,[106] sent a circular notice with the Democrat Party's seal supporting Karn's candidacy as PAO chief.[107] This prompted Suthat Nguenmuen, an opponent of Withoon's, to pledge supported for Karn's rival, Pornchai. A second Democrat group, led by Kraisak Chunhawan, the veteran Democrat party list MP, supported Pornchai to prevent the PPP's networks vying for dominance and power in the province. This phenomenon could not be explained by the formal support of the political party. It was in the form of personal ties and networks, reflecting the conflict among the politicians in Ubon Ratchathani. Ultimately, Pornchai was reelected Chief with 415,584 votes, whilst Karn received only 260,872. It was a landslide victory for Pornchai compared with the first election in 2004, and the electorates' decision tended to be individual or policy-based.

Table 8: Result of the Ubon Ratchathani PAO election in 2008

(Only the main candidates)

	Name	Votes
1	**Pornchai Khowsurat**	**415,584**
2	Karn Kantinun	260,872

Source: Office of Provincial Election Commission of Ubon Ratchathani

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[106] Southern Isan refers to 8 provinces in the Southern part of Northeastern region: Nakhon Ratchasima, Ubon Ratchathani, Sri Saket, Chaiyaphum, Yasothon, Buriram, Surin and Amnat Charoen.

[107] *Nation Weekly*, 16(831), May 2-8, 2008, p. 20-21.

In the wake of the intensification of political polarization, the pattern of the election campaign in the 2012 PAO election changed. Pornchai, the incumbent PAO chief executive, was still a candidate for these elections. However, his competition came not from Karn or another Kantinum candidate member, but from the UDD. Phichet Thabudda, leader of the *Chak Thong Rob* Red Shirt group in the province, and Jumrunsak Junthamai, operator of a local radio station and a member of Ubon's UDD, both ran for the PAO elections.

It was the competition between Pornchai and Phichet that caught the public imagination. Finally, Pornchai achieved a decisive victory with 518,314 votes, whilst Phichet could gain only 131,785.

Table 9: Result of the Ubon Ratchathani PAO election in 2012

	Name	Votes	Percent
1	**Pornchai Khowsurat**	**518,314**	**73.22**
2	Jumrunsak Janthamai	32,400	4.58
3	Phichet Thabudda	260,872	18.62
4	Wilasinee Srithanyarat	25,382	3.59

Source: Office of Provincial Election Commission of Ubon Ratchathani

During that time, Red and Yellow tribalism played an influential role in local politics. In many provinces, Red Shirt groups could dominate local elections. In Ubon Ratchathani, there were more three major Red Shirt groups that played significant roles. Two of them—*Chak Thong Rob* and Ubon's UDD—fielded their members to the PAO elections, competing against Pornchai. However, Pornchai and the Red Shirts were not entirely in opposition. The

third Red Shirt group, *Khon Thai Samakee* (Thai people are harmonious), was led by radio station operator Anurak Anuchat. Anurak's group supported Pornchai in the election for pragmatic reasons, recognizing that his policies were useful and effective for the community.[108]

This shows that polarized politics largely manifested itself at the national rather local level. In national politics, the Red Shirt groups were united, support their side or preferred political party over their rivals. However, in local elections, the proposed policies or development plans were the main factor for the electorates' decision. The Red Shirt groups could choose whom to support. The electorate's preference was based on policies and individual candidates rather than political ideology, leading to Pornchai's election victory.

Political network formation with lower-level local authorities

In local politics, the local authority is not able to work independently. Local political networks are increasing important to strengthen its power and assist the work of local politicians. The chief executive of Ubon Ratchathani PAO expands his network to include many lower-level local authorities. Among these networked local authorities, Ubon Ratchathani city municipality is the PAO chief's most strategic ally.

Ubon Ratchathani city municipality was established in 1935 following the Municipality Act B.E. 2476 (1933). (The Act was revised in 1953.) According to Pichai (2009), the residents in the municipal area comprise three economic groups:[109] middle-class residents in the business quarter, people in urban residential communities, and those who live in

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[108] Thairath Online (http://www.thairath.co.th), May 12, 2012.

[109] Pichai Rattanadilok Na Phuket (2009). *Khrongsang amnaat thongthin: kwamkatyaeng lae kanplianplaeng* (Local power structure: conflict and change). Bangkok: Charansaniwong Publishing.

suburban and rural areas. The latter primarily self-identify as rural, and their social interaction is relatively higher than the other groups.

The dynamic of political power in Ubon Ratchathani municipality has been greatly influenced by the national power structure since 1960s.[110] In 1962, the military-led government further revised the Municipality Act and allowed civil servants from the Ministry of Interior to be posted in the municipality. As a result, officers sent from central government dominated the municipality until 1968, when municipal councilor elections were first adopted.

From 1968, the Srithanyarats, one of the wealthiest families in Ubon Ratchathani, monopolized power in the Ubon Ratchathani city municipality. The Sritanyarats fielded their family members to run in both national and local elections. Although they did not achieve popularity at the national level, Prachuap was successful in his Ubon Ratchathani mayoral campaign, and he remained mayor for more than 20 years.

After 1990, the power in Ubon Ratchathani municipality shifted to new a political group, led by Chaisiri Reaungkanchanaset, former MP, minister of the Office of Prime Minister, and well-connected businessman. His many businesses included liquor, rice milling and hotels in the province, and his empire expanded to other provinces in the Northeast. Chaisiri held not only economic power, but also political influence in the area, as he was seen as the godfather of lower Isan, adopting the practices of *chao pho* and *nakleng*.[111] In political contests, he used patronage networks and coercive power to beat his rivals.[112]

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[110] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[111] See Viengrat Netipo. (2015). *Hipbat kap bunkun: Kanmueang kanlueaktang lae kanplianplaeng khrueakhai uppatham* (Ballot and favor: electoral politics and change to patronage networks). Chiang Mai: Center for ASEAN Studies, Chiang Mai University.

[112] Pichai, *supranote 109*, p.33.

At the municipal level, Chaisiri sent his younger brother Prasan Reaungkanchanaset to confront the established power elites. At the same time, a national political party became involved in the local election. Suthat Nguenmuen, a key politician of the Democrat Party, fielded his network candidate to the city's mayoral election. Pichai (2009) argues that the involvement of a key national-level politician in the municipal election came in the form of apersonal relationship rather than a formal party candidacy.[113] That is to say, national-level politicians used the local election as a battlefield to measure the voter base of their rivals and secure their power in the area. In the end, Prasan won the municipal contest, though Chaisiri was disappointed by his brother's administration and helped his networked candidate, Anan Tantisirin, become mayor in 1994.[114]

In 1995, the Srithanyarats cooperated with their business allies to found the local political group *Rak Ubon* (love Ubon). The competition between two groups in the municipal contest became intense. The *Rak Ubon* businessmen used economic power as their advantage to compete with Chaisiri's group. *Rak Ubon* successfully campaigned for Prasan as the town mayor, a post he held for two years. (He was succeeded by Penpak Srithongpresided, also supported by *Rak Ubon*.) Viengrat (2015) discussed the reasons behind the *Rak Ubon* group's triumph, noting their superior strategy: they secured the poor and middle class in the municipal area as their strong voter base. At the same time, the Chaisiri clique's monopolization of power prompted the municipal middle class call for change, securing electoral victory for *Rak Ubon*.[115]

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[113] *Ibid.*, p.53.

[114] *Ibid.*, p.33.

[115] Viengrat, *supranote 19*, p.70.

After the area became a city municipality in 1999, a new mayoral election was called. This time, there was some internal conflict among *Rak Ubon*, some of whose members separated and founded their own political group, *Nakhon Ubon* (Ubon city). However, the *Rak Ubon* group maintained their winning streak, with Penpak's mayoral election victory. When Penpak became an MP, she resigned as mayor, and was replaced by another *Rak Ubon* member, Prasan Srithanyarat, who stayed in power for many years.

Kriang Kantinun also supported the *Nakhon Ubon* group, and Rotchana Kantinun presided as the leader of the group at that time. Although Kriang was a New Aspiration Party member, Sudarat Keyuraphan and her team from Thai Rak Thai supported *Nakhon Ubon*'s mayoral election campaign. This reflected the warm relations between Kriang and Sudarat, and presaged Kriang's defection from New Aspiration to Thai Rak Thai.[116]

A power shift in municipal politics emerged again in 2012. After the 2012 PAO elections, Pornchai consolidated the power of his local political group by extending to the city municipality, which was a strong Kantinun political base. The Pornchai-led *Kunnatham* group sent Somprathana Wikraijerdcharoen to stand against Rotjana Kantinun, the former city mayor and Kriang's wife. In these elections, both sides received national- and local-level political support. Somprathana, rather than the PAO chief, received substantial national-level support from, for instance, Pol. Gen. Chidchai Wannasathit, former Deputy Prime Minister, Sitthichai Khowsurat and various Chat Pattana and Democrat politicians.[117] On the other side, Kriang Kantinun and his network politicians sided with Rotjana, though, the *Kunnatham* group ultimately toppled the Kantinuns and Somprathana became the city mayor of Ubon Ratchathani.

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[116] Pichai, *supranote 109*, p.54.

[117] Manager Online (http://www.manager.co.th), March 21, 2013.

Pornchai's *Kunnatham* then expanded its network to the city municipality. Forming networks among local politicians was mutually beneficial. They could coordinate policies among their networked local authorities, and coordination with local authority heads from the same group was inherently easier:

> Political polarization at the local level has affected cooperation among local authorities. When the mayor of a city municipality comes from the opposite group, there was little cooperation between the PAO and city municipality. However, after Somprathana became mayor, the PAO chief executive provided both financial and labour support for provincial events such as the annual candle festival. In the past, the PAO provided only financial support.[118]

In addition to the city municipality, Pornchai expanded his political networks to other municipalities and TAOs covering the provincial area. His networked local authorities include Khemarat *tambon* municipalities, and TAOs in Kud Khao Pun, Phosai, Natal and Khemarat districts.

4.2 Udon Thani

Local politics in Udon Thani is distinctive since the degree of influence from national politicians and parties is considerably high compared than that of other provinces in the region. As seen by the general election results of 2001, 2005, 2007 and 2011, TRT became the most influential political party and had a great impact to the voter's behavior and electoral decisions in the province. Like TRT, the Red Shirts played a key role in the area. Udon Thani province

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[118] Interview with Sathit Sena, Head of Planning and Policy Section, Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani, August 4, 2014.

has a deserved reputation as the stronghold of Pheu Thai supporters in Northeastern Thailand and is known colloquially as 'the capital city of the Red Shirts' in the region because influential Red Shirt groups and the Red Shirt villages are all centered in this province.

Table 10: The Number of MPs in Udon Thani, Classified by Political Party

	TRT/ PPP/ Phue Thai	Democrat	Chart Pattana	Seritham	Bhumjaithai	Phue Phaendin
2001	4	1	2	3	-	-
2005	10	-	-	-	-	-
2007	8	-	-	-	1	1
2011	9	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Election Commission of Thailand, and complied by author

Actors in the local political system in Udon Thani, therefore, were not limited to only the local political groups. Many different actors attempted to assert an influence in the area by participating in local politics. Udon Thani PAO was, in particular, attracted those actors since it is one of the top five wealthiest PAO administrations in the region, and the local chief executive has full authority and legitimacy to manage ithe budget themselves. The main actors in Udon Thani's local politics are composed of three groups: 1) local political groups, namely *Rak Muang Udon* (love Udon town) led by Chaloemphon Sanitwongchai, *Nakhon Mak Khaeng* (Mak Khaeng city) led by Harnchai Theekhathananon and other independent groups; 2) Pheu Thai MPs in Udon Thani and the Pheu Thai Party themselves; and 3) social movements, especially two main Red Shirts groups, namely *Khon Rak Udon* (people who love Udon) led by Kwanchai Phaiphana, and the Red Shirts village group led by Anon Saennan. The leaders of the the two Red Shirt groups had a mutual conflict of interest, and were bitter rivals.

