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Chambers, Paul; Waitookiat, Napisa

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Faction Politics in an Interrupted Democracy: the Case of Thailand

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Paul Chambers and Napisa Waitoolkiat

Abstract

Though dominated by the monarchy and military, Thailand in 2020 has a highly factionalised, political party system ensconced within a defective democracy. When not under military rule, such a situation has been common. The country's excessive level of factionalism across parties and over time is due to a long history of regionalised and decentralised parties that have invariably been dependent upon finance from faction leaders who have rarely been reined in by laws to limit factionalism. Only under Thaksin Shinawatra (2001–2006), did factionalism diminish in importance on the national level owing partly to 1997 constitutional alterations. Following a 2006 coup and the 2007 adoption of a military-endorsed constitution, a high level of intra-party factionalism returned across parties. Though the 2014 coup again ended the country's faction-ridden democracy, the 2019 general election resurrected factionalism, which guaranteed weakness for party politics while benefiting the aristocracy and military.

Keywords

Thailand, faction, factionalism, party, political

Center for ASEAN Community Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Naresuan University, Thapho, Phitsanulok, Thailand

Corresponding author:

Paul Chambers, Center for ASEAN Community Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Naresuan University, 99 Thapho, Phitsanulok 65000, Thailand.
Email: pwchambers@gmail.com



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Introduction

Thailand has a weak democracy. Despite the overthrow of military-backed absolute monarchy in 1932, the monarchy and/or military have often dominated the country for most of the period since then. Thai democracy has been interrupted by thirteen successful military coups since 1932. In July 2019 the most recent episode of military rule gave way to an elected coalition government made up of factionalised political parties. Such factions have exercised enormous power in parties and governments when democracy has existed in Thailand.

Most studies on Thai politics focus upon political parties and inter-party politics, seeming to view parties as mere black boxes (e.g. McCargo, 1997). But beneath the veneer of an analysis emphasising only conflicts among parties as hard shells, factions do retain relevance in contemporary Thai politics. One might merely point to events that occurred in 1997 and 2008. On both occasions factions bolted from parties in one ruling coalition, then joined or formed other parties, effectively overturning governments. Thus, when Thai democracy has existed, intra-party factions have been relevant to party politics given that, though parties remain the principal parliamentary actors, factions are the building blocks of political parties. They can sometimes cause intra-party, intra-cabinet, and intra-coalitional instability but can also serve as pluralistic vehicles because they provide the “voice” of backbenchers in the party who may disagree with party leaders. Because of this relevance, it is important to examine how Thai factions have evolved and to what extent they remain important today. What accounts for the rise and persistence of intra-party factions in Thai politics? How has such factionalism affected party and parliamentary politics? To what extent is factionalism flourishing in 2020? This study, which contends that factionalism is alive and well in Thailand today, seeks to answer these questions and utilises historical institutionalism to understand it. It argues that a combination of critical junctures, sequencing, historical–cultural legacies, the plasticity of formal institutions, and path dependence – concepts of historical institutionalism – have accounted for the rise and sustainability of factionalised parties in Thailand, a phenomenon that has created instability in the country’s party politics.

The Evolution of Factionalism in Thai Political Parties Until 2007

This study defines “faction” as the often temporary grouping together of politicians and their support groups both within and apart from an overarching party structure (Chambers, 2003). Factions are crucial political players in Thai politics. Historical institutionalism helps to explain their evolution and persistence within political parties and the overall party system (Hellmann, 2011). Historical institutionalism as an approach is useful in explaining institutional persistence and change across time. Historical institutionalists emphasise how institutions shape not only strategies but also the historical evolution of preferences, goals, and interests (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992: 9). The approach offers explanations about how events in history either constrained or offered opportunities that affected institutional resilience or transformation (Pierson, 2004).

Beginning from the institutional point of origin, initial institutional patterns become chronologically reinforced, producing persistent impacts upon contemporary configurations (Pierson, 2004). As such, it is useful in showing how a sequential series of events helps to reinforce configurations that have later effects. In this respect, to explain divergent outcomes in the development of intra-party factionalism, it is necessary to utilise various concepts from historical institutionalism. Borrowing such concepts as derived from Mahoney and Schensul (2006), Pierson (2004), and Krauss and Pekkanen (2011), this study looks at institutional change in terms of degrees of intra-party factionalism. In this regard, the historical institutionalist factors of critical juncture, sequencing, historical legacies, path dependence, and the plasticity of formal institutions allow us to understand the chronological origins of Thailand's tradition of "strong" factionalism.