Like other provinces in the country, the 2004 Udon Thani PAO chief executive election attracted the major political parties to field their networked candidates, as the PAO's authority covers the entire provincial area, giving a potential advantage to national-level politicians in their upcoming 2005 general election campaigns. This was the general pattern of 2004 PAO chief executive elections in Northeastern Thailand, as the chief executive of Loei PAO, a province in the upper Northeastern region, explained:

> In the first place, the political parties and MPs have attempted to get involved in local government because they want the voter base in the local area. The PAO chief executive has the authority to approve their own budget so he/she is able to help the MP to realize local projects. Moreover, if the MP helps the PAO chief executive in the elections, he/she has to return the favour. When the MP needs help, he/she can call on the PAO executive anytime.[119]

In 2004, Chaloemphon Sanitwongchai had been a dominant figure in the province since he was a longstanding MP for two decades (1976-2001). He was born into a government official family, and he was a school teacher before starting his political career. In 1976, he was first elected as an MP for the Social Action Party. When he won reelection in 1979, he became Vice-secretary to the Minister of Education. He subsequently switched parties on several occasions and won a total of seven elections. His political positions included Deputy Minister of Commerce and Vice-president of the House of Representatives. However, Chaloemphon was defeated in the 2001 general election, and switched from national to local politics.

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[119] Interview with Thanawut Thimsuwan, chief executive of Loei PAO, Bangkok, August 26, 2015.

Chaloemphon's long political career stood him in good stead, As long-standing veteran MP, Chaloemphon had a stronger bastion of support in the area than other candidates. He had an established voter base in every district in the provincial area, giving him ta great advantage for the PAO election. Furthermore, he used his political connections as a veteran MP in his electoral campaign:

Chaloemphon had a connection in every district, being a veteran MP. If a ceremony was held in the district, such as the career development workshop (mushroom planting), volunteer training, or blanket distributing ceremony, Chaloemphon was invited to chair it. In his speeches at these events, he would reel off his accomplishments as an MP. At each ceremony, an audience of approximately 500-600 people was assembled by the TAO chief executive, sub-district headman (*kamnan*) or village headman (*phuyaiban*). Chaloemphon also used his connections with other MPs in the province during electoral campaigns. As a senior MP, he could call on other MPs to help him.[120]

Furthermore, Chaloemphon ran for election under the Thai Rak Thai banner, which held great sway with eligible voters, especially in his constituency. Chaloemphon was supported by the *Wang Bua Ban* group led by Yaowapha Wongsawad, Thaksin's sister. Their support ranged from providing funds for his electoral campaign, asking MPs and vote canvassers to campaign for him, and giving permission to use the party's logo in his publicity.

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[120] Interview with anonymous informant, Former PAO officer, Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, July 13, 2016.

Knowing that association with Thai Rak Thai was influential in winning local elections in Udon Thani, Harnchai also ran as a Thai Rak Thai candidate. He attached himself to Newin Chidchob's faction, as his elder brother was close to Newin. However, Newin's influence was stronger in the lower Northeast, and his base in Udon Thani was not sufficient to benefit Harnchai. Instead, Chaloemphon's status as a vetern MP, and particularly his association with Thai Rak Thai, propelled him to victory.

It was hard for candidates, especially 'the new faces', to make names for themselves and gain votes in every district, as required in the PAO elections. Therefore, unless candidates could rely on their own strong bases in the area, the use of party banners and networking with national-level politicians was essential. The use of the Thai Rak Thai banner was an effective shortcut, presenting an immediate and recognizable image for voters to understand, and this was a significant factor in Chaloemphon's success.

Table 11: Result of the Udon Thani PAO Election in 2004

	Name	Career	Voters	Voter turnout	Votes	Percent
1	Wichien Khaokham	Politician	545,150	51.6	33,915	6.22
2	Phoonsak Yuprasert	Lawyer			138,214	25.35
3	**Chaloemphon Sanitwongchai**	Politician			**205,280**	**37.66**
4	Surachet Ornkham	Politician			15,874	2.91
5	Kittichai Chai-ia	N/A			117,801	21.61
6	Withoon Namkhun	Lawyer			4,388	0.80
7	Mongkol Khusakul	Politician			2,266	0.42
8	Phayom Suphawichitphan	Lawyer			4,048	0.74

Source; King Prajadhipok Institute (2004)

Local politics in Udon Thani became intense during the 2008 local chief executive elections, since three candidates were neck-and-neck. All three of them—Chaloemphon Sanitwongchai, Kiattichai Chaichaowarat and Harnchai Teekathananont—had strong political backgrounds and influence in the area. The intense competition between the three evenly-matched candidates put this election in the spotlight.

Although he had run as a TRT candidate in 2004, Chaloemphon did not align himself with the PPP, TRT's successor party, in 2008. Instead, he relied on his *Rak Muang Udon* group for his electoral campaign. After he established a political stronghold, some affiliated MPs and members from the People Power Party gave political support. Moreover, as his son was a Pheu Phaendin MP, that party also provided some support.

The second candidate is Kiattichai Chaichaowarat, a veteran MP of Udon Thani who was elected to parliament six times. He started his political career by standing for national elections with the Social Action Party in 1983. Since then, he had defected to other parties such as Raum Thai and the New Aspiration Party. During his national political career, he was Deputy Minister of Industry under Chuan's administration, Deputy Minister of Interior under Banharn, and Minister attached to Prime Minister's Office under Chawalit. He then turned to local politics. He received support in the 2008 PAO election from PPP MP Kittisak Hatthasomgkrao. Moreover, his decision to run in the election was a resulted of a conversation between him and the ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, on Thaksin's return to Thailand in February 2008,[121] as he explained in a newspaper interview:

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[121] *Siamrat*, April 24, 2008, p. 23.

I talked with Pol. Lt. Gen. Thaksin on the plane backed from Hong Kong. He told me that if you don't run for the general election, you could run for the local elections. I took it into consideration for a time. Formerly, I was appointed to many positions of importance, but I've never served as the Prime Minister. If the position of Prime Minister (*nayok*) is impossible for me, I will try to be the chief executive (*nayok*) of the PAO.[122]

The last candidate for these PAO chief executive elections was Harnchai Teekathananont. As the former mayor of Udon Thani city municipality, Harnchai was also in a strong position. He was an established businessman, and the Teekathananont family was one among the most successful local capitalist groups in the Northeast. Their businesses included Udon Charoensri, founded by Harnchai's father, Charoen, known as 'Sia Leng.' The Udon Charoensri empire included hotels, shopping centers, and real estate. Their automotive business grew rapidly, with several companies (Mitsubishi, Mazda and Ford) expanding to other provinces such as Bangkok, Khon Kaen, Mukdahan, Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon and Ubon Ratchathani. Due to a decline in their business, the Teekathananonts sold their hotels and shopping centers to Central Group, one of the biggest conglomerate holding companies in Thailand. However, the real estate and automotive businesses remained family-owned. Once Charoen's family business was relatively stable, he began fielding his sons in national and local political contests: Komut Teekathananont became mayor of Sakon Nakhon town municipality, Komet Teekathananont, became a Khon Kaen senator, and Komin Teekathananont was an Udon Thani candidate for Pheu Phaendin.

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[122] *Kom Chad Luek*, May 7, 2008, p. 3.

Like his brothers, Harnchai also decided to enter local politics. He stared his political career as mayor of Udon Thani city municipality in 1995. Although he was well-versed in business—as Chief of Toyota Chinnont Udon Thani—he had less political experience than his rivals, Chaloemphon and Kiattichai. Nevertheless, after serving as mayor of the city municipality for multiple terms, he had established a level of recognition among the people of the area.

The rise of Thaksin and the TRT (and subsequently PPP) behemoth brought massive change to the Udon Thani's provincial landscape. Realizing the potential benefit of an alliance with the PPP or Thaksin, Harnchai made many new allies to ensure he could win the election.

Also, every PPP MP in Udon Thani endorsed Harnchai's candidacy, giving him a high level of PPP support.[123] He also received strong support from Theerachai Saenkaew, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives in Samak's government, as Theerachai explained in a newspaper interview:

> For Udon Thani, the (People Power) party supported Harnchai because he's
> still young, energetic and talented. Moreover, he has a clear direction and
> vision for coordinating policy to support the government. Nine People Power
> Party's MPs and I will try our best to help him campaign.[124]

Harnchai, therefore, ran under the official banner of the PPP. He and his supporters recognized that the party was very popular and powerful in Udon Thani province. He strongly

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[123] *Post Today*, May 8, 2012, p. 4.

[124] *Kom Chad Luek*, May 7, 2008, p. 3.

believed that the party brand and endorsements from the powerful MPs in the area including his solid voter base in Udon Thani could get him elected.

This was indeed the case, as Harnchai won the election with 282,219 votes, whilst Chaloemphon and Kiattichai received 114,245 and 94,356 respectively. 24 of the 42 PAO councilor candidates n Harnchai's team were also elected. The electoral result demonstrated that votes in urban areas were a key factor for a candidate's victory. Since all three candidates had relatively the same voter base in rural areas, the competition depended at least as much on the urban voters. Harnchai also claimed that his outstanding performance in the city may have motivated rural voters to support him.[125] Furthermore, the outcome indicated that the support from the leading political party and the MPs in the area remained strong. A candidate with from the MPs in the province was likely to receive massive vote share since each MP had their own strong patronage network and voter base in their constituency, and could help the candidate to gain votes in the entire provincial area.[126]

The 2012 PAO election

The 2012 Udon Thani PAO chief executive election was more intense than those of most other provinces, because political polarization became stronger, and the Red Shirts—who were influential in the province— attempted to enter the formal political arena by fielding their candidates for the election. Moreover, the defeat of Pheu Thai's candidates in a by-election and the Pathum Thani PAO election increased pressure on them to win in Udon Thani, it being the Red Shirts' Northeastern stronghold. Recruitment of the Pheu Thai candidate was, therefore,

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[125] Interview with Harnchai Teekathananont, former chief executive of Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, August 21, 2015.

[126] Interview with local official, Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, September 3, 2014.

carefully considered. Following Pheu Thai's resolution allowing the MPs in the province to decide on local election candidates, almost all Pheu Thai MPs—with a few exceptions, to be discussed later—in Udon Thani, including Wichien Khaokham, agreed to field Prasop Butsarakham, the veteran MP and former Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives.[127] *Kon Rak Udon*, the biggest Red Shirt group in the Northeast, also gave him their full support.

Nevertheless, conflict between Pheu Thai and the Red Shirts began when some Pheu Thai MPs in the area broke ranks and attempted to field their own candidates. Surathin Phimanmekhin, for example, planned to field his son Poramin, whilst Kittisak Hatthasongkhro, intended to nominate his daughter, Opal. Pheu Thai supporters, therefore, were divided into three factions. Likewise, the Red Shirts in the province were also divided into three groups, as Suthin and Kitisak organized their Red Shirt groups to oppose Prasop's candidacy.[128]

As no agreement could be reached on the three alternatives, Wichien Khaokham was eventually nominated as a compromise candidate, after the veteran MP Pracha Phomnok and others lent him their support. Wichien's political career started in 1987, when he became a Poung Chon Chaw Thai Party (Thai People Power party) MP. Like many of his fellow MPs, he switched party affiliations numerous times, joining Chat Thai, Chat Pattana, and Social Action. In 2007, he moved again, to PPP, and in 2011 he was elected as a Pheu Thai MP, though he resigned soon afterwards in order stand as a PAO election candidate.

Wichien was backed by the Udon Thani MPs and Red Shirts in the province in order to lessen the conflict among Pheu Thai supporters. His resignation was accepted by a party

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[127] *Khao Sod*, April 29, 2012, p. 10.

[128] *Post Today*, May 9, 2012, p. 41.

resolution, as it avoided the need for a by-election, which would be regarded as wasteful by voters.[129] The position could be automatically filled by a deputy.

Candidate recruitment for the PAO elections in Udon Thani was taken more seriously comthan in other provinces, in order to maintain the influence of Pheu Thai in this strategically significant province. As Wichien explained in a newspaper interview:

> We have to relieve Pathum Thani fever. Udon Thani is the capital city of the Red Shirts. I'm also a genuine Red Shirt. If we failed [in these elections], it might be more severe than the Pathum Thani fever. I'm confident that we won't face any problem like PathumThani.[130]

Wichien was Pheu Thai's candidate, though he had three rivals in the PAO election. He made the most of Thaksin's endorsement of him, quoting a statement by Thaksin on one of his election posters:

> I would like to entrust WICHIEN KHAOKHAM, candidate no. 2, to be the chief executive of Udon Thani PAO, on behalf of all Pheu Thai council members in every constituency. Please don't be confused by any allusions from other groups. *I insisted that Mr. Wichien is the one who has been approved by me to run for election* in order to care for you, develop Udon

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[129] Following a resolution of the Pheu Thai Party, the resignation of an MP who aims to run in a local election was prohibited, because in Pathum Thani case, the constituency MP resigned and ran for PAO elections, and defected to the Democrat Party.

[130] *Kom Chad Luek*, May 9, 2012, p. 8.

Thani city and coordinate the government's policies. If I return to Thailand, I will come to live in Udon Thani as I have promised.[131]

The second candidate was Harnchai, who had followed Newin Chidchob in 2009 and broken away from Pheu Thai. Newin established a new party, Bhumjaithai, and Harnchai had a close relationship with Newin. Moreover, Harnchai had a conflict with the Red Shirts because, when he was PAO chief, he had never provided any of the assistance requested by them for their rallies.[132] Resentment over this cost Harnchai at the ballot box.

The other candidates were veteran MP Surachart Chamnansilp and Surathin Phimanmekhin's daughter, Kiratikarn. Kwanchai Phaiphana, leader of the *Khon Rak Udon* group, was not proposed, as he was disliked by many members of the Red Shirt Villages, led by Anon Saennan. They would not have supported any campaign associated with Kwanchai. If Surathin had not fielded his daughter as candidate, and there had been no other choice, they would have supported Harnchai instead.[133]

Ultimately, the electoral outcome on 17 May 2012 was as expected: Wichien won with 376,856 votes, while Harnchai received only 182,239. Surachart and Kiratikarn received 13,602 and 40,281, respectively. Data on this PAO election showed that connection with Pheu Thai and the Red Shirts remained necessary to win the election in Udon Thani.

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[131] Campaign poster of Wichien Khaokham, June 5, 2012.

[132] Interview with local official, Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, September 4, 2014; *Manager*, May 11, 2012, p. 15.

[133] *Kom Chad Luek*, May 15, 2012, p. 8.

Table 12: Result of the Udon Thani PAO election in 2012

		Name	Voters	Voter turnout	Votes	Percent
1		**Harnchai Teekathananont**	644,794	57.67	**182,239**	**29.73**
	2	Wichien Khaokham			**376,856**	61.48
	3	Kiratikan Phimanmekhin			40,281	6.57
	4	Surachat Chamnansilp			13,602	2.22

Source: Office of Province Election Commission of Udon Thani

In Udon Thani, the local political groups also played an active role in both PAO and municipal elections. The influential *Nakhon Mak Kaeng* had strong support in the city, as it was founded by a coalition of an Udon Thani city mayor. When Harnchai ran in the PAO elections in 2008, he supported his brother-in-law Itthiphon Triwatsuwan's successful campaign to become city mayor. Therefore, after 2008, the Udon Thani PAO and city municipality coordinated and worked together. When the municipality office was burnt by arsonists in 2010, for example, Harnchai allowed municipal officers to work from the PAO offices free of charge.

However, after Wichien was elected in 2012, the coordination between the two local authorities decreased.[134] Local affairs and projects were implemented separately. Wichien reduced the budget allocated to municipality events, and cancelled many joint PAO and municipality projects. Instead, he focused on establishing a network with TAOs.[135] Therefore,

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[134] Interview with Narin Pornchaisitthikul, Head of Planning and Policy Section, Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, September 3, 2014.

[135] Interview with Withoon Chanthakhan, Director of Planning and Policy Division, Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, September 10, 2014.

local policy and planning was largely dependent on the whim of the PAO chief, and local networks still maintained an active role in local politics, particulary in Udon Thani.

4.3 Khon Kaen

Khon Kaen is the most influential province in the upper part of Northeast Thailand since it is recognized as the regional center for financial organizations, educational institutions and governmental office branches. It is located 450 km from the capital city, and is the fifth largest province in Thailand in terms of population. Economically, its GDP and provincial budget have been expanding noticeably. It ranks as the second largest economy in the Northeast, next only to Nakhon Ratchasima in terms of GDP. The province's economy grew rapidly, especially after Chatchai's government created substantial waves of domestic and foreign investment.

Among other local government organizations in the region, Khon Kaen has the second richest PAO, with an annual budget of approximately 2,646 million baht in the fiscal year 2013. Also, many of its MPs are national-level politicians and cabinet members who play a leading role in major political parties. One of the most outstanding examples is Somsak Kiatsuranont, the veteran Pheu Thai MP, who served as speaker of the House of Representatives and president of the national assembly, and acquired the nickname 'Khun Khon' (hammer man). Like Udon Thani, Khon Kaen is a Pheu Thai stronghold, as the party's MP's won every seat on the province in the 2011 general elections.

It is clear that PAO elections and national politicians are closely connected. However, Pheu Thai seems to play a lesser role in local politics than might be expected. Political parties

attempted to politicize local politics when the first local elections were held, but their influence has gradually decreased.

Although competitiveness in local politics is quite high, only one local politician, Phongsak Tangwanitchakaphong, could dominate the PAO for more than a decade. He presided as the chief executive of Khon Kaen PAO for an unprecedented five consecutive terms.

Originally, Phongsak was a schoolteacher, though he entered politics via local elections, becoming a PAO councilor in 1985. After the PAO chief selection system was changed in 1985, he was elected indirectly by the PAO councilors as Khon Kaen PAO chief. Moreover, when direct PAO chief election was first adopted in 2004, he stood as a candidate supported by his team, as he explained in an interview:

> I intended to stand in the PAO election with the support of Rattanaporn Somboon, Suthep Khunkitti, Piyabut Phommalakkhano, Apichat Singkhleebut and Phongthep Musiket as team leader. All of these people helped elect candidates to the PAO council, winning 38 out of 42 seats.[136]

The 2004 PAO election

Phongsak and Suwit Khunkitti—who was a member of Thai Rak Thai and a founder of Pheu Phaendin—were closely connected. Suwit was one of the key supporters who backed

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[136] *Siam Rat*, October 7, 2006.

Phongsak in the PAO elections.[137] In the 2004 election, there were two main competitors: Atsadang Sawaengkan, leader of the *Rak Thai Khon Kaen* (Love Thai, Khon Kaen) group; and Phongsak, the incumbent PAO chief. Phongsak remained in office, winning 58.80 percent of the vote. To consolidate his position, he requited the supporters by assigning politicians in Suwit's network—namely Suthep Khunkitti, Suwit's brother; and Atthaphon Chainansamit, Suwit's brother-in-law—as deputy PAO chief executives.

Table 13. Result of the Khon Kaen PAO Election in 2004

	Name	Career	Voters	Voter turnout	Votes	Percent
1	Atsadang Sawaengkan	Civil servant	727,999	58.8	298,688	41.03
2	Manop Phromchak	Businessman			24,370	3.35
3	Natthamon Kruangchampa	Businessman			7,839	1.08
4	**Phongsak Tungwanitkaphong**	Businessman			**350,202**	**48.10**

Source; King Prajadhipok Institute (2004)

The 2008 PAO election

However, in 2007 Phongsak had a severe conflict with Suwit's network. Suthep and Atthaphon were found guilty of corruption and deposed from office. Phongsak's commitment to transparency rather than favoritism demonstrated his independence from party politics:

I don't want external politics to intervene in this case because the Khon Kaen

PAO belongs to the people. It doesn't belong to any one person or political

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[137] *Nation Weekly*, 616, March 22-28, 2004.

party. I would not allow anyone to monopolize [PAO politics]. So it happened like that. Regarding the political patriarchs, especially Suwit, I think he can judge this case accurately and fairly.[138]

In November 2007, Phongsak resigned several months before the termination of his term ended, the first local politician to do so. Many PAO chiefs in other provinces followed suit, to obstruct failed 2007 general election candidates from running in local elections.

There were four candidates for the Khon Kaen PAO elections in 2008: Phichet Watthanasantiphong; Soraphika Torcharoensuk, former PAO councilor; Kamol Piamphaisan; and Phongsak. Veteran MP Prasom Prakhunsukjai had intended to run, though Suwit Khunkitti dissuaded him, since both he and Phongsak belonged to the same camp.[139] Only two of the candidates—Phongsak and Soraphika—were serious contenders.

Soraphika was a former PAO councilor. Her husband, Nawat, was a Khon Kaen MP who had defeated Suwit in the 2007 general election. She used the PPP's name and logo in electoral campaign, capitalizing on the party's popularity, though she was not officially endorsed by the PPP. Some Khon Kaen MPs even reported her to the police, claiming that the PPP and its MPs had not endorsed her.[140] Being the wife of a PPP MP did not guarantee the party's support in the local election, as the party and its MPs were separate entities. Soraphika

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[138] *Khom Chad Luek*, July 30, 2007.

[139] *Ban Muang*, January 2, 2007.

[140] *Siam Rat*, January 18, 2007.

ultimately removed the PPP logo from her campaign materials, instead highlighting her husband's name and position as a PPP MP (see figure 5).

Figure 5: The Banner for the Electoral Campaign of Soraphika Torchareonsuk before and after the report from MPs
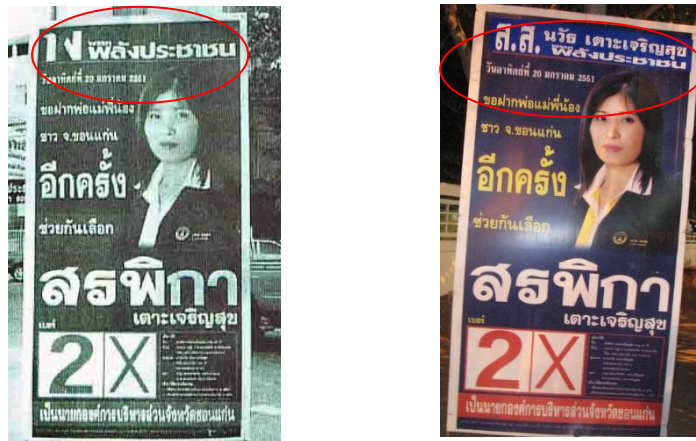
Phongsak had a strong voter base after serving as PAO for three terms, albeit two of them from indirect elections. With his administration's outstanding record, the election result seemed a foregone conclusion.[141] Moreover, politically, he had strong relations with other MPs in the province who cacouldn provide support during the campaign. According to one such MP:

> During the election period, Phongsak always came to see the MPs to introduce
> himself and ask for support. Although MPs didn't provide any kind of tangible

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[141] Interview Waraphon Hanchanachaikul, Director of Council Affairs Division, Khon Kaen PAO, Khon Kaen, September 19, 2014.

support, at least they were aware of him and did nothing to obstruct him. That was enough for his electoral chances.[142]

It is necessary in local elections that the candidates at least should have strong connections with the MPs in the province. As MPs are national politicians who have strong voter bases in their constituencies, they could provide support such as vote canvassers or political networks to help the candidate in electoral campaigns. PAO councilors are also necessary for during elections. If PAO councilors are on the candidate's team, they can assist in the electoral campaign in each constituency. This also creates networks of various political actors at the local level.

In Phongsak's case, he had his own team of PAO councilors, so he could coordinate each councilor or political network to help in his campaign.[143] With a strong voter bases and support, Phongsak won the election with 346,225 votes and 62.75 percent.

The 2012 PAO elections

After his second term, Phongsak again prematurely resigned from the position, in December 2011, for an unspecified personal reason.[144] As he had done in 2008, he stood as a candidate in the PAO election despite having resigned. Some MPs, Red Shirts leaders, and more than 300 Red Shirt members supported his campaign,[145] reflecting the strong relations

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[142] Interview with Kitiphum Deenang, personal assistant of Somsak Kiatsuranont, Khon Kaen MP, Khon Kaen, August 13, 2015.

[143] Interview with Somphong Poopheng, Khon Kaen PAO councilor, Khon Kaen, August 17, 2015.

[144] *Khom Chad Luek*, December 1, 2011.

[145] *Khom Chad Luek*, December 12, 2011.

between Phongsak and the Red Shirts. As in other Northeastern provinces, some Red Shirt leaders intended to run for the PAO elections, though they gave up and instead supported Phongsak. In the 2012 elections, there were six candidates. Four of them were unheardof newcomers, and of the remainder only Khongrit Atsawapatthanakul, a former PAO councilor, had the potential to defeat Phongsak. In fact, Phongsak won in a landslide, with 489,855 votes and 81.63 percent and, at the time of writing, he remains in position.

Table 14: Result of the Khon Kaen PAO Election in 2012

	Name	Votes	Percent
1	Duangchan Chansri	25,885	4.12
2	Krissana Tawong Perry	8,230	1.31
3	Boontiem Susena	3,122	0.5
4	Udom Kaenphrom	8,068	1.28
5	**Phongsak Tangwanitchakapong**	**489,885**	**77.88**
6	Kongrit Atsawapattanakul	64,967	10.33

Source: Office of Provincial Election Commission of Khon Kaen

The Khon Kaen case indicates that political connections are important for politicians to obtain or continue in their positions. In addition to voter bases and candidate performance, another important factor that entails success in local elections is coordination between politicians in the provinces. Provincial MPs can influence their own voter bases in their specific area. To win elections, therefore, candidates forge connections with their voter base to gain support. Politically, it is customary for new local politicians to introduce themselves and ask MPs for permission to work in the area for electoral campaign purposes.[146] Showing disrespect

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[146] Interview with Kitiphum Deenang, personal assistant of Somsak Kiatsuranont, Khon Kaen MP, Khon Kaen, August 13, 2015.

for the influential people in the area might be problematic for the candidates, and can directly affect their votes. MPs prioritize their networked candidates of the same faction or the same political ideology because their work might be easier in terms of area development or budget allocation. In addition, PAO councilors are also necessary to coordinate during the campaign period. Each councilor has responsibilities in the specific area that are different from the scope of the PAO chief's work in the provincial area. Thus, the councilors are always close to the electorate in their area and have strong voter bases and the potential to help the candidates for PAO chief in the electoral campaigns.

In Phongsak's case, councilors were willing to help him because he took care of every councilor fairly, allocating a 7 million baht development budget to each councilor equally, which reflected his sincerity towards the councilors.[147] Such manner can create or extend political networks among PAO chiefs, MPs, and PAO councilors. The local political networks have strengthened the PAO chiefs in dealing with issues regarding government and administration in the provincial area.

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[147] Interview with Somphong Poopheng, Khon Kaen PAO councilor, Khon Kaen, August 17, 2015.

Chapter V

Change and Continuity of Local Political Networks

5.1 The 2004 PAO chief executive elections

The first PAO chief executive elections in 2004 presented an opportunity for new candidates to enter the political arena through political positions in the local office. In addition to the incumbent local politicians, many candidates from various careers ran for those posts (see *Table 15*). Among all 314 candidates nationwide, approximately 45 percent were businessmen who seized the opportunity to enter formal politics and possibly use the election to their business' advantage.[148] An estimated one-fourth of this group won the elections they contested. Candidates from the business sector outnumbered incumbent local politicians by a margin of 2:1. This reflects the emergence of new power in local politics that was capable of challenging the incumbent local politicians who had well-established electoral bases in the area.

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[148] Prajak, *supranote 41*, p. 132.

Table 15: The Candidates for the 2004 PAO Elections Nationwide, Classified by Occupation (74 Provinces Excluding Buriram Province)

Occupation	Candidate		Elected candidate		Ratio
	Person	Percent	Person	Percent	
Businessman	142	45.22	40	54.06	28.17
Local politician	72	22.93	25	33.78	34.72
Civil servant	31	9.87	6	8.11	19.35
Lawyer	19	6.05	1	1.35	5.26
Agriculturist	7	2.23	1	1.35	14.28
Other	43	13.7	1	1.35	2.33
Total	**314**	**100**	**74**	**100**	

Source: Data obtained from King Prajadhipok Institute (2004), compiled by the author.

Desite the partisanship of this election, independent candidates accounted for more than half of the total number of candidates. However, political parties themselves played and active role. *Table 16* shows that nearly half of the candidates for PAO elections were supported by major political parties. Parties realized the salience of forming relationships with local politicians and involved themselves more directly in the local elections. Aiming to establish local power bases and strengthening their parties' political standing, Thai Rak Thai, Democrat, and other major political parties supported and fielded their candidates to run in PAO elections nationwide. In contests, not only political parties, but also political factions, in particular within TRT, sought to place their candidates in post. The targeted areas for the factions were particularly the North and Northeast TRT strongholds.[149] In a related issue, Prajak (2013)

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[149] These were the *Wang Bua Ban* faction: in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phayao, and Mahasarakham; the *Wang Namyen* faction: in Chaiyaphum and Roi Et; the *Wang Phayanak* faction: in Ubon Ratchathani, Khon Kaen, and

observed that the direct local elections created intra-party conflict, as each faction competed with each other in order to ensure hegemonic power within the party.[150]

Table 16: The Number of Candidates in the 2004 PAO Chief Elections in 74 Provinces, Categorized by the Supporting Political Parties

Region/party	Thai Rak Thai	Democrat	Chart Thai	Chart Patthana	Mixed	Independent	**Total**
North	21	6	-	1	1	36	**65**
Northeast	26	2	1	1	4	58	**92**
Central	26	4	4	-	6	72	**112**
South	11	18	-	-	2	14	**45**
Total	**84**	**30**	**5**	**2**	**13**	**180**	**314**

Source: Data obtained from King Prajadhipok Institute (2004), modified by the author.

Following the 2004 PAO elections, most of the winning candidates were backed by political parties, factions, and national politicians. Among 74 provinces, only five independent candidates were successful, and most of them were in the central region (see *Table 17*).

Udon Thani; and the Former-New Aspiration faction in Nakhon Phanom. Source: *Nation Weekly*, 12(612), February 23–29, 2004, p. 20.

[150] Prajak, *supranote 41*, p. 135.

Table 17: The Number of Elected Chief Executives of PAO in 75 Provinces, Categorized by the Origin of Supporters

| Region/party	Thai Rak Thai	Democrat	Chart Thai	Chart Patthana	Independent	Total
North	12	3	-	-	1	16
Northeast	17	1	1	-	-	19
Central	16	1	4	1	4	26
South	5	9	-	-	-	14
Total	**50**	**14**	**5**	**1**	**5**	75

Source: Nation weekly, Vol. 616, March 22–28, 2004, modified by the author.

Regionally, it was no surprise that TRT could dominate seats in the North, Northeast and central regions, as this trend mirrored the national picture. TRT succeeded in linking with influential networks at the local level.[151] Although the Democrat gained a majority in its Southern stronghold, TRT-supported candidates unexpectedly won seats in five provinces that accounted for 36 percent[152] of the electorate (see *Figure 6*). The electoral outcome appears to suggest that partisanship played a strong role and that the involvement of political parties in local government seemed to be developing since the first local elections.

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[151] Nithi Eowsriwong. (2010). *An kanmueang Thai 1: kanmueang rueang phi Thaksin* (Read Thai politics 1: Politics of Thaksin ghost). Bangkok: Open books, p.74.

[152] The candidates from Thai Rak Thai won the PAO elections in Krabi, Ranong, Satun, Pattani, and Yala. Most of them were supported by *Wadah*, a group with extensive political influence in Southernmost Thailand.

Figure 6: The Number of Elected Chief Executives of PAO in 75 Provinces, Categorized by the Supporting Political Parties and By Regions
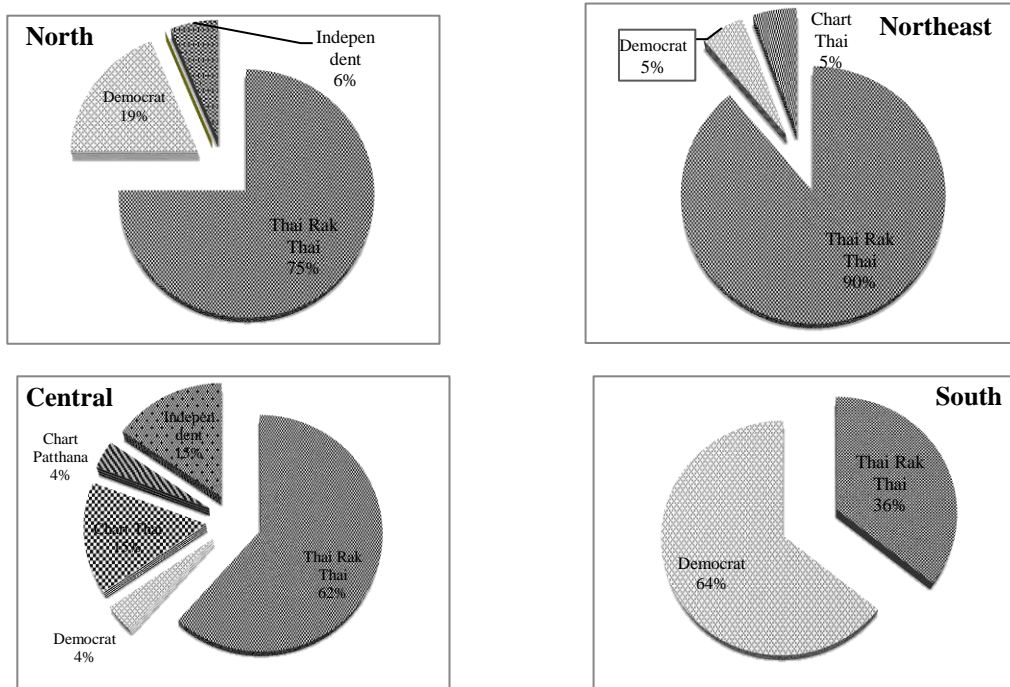
Source: Compiled from several documents and classified by the author

Focusing on the Northeastern region, where the Thai Rak Thai brand carried significant value for electorates in the national contest, 90 percent of the PAO chief executives' seats were won with TRT electoral support. TRT-backed candidates in the Northeast accounted for 17 winning seats out of 19 provinces. *Table 18* shows the number of successful candidates for PAO chief executives as classified by the origin of their supporters. Approximately half of them were supported by political factions. The intra-party factions were mostly Thai Rak Thai in orientation.

The results of the 2004 PAO elections confirm that the persistence of Thai Rak Thai success in the northeast was extremely remarkable at all levels of government.

Table 18: The Elected PAO Chief Executives in the Northeast, Classified By Parties and Factions in 2004

Thai Rak Thai (17)		
	Wang Buaban (4)	Udon Thani, Srisaket, Surin and Sakon Nakhon
	Wang Phayanak (3)	Ubon Ratchathani, Roi-et and Nongkhai
	Wang Namyen (2)	Chaiyaphum and Loei
	Other (8)	Nakhon Ratchasima, Yasothon, Nakhon Phanom, Khon Kaen, Nongbua Lamphu, Kalasin Mukdahan, and Buriram
Democrat (1)		Amnat Charoen
Chart Thai (1)		Mahasarakham

Source: Compiled from several documents and classified by the author

Table 19: The Elected Chief Executive of PAO in the Northeast With Their Electoral Supporters in 2004, 2008 and 2012

	Province	2004			2008			2012		
		Chief	Supporter	Relations	Chief	Supporter	Relations	Chief	Supporter	Realtions
1	**Kalasin**	**Yongyuth Lortrakul**	Thammarak Issarangkul Na Ayutthaya (Yongyuth was former chief and advisor for TRT president)	Party	**Chamoi Waramitr**	Old power and former PAO councilors (Chamoi was former senator)	Own base/ local faction	**Yongyuth Lortrakul**	*Kalasin Phue Thai* group and MPs	Own base/ MP
2	**Khon Kaen**	**Phongsak Tungwanit-kaphong**	Suwit Khunkitti (Phongsak was former chief)	MP	**Phongsak Tungwanitka-phong**	INCUMBENT	Own base/ MP	**Phongsak Tungwanitka-phong**	INCUM BENT	Own base/ MP
3	**Chaiya phum**	**Anan Limkuptatha-worn**	Sanoh Theinthong and Kamsung Praphakornkaewrat, MP from TRT (Anan was former chief)	MP/ party faction	**Suriyon Phunratana-praphin**	Phutthipong Sangaunwong-chai, the only one Democrat MP in province (Suriyon was former senator)	Party/ Kinship	**Montri Chaleekrue**	Parichart Chaleekhrue, Phue Thai MP, and Suchon Chaleekrue, former Senate chairman, and Red Shirts, Used Phue Thai logo without party's permission (Montri was former PAO councilor)	Kinship/ Red Shirts

	Province	2004			2008			2012		
		Chief	Supporter	Relations	Chief	Supporter	Relations	Chief	Supporter	Realtions
4	**Nakhon Phanom**	**Manaporn Charoensri**	Prasong Butphong, former MP and 5 MPs from TRT (Manaporn was former chief)	Kinship/ MP	**Somchob Nitiphoj**	Sriworrakhan Family and MPs from PPP	MP	**Somchob Nitiphoj**	INCUM BENT	Own base/ MP
5	**Nakhon Ratcha sima**	**Withoon Chartpatima-phong**	Suwat Lippatapanlop and Phairoj Suwanchawee, MP from TRT (Withoon was former chief)	MP	**Samroeng Yaengkrathok**	PPP MPs *and Rak Korat* group	MP/ local faction	**Ranongrak Suwannacha-wee**	Phumjaithai and Phue Thai MPs	MP
6	**Mahasara kham**	**Yingyot Udonphim**	Prayuth Siriphanit, Chartthai MP, and Yutthaphong Charassathien, Democrat MP	Kinship	**Yingyot Udonphim**	INCUMBENT	Own base/ Kinship	**Khomkhai Udonphim**	Yingyot Udonphim	Kinship
7	**Mukda han**	**Adul Chaisunan**	Thammarak Issarangkul Na Ayutthaya and MP (Adul was former chief and used TRT brand)	Party	**Wiriya Thongpha**	MPs and local networks (Wiriya was former senator, PAO council, and deputy chief)	Own base/ MP	**Malairak Thongpha**	Wiritya Thongpha, former chief PAO, and local politicians	Kinship/ local factions
8	**Yasothorn**	**Sathiraporn Naksuk**	Suthuchai Chanarak and Ronritthicahi Kankhet, TRT MP (Sathiraporn was former chief)	MP	**Sarit Pradabsri**	(Sarit was former Phue Phaendin MP)	Own base	**Sathiraporn Naksuk**	Phue Thai MP and Red Shirts 2004 INCUM BENT	Own base/ Red Shirts

	Province	2004			2008			2012		
		Chief	Supporter	Relations	Chief	Supporter	Relations	Chief	Supporter	Realtions
9	**Roi-Et**	**Ratchanee Phonsue**	Ekkaphap Phonsue and Phinit Charusombat, MP from TRT	Kinship/ party faction	**Mungkorn Yontrakul**	*PPP 101* group and cooperated with another candidats in the 2004 PAO elections, Thinnakorn Jureemat (Mungkorn was former chief)	Local faction	**Mungkorn Yontrakul**	INCUM BENT	Own base/ local faction
10	**Loei**	**Thanawut Thimsuwan**	Thanathep Thimsuwan, MP	Kinship	**Thanawut Thimsuwan**	INCUMBENT	Own base/ Kinship	**Thanawut Thimsuwan**	INCUM BENT	Own base/ Kinship
11	**Sri Saket**	**Wichit Traisarana-kul**	Sunee Inchat, Senator and MPs from TRT (Wichit was former chief)	MP	**Wichit Traisaranakul**	INCUMBENT, *Khon Thongthin* group (strong faction that combines the relatives of MPs to the group)	Own base/ local faction	**Wichit Traisaranakul**	INCUM BENT	Own base/ local faction

	Province	2004			2008			2012		
		Chief	**Supporter**	**Relations**	**Chief**	**Supporter**	**Relations**	**Chief**	**Supporter**	**Realtions**
12	**Sakonnakhon**	**Weerasak Phomphak-dee**	Sakhorn Phomphakdee, MP from TRT	Kinship	**Chaimongkol Chairob**	Phongsak Boonkuson, Kasem Uppara, and Ekkaporn Rakkwamsuk, MPs from PPP, *Kao Mai Thai Sakon* group, and local politicians (Chaimongkol was Phue Phaendin candidate in general elections)	MP/ local faction	**Chaimongkol Chairob**	INCUMBENT (Bhumjaithai network)	Own base/ MP
13	**Surin**	**Thongchai Mungcharoen-porn**	Chuchai Mungcharoenporn, partylist MP and MPs from TRT (Thongchai was former chief)	Kinship	**Thongchai Muncharoen-porn**	INCUMBENT	Own base/ Kinship	**Kittiphat Rungthana-kiat**	Newin Chidchob and Phumjaithai party	Party
14	**Nongkhai**	**Yutthana Sritabut**	Phithak Sritabut, former MP, and Phinit Charusombat and 4 MPs	Kinship/ MP	**Yutthana Sritabut**	INCUMBENT, *Rak Nongkhai* Group	Own base/ local faction	**Yutthana Sritabut**	INCUMBENT	Own base/ local faction

	Province	2004			2008			2012		
		Chief	Supporter	Relations	Chief	Supporter	Relations	Chief	Supporter	Realtions
15	**Nongbua Lumphu**	**Sorachart Suwanna-phom**	Thai Rak Thai (Sorachart was former MP)	Party	**Sarawut Santinantarak**	*Rak Nongbua* group, PAO councilors	Local faction	**Sarawut Santinantarak**	INCUMBENT	Own base/ local faction
16	**Amnat charoen**	**Chaiyaporn Thongprasert**	Suthat Nguenmuen, vice president of Democrat, and Phaisan Chantawara, Democrat MP (Chiyaporn was former MP)	Party	**Chaiyaporn Thongprasert**	INCUMBENT Democrat MP	Own base/ Party	**Sakchai Tangtrakul-wong**	Suthat Nguenmuen and Democrat (Sakchai was former town mayor)	Party
17	**Udon Thani**	**Chaloemphon Sanitwong-chai**	Theerachai Saenkaew, MP from TRT (Chaloemphon was former MP)	MP/ own base	**Hanchai Teekathana-nont**	Udon Thani MPs (Harnchai was former city mayor)	Own base/ MP	**Wichien Khaokham**	MPs, Red Shirts (Wichien was former MPs)	Party/ MPs/ own base
18	**Ubon Ratcha thani**	**Pornchai Khowsurat**	Sithichai Khowsurat, TRT MP and Wang Phayanak faction	Kinship/ party faction	**Pornchai Khowsurat**	INCUMBENT	Own base/ MP	**Pornchai Khowsurat**	INCUMBENT	Own base/ MP
19	**Buriram**	**Chawalit Chidchob**	Newin Chidchob	Kinship	**Karuna Chidchob**	Newin Chidchob	Kinship	**Karuna Chidchob**	INCUMBENT	Own base/ Kinship

Source: Compiled from several documents and classified by author

5.2 The Decline in Major Political Parties

The election of the PAO chief in 2004 shows that the involvement of political parties in local government became increasingly important. Major political parties as well as the local candidates themselves mutually catalyzed this process. Pressured to increasingly rely on party banners following the electoral result at the national level, the local candidates opportunistically sided with popular parties to gain votes from electorates who could no longer be reached by appeal to a traditional candidate-based preference. On the other hand, political parties solidified their electoral base at the local level by recruiting networked candidates to local elections. Due to the increasing influence of major political parties, the candidates from smaller parties were gradually restricted from the elections. Through this mechanism, local politics became more competitive and the importance of partisanship in local elections increased.

However, some electoral trends had changed since the PAO elections in 2008 and continued to the PAO elections in 2012. Even though the domination of Thaksin-allied parties continued to increase at the national level, the influence of major parties generally showed signs of decline in the local electoral arena. Several reasons may have contributed to this phenomenon.

5.2.1 Power Split in the Major Party

The Thai Rak Thai Party originally had multiple power centers cooperating and competing with each other within the party. When the Constitutional Court dissolved in 2007, the party's power became fragmented and broke down. Some of main party factions moved to establish their own political parties. The most obvious example is the *Wang Phayanak* faction

led by Phinit Jarusombut, the former Deputy Prime Minister, and Preecha Laohaphongchana, the former Deputy Minister of Commerce and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs under the Thaksin administration. In mid-2007, Suwit Khunkiiti founded Pheu Phaendin and persuaded the members of the *Wang Phayanak* faction to join.

The results of the 2008 PAO chief elections show that the incumbent PAO chiefs won in 8 out the 19 provinces in the Northeast (see *Figure 7*). The candidates in Khon Kaen and Ubon Ratchthani aligned themselves with the supporters of Pheu Phaendin. Moreover, among the new entrants, although the People Power Party (PPP) was expected to dominate local seats in the region, Pheu Phaendin made significant gains: 3 seats in 3 provinces, half as many as PPP, though a significant amount for a new party. The results of the PAO elections imply that the emerging power of small parties could challenge those of major parties at the local level.

Figure 7: The Elected PAO Chief Executives, Classified by the Origin of Main Supporters in 2008
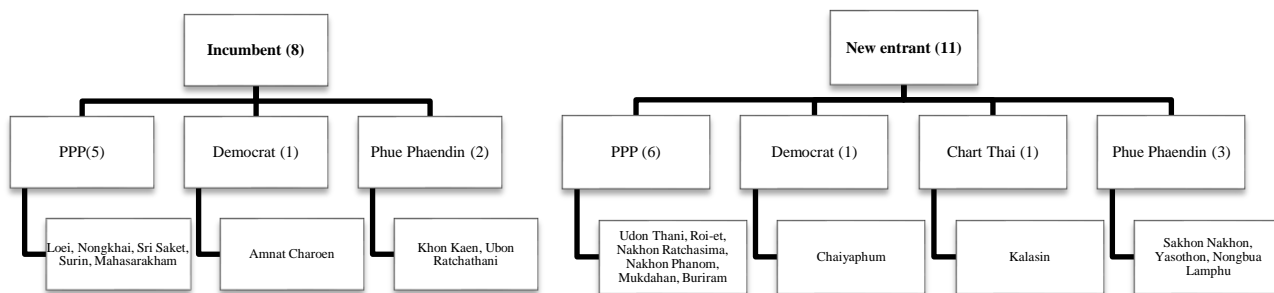
Source: Compiled from several documents and classified by the author

Moreover, the result of the 2012 PAO elections reveal that Thaksin-allied networks showed more signs of decreasing influence. Candidates supported by Pheu Thai networks were able to gain only 7 seats in 19 provinces, while those supported by the new Bhumjaithai were able to win 4 seats in the Northeast. When Newin Chidchob founded Bhumjaithai, his networked candidates at the local level also aligned themselves with him. The result of the 2012 PAO elections reflect the strength of other political factions that could replace the influence of major political parties—especially the Thaksin coalition—in local politics. Changing power relationships and the polarization of political factions could, therefore, lessen the influence of Thaksin-allied networks in the region.

Figure 8: The Elected PAO Chief Executives, Classified by the Origin of Main Supporters in 2012
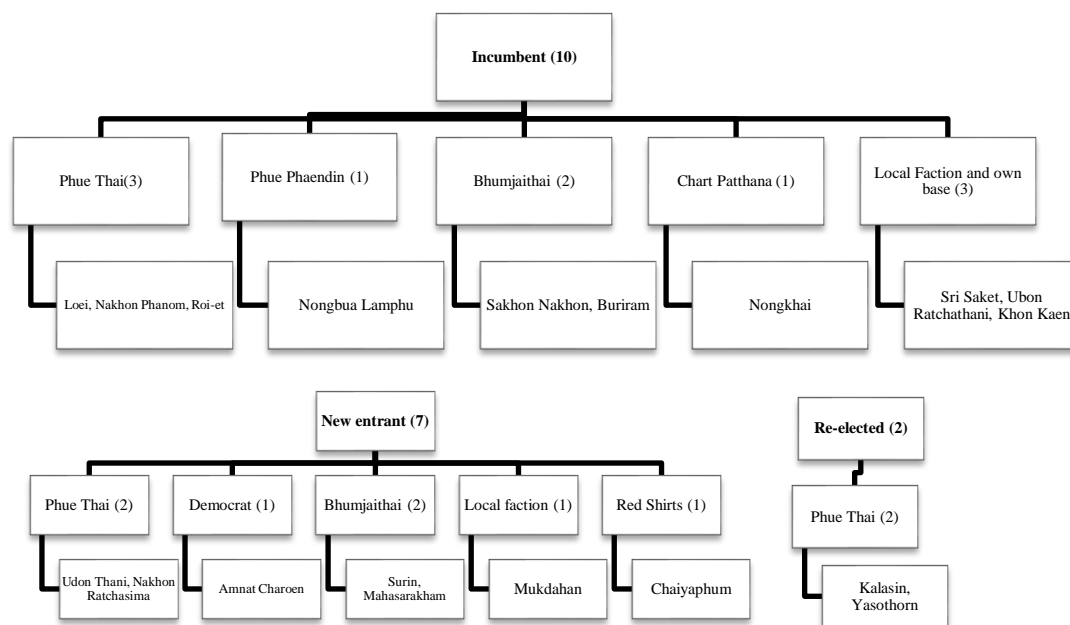
Source: Compiled from several documents and classified by the author

Although Pheu Phaendin and Bhumjaithai could not succeed in national elections, at the local level some of their networked candidates could more or less challenge the influence of Thaksin-allied parties. The victory of candidates supported by Pheu Phaendin and Bhumjaithai politicians indicates that major party brands did not further carry significant value in the PAO elections. The individual candidate, local group, and even the local political networks showed signs of increasing influence over political parties. In terms of national politics, the Pheu Thai Party gained almost all MPs' seats in the Northeastern region, but not in the local elections. If party affiliation were decisive in elections, partisan candidates would be elected, no matter who they were. This emphasizes the declining influence of major parties in local elections since 2008.

5.2.2 Adaptability of Electoral Strategies

After the PAO elections in 2008, the major parties modified their local election strategies. Changing course to further focus on national issues, the parties deprioritized the power and support of candidates at the local level. Thaksin-allied parties became especially cautious in supporting candidates in local elections. The prohibition against using the party's logo in local electoral campaigns is one of the actions that demonstrate this. In the 2004 PAO elections, many candidates used the Thai Rak Thai banner in an effort to gain massive votes from the electorates who tended to bind their electoral preference to TRT and Thaksin. Most of the candidates did this not with permission directly from the party, but through their supporters, who had direct linkage to the party, i.e. the MPs in the province. However, the use of party logos became more strictly regulated in the 2008 PAO elections. The PPP committee ruled that in cases where all MPs in the province reach a consensus to support a candidate for the PAO elections, the candidate could use the party's logo for the electoral campaign.

However, if any MPs wish to support their own candidate, the use of the party banner would be prohibited.[153] This decision decreased the party's electoral support at the local level.

Such was the case of the Khon Kaen PAO election in 2008. Soraphika Torcharoensuk, one among four candidates who ran for the PAO elections, used the party's brand in order to gain votes from the popularity of the party. Her husband, Nawat, was a PPP Khon Kaen, therefore Soraphika used the PPP's name and logo on her banner in the PAO elections. In this case, some Khon Kaen MPs did not accept the use of the party logo without permission, and claimed that Khon Kaen MPs and the People Power party did not officially support her in this local election.[154] Being the PPP MP's wife did not guarantee that the party would support her in the local election. To prevent further tensions, Soraphika, replaced the party's logo with her husband's name and position as PPP MP.

The party's prohibition of candidates using the party banner for electoral campaigns indicates that the party itself had become careful in supporting candidates in local elections when those candidates could decrease support for the party in local elections. In lieu of institutional support, most of the local candidates were backed by MPs individually. In only a few provinces did those MPs had a consensus in supporting single candidates for PAO elections. The influence of major parties, therefore, played a less important role in local politics.

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[153] *Ban Muang*, February 18, 2012.

[154] *Siam Rat,* January 18, 2007.

5.2.3 Influential MPs in the Province

In provincial politics, the MP was still a powerful political actor who could maintain their influence and power in the area. The influence of provincial MPs was not completely replaced by political parties. It can be said that in local elections, political connections are important for politicians to obtain or continue their political positions. Coordination with influential politicians in the province is recognized as one of the key factors to succeed in local elections. Each candidate, therefore, makes a strong connection with provincial politicians, such as MPs who have an influence on their own voter bases, in order to gain electoral support. It is customary for new local politicians to introduce themselves to the MPs in order to show respect for influential people in the area. Showing disrespect to such figures might be problematic for candidates and could directly affect their votes.[155] Working with ideologically sympatico candidates facilitates area development or budget allocation. Support from PAO councilors is also necessary during the campaign period. The councilors are always closer to the electorate in their area and have stronger voter bases than the PAO chiefs. They, therefore, have the potential to help candidates to gain votes in the area and win the PAO chief election.

Recruitment of the candidate for the Udon Thani PAO elections is a good case for explaining this situation. The outcome demonstrated that the support from MPs in the area remained strong. A candidate claimed support from Thaksin Shinawatra, who is recognized to have influence over voters in Udon Thani, did not even win in this election. A candidate who received support from the MPs in the province might attract massive votes because each MP has their own strong patronage network and vote base in their constituency, and could thereby

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[155] Interview with Kitiphum Deenang, personal assistant to Somsak Kiatsuranont, Khon Kaen MP, Khon Kaen, August 13, 2015.

help the candidate to gain votes in the whole provincial area.[156] This could indicate the influence of powerful MPs in the province on local elections.

5.2.4 Formation of Local Political Cliques

Finally, local candidates themselves form their own electoral base and local political group. Since the 2008 PAO elections, many local political groups have been established. In the first phase of the direct local elections, one of the best ways for local candidates to introduce themselves to the public and enter the political arena was to involve themselves with major political parties, especially TRT in the Northeastern. However, in 2008, the local politicians built a stronger voter base and established their own political groups. These local groups could replace the influence of political parties and play an active role in local politics, because they could directly formulate the public policies that responded to the local people's needs. The head of a local political group, who ran for the PAO elections, may strengthen and extend their power by supporting their member to run for a position of influence in lower local administrative organizations, especially the city mayoral elections. Local politicians tended to form new political networks in order to dominate the political arena at the local level and be more independent from national political parties' influence.

A good example of a powerful local political group is that of Ubon Ratchathani. The PAO chief, Pornchai Khowsurat, established his *Kunnatham* group to run a specific campaign focusing on local development. The group intended to show their 'neutral' status amidst the

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[156] Interview with local official, Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, September 3, 2014.

national political polarization[157] and announced their intention with anyone from any group.[158] In contrast, Karn Kantinun's *Phalang Prachachon Ubon* group clearly expressed their support for Thaksin and his party.

After Pornchai was elected in the 2012 PAO elections, he enhanced the power of his local political group by expanding to the municipal level. *Kunnatham* fielded Somprathana Wikraijerdcharoen to stand against Rotjana Kantinun, the former city mayor. In these elections, both national-level and local-level politicians supported each side. In the aftermath, the *Kunnatham* group was ultimately able to topple the Kantinun family and Somprathana became the new city mayor of Ubon Ratchathani.

This outcome made the local political group stronger. The PAO and city municipality could further coordinate their policies, which had never happened when the chief of PAO and city mayor were in different polarities.[159]

As in Ubon Ratchathani, in Udon Thani, the local political groups also played an active role in both PAO and municipal elections. Harnchai Theekhathananont's *Nakhon Mak Kaeng* group started from its support base in the city and extended its power by allying with other coalitions in rural areas.[160] This strategy strengthened their power and extended their electoral base in the province, giving them an advantage in the PAO elections.

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[157] Interview with Suchao Meenongwa, lecturer at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajabhat Ubon Ratchathani University, Ubon Ratchathani, August 20, 2014.

[158] Interview with Pornchai Khowsurat, chief executive of Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani, February 21, 2014, and his vote canvasser, Ubon Ratchathani, August 06, 2014.

[159] Interview with Sathit Sena, Head of Plan and Policy Section, Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani, August 04, 2014.

[160] Interview with Harnchai Theekhathananont, former chief executive of Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, August 21, 2015.

Victories in city mayoral elections might empower local political groups since they could ensure strong voter bases in the city area. For many areas, urban votes were likely a key factor for the PAO candidate's victory. Since many candidates have a relatively similar voter base in rural areas, the competition depended on decisions made by voters in the city. The policy platform is also one of the key factors that electorates use when determining their preferences. Voters have become concerned with public policies that affect their localities. Voters tend to choose an executive who will formulate public policies according to their needs and can effectively implement those policies. Political groups among local politicians can, therefore, respond to local citizens' interests better than political parties who mainly focus on national issues. From the reasons mentioned above, it can be argued that strong local political groups can also lessen the influence of national political parties in local elections.

5.3 The Formation of Local Networks through Local Political Groups

The newly prominent local political groups are neither family-centered groups nor party-supported organizations. They center on an individual or a group of leaders, and have a hierarchy of members that have been assembled for local political purposes including electoral competition and public policy formulation at local level. The main factor for network binding shifted from kinship ties and partisanship to a relationship among local politicians themselves. Local political groups are primarily devoted to drumming up political support for their leaders or election candidates. They do not completely commit to any national political party that may categorize them as a mere local party branch. They are independent to run their own election campaigns or create public policy at the local level. This leads to a new form of internal cooperation among group members as well as external competition. It also creates a new form

of local political networks that replace the traditional patron-client relationship or even the clan networks in local politics.

The change of local political networks has also involved the rise of local political groups. The local political groups are formed and become stronger after the local politicians are able to establish their own vote base in their constituencies. Their performance and policy implementation while in office brought gives local residents confidence in them. When decentralization and direct local elections were first introduced, most of the successful candidates were those who operated clan mechanisms and networks through clientelistic politics including the veteran politicians. They had their own strong voter bases or supporters, which they could leverage to win at the ballot box. Decentralization made the local politics a powerful new platform and created a new generation of first-time local politicians, though unlike the veteran politicians, they had no established voter bases. Particularly in the PAO elections, it was challenging for the new entrants to win since it required a wide range of votes that covered the entire provincial area. One of the most effective ways for them to be elected was to build connections with major political parties or national politicians who were able to introduce them to local residents. These connections were mutually beneficial, as the national politicians or MPs could more easily launch development projects in the local area and gain more popular support in the constituencies. Therefore, the connections between new local politicians and national MPs were strong in the early phase of local elections.

Once the new entrants were elected and began serving, they became well-known by the local residents through their policy implemetation. The more they launchded public policies or projects that directly responded to the local resident's needs, the more they were able to gain popularity that would be beneficial for their next election. Public policy at local level is partially different from national policy. At national level, public policies are proposed by the political parties for their electoral campaigns, formulated by the cabinet, decided by parliament,

and implemented nationwide. The national policies have a broad mandate, and cannot directly respond to the needs or problems in specific areas of the country. On another hand, local public policy is decided and formulated with area-based problems in mind, so it can more directly respond to the local resident's needs. Through those policies, the local residents are able to easily evaluate whether their representative can work effectively or not. Performance in implementing public policy at the local level, therefore, is one factor used by local residents to choose their representatives in local elections.

When the incumbents become well-known by the local residents and their voter base strengthens, they often establish their own local political groups in order to build up a unique entity that is independent from the influence of political parties, national politicians or any person/group of influence in the constituencies. The founder or leader of large local political groups is always the PAO chief, since he/she is the most influential person who can provide political and financial support in order to maintain the group. The leader would establish their hierarchical networks with other heads of local authorities in the province, namely the city municipality, town and *tambon* municipality and SAO. The leaders of these group include both new entrants and veteran politicians who turned from national to local politics.

Local politicians also form their own networks among other politicians in the area. When local elections are held, the group leaders and some executives may recruit a candidate to field on behalf of the group. If the candidates are elected, they can coordinate policies among their networked local authorities from the same group. Ubon Ratchathani is a case that shows the close relation between the heads of two local authorities who come from the same local group, the PAO and city municipality. When an annual festival in the province is held, for example, they can cooperate and help each other by providing financing and labour to hold the festival. On the other hand, if the relations among local authorities in the province are weak, the head of a local government organization may individually implement his/her own project

without coordinating with others, as shown in the case of Udon Thani. Moreover, in order to establish a political alliance and gain more popular support, the local political group might expand their networks to other social groups in the community, such as business, civil servant and professional groups, etc.

Local political groups maintain relations not only with their internal members, but also with external local groups. More firmly established groups have increased negotiating power, giving them an advantage in the power balance with other local groups. Although many local political groups have emerged in the Udon Thani recently, only a few of them wield significant political clout in the province. Those groups are always chaired by the candidates for the PAO elections, giving them more influence and authority.
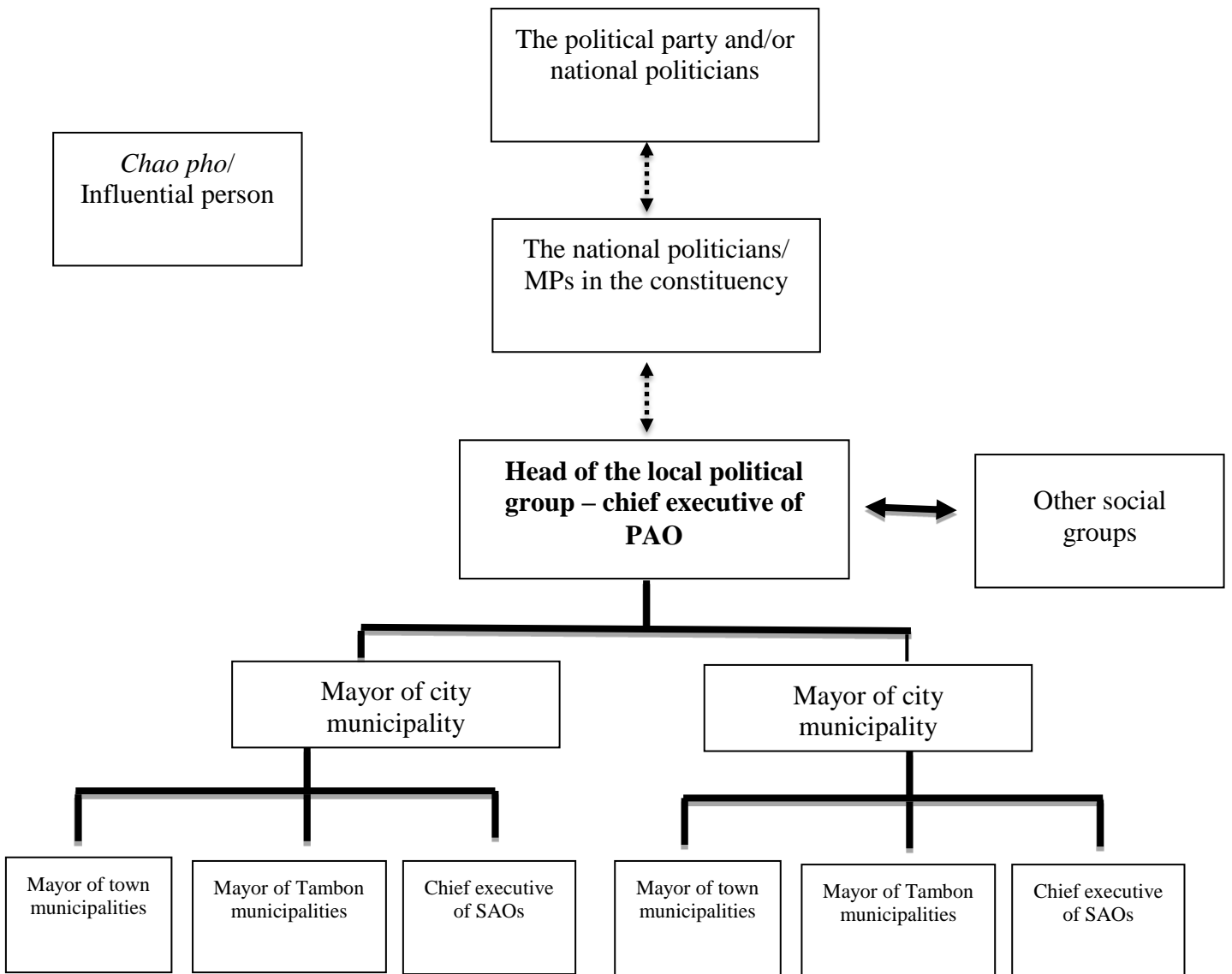
There is a high level of competition between the Udon Thani local political groups. Hence, they still maintain connections with some political parties or national politicians in their constituency, to give them a competitive advantage. However, since the early phase of local elections, these connections become looser, since the local groups now have more negotiating power to deal with the political parties and national politicians. The local political groups have therefore become the most influential actors in recent local politics. Lately, the local politicians have sought to build connections and expand their networks with other local politicians rather than political figures at a national level.

Party politics and Red/Yellow polarization used to play a more influential role in local politics, in terms of candidate recruitment, election campaigning, or even the policy decision-making process. That phenomenon energized local politics, since the electorates began actively participating in local elections as an effective channel to choose the candidates they preferred. Nevertheless, the influence of party and Red/Yellow politics has decreased. Even the influence

of *chao pho* is now limited only to some specific areas. They have no potential to further control local politicians or otherwise assert their influence in local politics.

At the national political level, party affiliation and Red/Yellow self-identity remain important factors. The electorate can express its political position and ideology via the ballot box. National representatives are not selected based on their charisma or the policy platforms of their party. On the other hand, in local elections, the proposed policies or development plans are recognized as the main determiner for the electorate. Their preference is based on policy or individual candidates rather than political ideology. This phenomenon has made local politics independent from the influence of national politics. Local politicians are able to decide public policy based on the needs in their own area of responsibility. It is not necessary for them to maintain close connections with the traditional power structure such as clientalism. New political networks at the local level are then formed, establishing local democratic structures. The local residents can elevate representatives who know the issues, problems and conditions of the locality into office. The decision-making process has become more independent from the centre and is more concerned with local issues, more suited to local people than decisions that emanate from the central government.

Figure 9: The Local Political Networks Formed By Local Political Group

The political party and/or national politicians

Chao pho/ Influential person

The national politicians/ MPs in the constituency

Head of the local political group – chief executive of PAO

Other social groups

Mayor of city municipality

Mayor of city municipality

Mayor of town municipalities

Mayor of Tambon municipalities

Chief executive of SAOs

Mayor of town municipalities

Mayor of Tambon municipalities

Chief executive of SAOs

Source: Made by author

Chapter VI

Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

This analysis addressed the declining engagement of major political parties in local politics and examined the reasons behind the decreasing influence of Thaksin-affiliated parties on electorates in Northeastern Thailand. The shift to direct local elections led to increased involvement of political parties in local government in 2004. The influence of political parties and posturing, which brought about changes in voting patterns, were central to the development of this phenomenon. Moreover, as a result of the Thai Rak Thai Party entering the national political arena, the electorates tended to have greater party-based preferences as opposed to the traditional candidate-based system.

At the local level, direct local elections welcomed many new entrants. As the direct local elections at the local level created new sources of power and wealth to elected candidates, new politicians including local business leaders, retired officials and provincial elites actively ran for office. After a political paradigm shift to a two-dominant party system that empowered major political parties, local election candidates courted major political parties and nation-level politicians more openly. Local candidates revealed their affiliations and used party labels to ensure their electoral victories in the first phase of direct local elections. Especially in 2004, when Thai Rak Thai became popular, TRT-supported candidates won the PAO elections in several provinces, particularly in the North and Northeast.

However, by the 2008 PAO elections, this strategy had led to a decline in major political parties and an increase in smaller parties as well as political groups formed by local politicians. Major parties, especially those allied to Thaksin, showed signs of decreasing influence in local elections, despite maintaining strong influence at a national level. The local electoral preference had shifted again, from party-based to candidate- and policy-based. From the case studies outlined herein, several factors can be highlighted to explain this situation. Strong political parties can lose their electoral bases at the local level when there is a power struggle within the party. Local politicians then defect to newly-established political factions. Moreover, political parties themselves adapted their strategies to focus more on national issues, maintaining power through their links with MPs, and reduce their emphasis on establishing a local power base. MPs remained influential actors in local politics. Moreover, the local politicians themselves attempted to form their own political networks through local political groups that could possibly replace the influence of major political parties, since they can formulate public policies that respond to citizens' interests and effectively implement those policies.

In light of these results, what can we infer about national politics? The results appear to indicate that local elections are insulated from national politics to a certain degree. This phenomenon might give smaller parties or independent candidates a better chance to enter the political arena at the local level, whilst the major parties continuously maintain their domination in national politics. The local electoral preference will rely more on a candidate's policies and charisma, rather than their affiliation. Gradually, the role major political parties play as intermediaries between local administrative organizations and local citizens might be eliminated. When the local government becomes independent and stronger, local policies that directly respond to the people's needs and which are independent from national issues will emerge. The gap between national and local politics may gradually increase.

6.2 Conclusion

The main purpose of this dissertation was to investigate and understand the change and continuity of the political networks at a local level caused by the adoption of direct local executive elections following the decentralization measures that devolved a wide swath of administrative and fiscal power to the local government. However, this research has not focused on the administrative aspect, as that has already received much scholarly attention. This study focused specifically on the political aspect, and set out to explain the dynamic of political networks, temporally and geographically. This research assumes that the main factors causing formation and change to political networks between 2004 and 2012 are the adoption of direct local elections following political and administrative decentralization, the domination of Thaksin and his allied parties over Thai politics, and the political polarization between Yellow and Red Shirts. In regard to the variation of factors over time, the direct elections of the PAO executive in 2004, 2008 and 2012 were analyzed in order to understand the local power structure and its change when affected by those factors. This conclusion will summarize the argument and the evidence collected from the fieldwork of the case studies presented in the previous chapter. It concludes with the change and continuity of the local political networks, the dynamics of Thai local politics and local democratization, and the potential of Thai politics at both national and local level in the near future.

Before the adoption of the direct local executive elections, local politics were bound by patron and client connections. Business leaders and *chao pho* were the main actors in local politics. Elective positions were seen as a major source of patronage, and business leaders fielded either themselves or their networked candidates in elections.

There were significant changes in the pattern and method of political connections when direct local executive elections were adopted. New local political networks were formed among

the main national parties, national-level politicians and candidates for the first local executive elections. The 2004 PAO executive elections led to a transformation of politics at the local level. Under the old rules, PAO chiefs were appointed and dismissed by the PAO assemblies. However, once the PAO chiefs became directly elected by the people in the area, political decisions were more decentralized.

There were also new bonds between political parties and the candidates for local elections. The major political parties' brands inherited from the popularity of the Thai Rak Thai Party and attracted local candidates. Likewise, the political parties actively participated in local competitions with the aim of influencing the local government and solidifying their broad base of local support in order to ensure a triumph in their next general elections, which would be held in 2005. If their candidates could win the PAO executive elections, they would be able to exploit their networks and advance to the electoral campaign in the 2005 general elections. The political parties were seeking locally ad hoc coalitions with powerful local politicians. From that phenomenon came the rapidly rising importance of partisanship in local elections. The party-candidate relations was first formed at the local level.

A notable feature of the first direct PAO elections was the inconsistent patterns of party domination across the country. The winning party coalitions varied region by region, reflecting the 2001 general elections. TRT and Democrat candidates still gained votes in their areas of influence, showing the different power configurations at each locality. Although kinship networks still had an influence on local elections in some areas, party politics had the most powerful impact on the dynamics of local politics at that time.

In the 2008 PAO chief executive elections, political polarization had a strong impact on both national and local politics. The 'Red' and 'Yellow' polarization led to strong support for political parties from groups with different political opinions. Not only in national politics,

but also at the local level: polarization had a powerful impact on the local elections, in which the electorate tended to vote for pro-Thaksin or anti-Thaksin candidates. Therefore, the connections with the major political parties that played a strong role in the specific area became one of the key factors for electoral victory. It shows that the party politics still have a role in local politics although the party politicization in local elections showed signs of reversal in some area.

However, the influence of party politics at the local level declined in the 2012 local elections. The political parties played a less significant role in local politics. The number of non-partisan or independent candidates increased. This phenomenon can be explained by the following reasons.

1. Local politicians have become stronger and more independent. They can establish their vote base without any assistance from national politicians or even political parties.

2. Local politicians can establish their local political groups by themselves. Instead of political parties, independent groups played an increasing role in the local electoral arena as they could formulate the public policy themselves that directly responded to the locality's needs.

6.3 Which Way Forward? Analysis of Future Local Elections through the Lens of the 2019 General Election

Regarding local elections in the near future, the local voters tend to make more complex voting decisions than the typical image of vote-buying. Voting behavior tends to be the candidate- and/or policy-based rather than party-based, as seen in the recent 2019

parliamentary elections. The 2017 military-written constitution was designed to enable the military-backed Phalang Pracharat Party (PPRP) to retain power even after the election. A form of institutional engineering through the 'mixed-member apportionment' system was introduced to help PPRP garner a large number of parliamentary seats, and limit the number of Pheu Thai seats. However, PPRP gained only 8.5 million votes from approximately 35 million votes in total. It could not gain a landslide victory over its political rivals, especially Pheu Thai and the new progressive Future Forward Party.

Most of the successful PPRP candidates were former MPs poached from existing parties including as Pheu Thai. This, therefore, reflects that voters still supported politicians from the patron-client networks, or whom they were familiar with. Although the PPRP had attempted to introduce populist programs such as welfare for the poor and pregnant women, to gain votes, the party could not convince the voters to trust them. However, there was a more substantial reason for the PPRP's failure to win the popular vote: Prime Minister Gen. Prayuth's economic failures during his almost five years in power. He could not build trust to deliver promises to voters.

Pheu Thai won almost 8 million votes in the election. Although the result reflects voter loyalty to the party, there are also other factors. Most Pheu Thai candidates had previously served as MPs. Individually, they had their own strong voter bases, established due to the tangible facilities, welfare or public services they had provided as MPs. They had also supported local charities, creating goodwill among the electorate. It cannot be denied that the political patronage system retains some influence in Thai politics, though candidate-based preferences were uppermost in many voters' minds.

Another recent example showing that a party's brand had a less significant influence on voters is the case of Future Forward. The emergence of the party in the 2019 general election

established a new kind of Thai politics, as they positioned themselves as a new alternative for young voters. Their proposed policies, especially ending Thailand's military conscription, convinced a new generation to become politically engaged. The party benefited from the 'mixed-member apportionment' system, which favored medium and small parties. (Major Thaksin-allied parties, including Pheu Thai, had won every general election since 2001, and the military sought to hamper their chances in 2019). Future Forward gained 50 party-list seats under this system, but only 30 out of 350 constituency seats. Their low number of constituency seats was due to the relatively unknown backgrounds of their candidates, most of whom were newcomers with little or no voter bases. Future Forward gained approximately 6 million votes at the election, many of which came from energized young voters, though the veteran candidates of Pheu Thai, the Democrat Party, and Phalang Pracharat were more successful. Thus, although Future Forward built a popular political brand and movement, this was not sufficient for electoral success.

Local elections in Thailand had been frozen since the National Council for Peace and Order seized power in 2014. General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the coup leader, claimed that the previous selection method for local officials was not transparent, and that elected officers were not effective. The NCPO called for more transparency and fairness in local elections.[161] They announced a goal of achieving national reconciliation by amending rules and regulations to produce good, honest, and moral political leaders. Arguing that local politicians were bad and corrupted leaders, the NCPO prohibited local elections at all levels including PAO, municipality, and TAO.

Decentralization under Prayuth's administration was totally ignored. Prior to the coup, the PAD had attempted to motivate protesters by proposing decentralization, including the

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[161] Bangkok Post online (www.bangkokpost.com), June 25, 2014.

transfer of more power and budget to local authorities, and the direct election of governors nationwide. However, after the coup, decentralization was barely mentioned, even in the 2017 Constitution. Prayuth's administration attempted to integrate civil society within an authoritarian regime, by increasing policy centralization. To this end, provincial officers were assigned to replace local positions. This enabled the military-led government to centralize its power and exercise influence over national policy.

However, the ban on local elections has since been rescinded, and they will be held in the coming year. Although local politics was affected by the 2019 general elections, it is not completely overwhelmed by national politics. The next local elections are expected to be a battlefield for political parties. Many parties plan to field local election candidates as part of their strategy to expand their influence beyond Parliament. However, the fact that many candidates are fielded under party labels does not necessarily mean that the electorates will vote on a party-based preference. The characteristic of local elections is unique. Changes taking place within the political arena include a decrease of partisanship at the local level. Local elections tend to show an increase in the number of successful independent candidates and a concomitant decline in partisan candidates and partisan competition, as described in the case studies of this dissertation. Local electoral trends have been observed throughout the country, except in some specific areas where the political parties monopolized their power over a prolonged period.

If local elections tend to be less partisan, how do national politicians or political parties cope with decentralization? Does it still matter for national politicians? Although local-party networks tend to be non-partisan, decentralization is still important for political parties. First, in recent decades, decentralization and strengthening of local authorities have become an important issue in Thai politics. Many people also desire more decentralized power and self-determination for local governments, so that policies can be responsive to local needs.

Decentralization policy has, therefore, been included on the policy platforms of national politicians' election campaigns. Second, theoretically, decentralization makes local authorities more independent from central and provincial control. However, in practice, there are mechanisms that allow central and provincial officers to maintain control over local governments. The allocation of the budget is one such mechanism. Budgetary decisions are made by central government, and allocated through the Department of Local Administration, in the Ministry of Interior. Therefore, central government still exerts indirect control over local government. Third, the fact that local politicians have become non-partisan does not mean that they have rivalry with national politicians. Some policy implementation needs the support of local authorities. Without it, some affairs conducted by central or provincial officers would be difficult to arrange since local authorities leaders are more familiar with local people and have large budgets. Thus, we can see that after decentralization, the relationships between national and local politician are still preserved. For the aforementioned reasons, national politicians need not reverse the decentralization policy. Decentralization is still a necessary criteria to establish democracy in Thailand.

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Interview with Auoychai Phatsaduraksa, Division Director, Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Bangkok, August 28, 2015.

Interview with Benjawan Narasaj, Lecturer, Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Khon Kaen Universit, Khon Kaen, August 19, 2015.

Interview with Dararat Mettatrikanon, Associate Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Khon Kaen Universit, Khon Kaen, August 19, 2015.

Interview with Duangnet Chasuwan, Head of Public Utility Section, Khon Kaen PAO, Khon Kaen, September 19, 2014.

Interview with Harnchai Teekathananont, former chief executive of Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, August 21, 2015.

Interview with Jiraphat Somthep, Head of Budgeting Section, Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani, August 15, 2014.

Interview with Kitikhun Deenang, personal assistant to Somsak Kiatsuranont and MP in the 2019 elections, Khon Kaen, August 13, 2015.

Interview with Kovit Phimchan, Director of Natural Resource Division, Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani, August 5, 2014.

Interview with local official, Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, September 3, 2014.

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Interview with Narin Pornchaisitthikul, Head of Plan and Policy Section, Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, September 3, 2014.

Interview with Nimmala Itthiphinyophap, Head of Public Health Section, Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani, August 4, 2014.

Interview with Oradee Uthaireung, Head of Tourism Section, Udon Thani PAO, Udon Thani, September 3, 2014.

Interview with Pornchai Khowsurat, chief executive of Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani, February 21, 2014.

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Interview with Preecha Phongthong, Head of Water Resource Development Section, Ubon Ratchathani PAO, Ubon Ratchathani, August 7, 2014.

Interview with Sakchai Saelee, Head of "Phirab Khao" group, Khon Kaen, September 15, 2014.

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Interview with Somphong Poopheng, PAO councillor and MP candidate in the 2019 elections, Khon Kaen, August 17, 2015.

Interview with Suchai Charoenmukkhayanan, lecturer at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajabhat Ubon Ratchathani University, Ubon Ratchathani, August 20, 2014.

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