Critical Juncture

Critical junctures are "short, time-defined periods, where antecedent conditions allow contingent choices that set a specific trajectory of institutional modification that is difficult to reverse" (Page, 2006: 88).

The critical juncture that allowed Thai intra-party factions to begin to imbed themselves in politics was the 24 June 1932 coup d'état, which ousted the Siamese kingdom's absolute monarchy. Without this juncture, Thailand would not experience the onset of parliamentary politics within which factionalism occurred. Minus the overthrow of monarchical absolutism there would not even have been an opportunity for the seeds of parliamentary politics to sprout, because monarchists would have forbidden such a move. The germination of Thai democratisation thus sprang forth from the critical juncture of Thai people's 1932 weakening of Siamese monarchy. Unfortunately, the new democracy was disjointed and uneven. As Lupu and Stokes (2007) have posited, "Cumulatively over time, repeated interruptions [in democracy] can severely erode partisan attachments" (Lupu and Stokes, 2007). Thailand's critical juncture initiated only an incremental movement towards pluralism given that Thai democracy, by 2020, had been punctuated by thirteen successful coups, ten military-dominated regimes, twenty constitutions, and resistance to greater political space from Thailand's aristocracy. These interruptions contributed to continuous ruptures in rules relating to political parties and elections. Parties, as formal actors, became weaker, while faithless factions, as informal groups, and factionalism became prevalent.

Sequencing

Sequencing is important in understanding factional development because the sequence in which events occur, in terms of prior occurrences affecting later ones, tends to determine the options later on down the path, a situation that reinforces the path, making it harder to get off the path as time goes by. The development of factions prior to that of any centralised political party structures makes factional loyalties more important than party loyalties for politicians (Magone, 1995: 92, 99).

In Thailand sequencing was crucial to the development of Thai factions because factions themselves and the vote-canvasser networks that operated alongside of them developed prior to the legal formation of political parties. As such, parliamentary “clubs” or “pre-factions” informally existed before the dawn of electoral party politics and laws pertaining to parties. Indeed, in the early years, though elections were held in 1933, 1937, and 1938, political parties (aside from the then ruling *Khana Rasadorn* or “People’s Party”) were not allowed by law to form. Candidates and members of parliament outside of *Khana Rasadorn* had to run as independents. However, informal groupings of politicians – parliamentary factions – did emerge. These cliques, revolving around wealthy or charismatic individuals, provided funds for candidates to get elected and acted as blocs to support or reject certain government measures. They defeated the then sitting government of Prime Minister (PM) Phraya Phahon on such matters in 1934 and 1938. Under the successor Phibul Songkram government, the royalist faction lost much power while the civilian and navy factions remained subordinate to the army. Towards the end of World War II, Pridi Phanomyong was able to engineer Phibul’s defeat in Parliament by organising parliamentary factions against him. Yet the waning popularity of Phibul and his military factions allowed the civilian and royalist factions to return to monopolise power. In short order (1 August 1944 to 7 September 1945), Kuang Aphaiwong, Thawee Bunyaket, and Seni Pramoj successively acted as PMs (Rathamarit, 1984: 71–72).

Following the 6 January 1946 elections, a new constitution was enacted, which finally allowed the formation of political parties. One of the first parties was the Democrat Party (DP; founded on 5 April 1946). It initially contained four major faction leaders: Khuang (as Party Leader); Seni Pramoj (as Deputy Party Leader); Kukrit Pramoj (as Secretary General); and Liang Chaiyakarn (who soon broke away to form the Pra-chachon Party).

PM Pridi Panomyong (1946) formed a coalition composed of four embryonic parties: the Constitutional Front, representing the pro-Pridi navy faction; the Cooperation Party, another pro-Pridi group; the Independent Party, a smaller pro-Pridi group; and the tiny Communist Party. The parties appearing during this time differed little from parliamentary factions except that they were now more legitimate and openly organised. The collective planning of campaigns and elections for party officers was no longer banned (Rathamarit, 1984: 77; Thompson, 1948: 186–188).

Pridi and his hand-chosen successor Admiral Thamrong Nawasawat governed until 8 November 1947, when the military staged another coup. By April 1948, Phibul was returned to the office of PM with the support of four military factions, including that of General Phin Chunhavan. The military group’s parliamentary base was the United Parties coalition – composed of four political parties (including the DP). No longer were parliamentary groupings based primarily on differences between civilian reformers, royalists, and pro-militarists. Rather, the co-opted parties now gave their support to Phibul in return for cabinet posts and financial favours. Because of fears of a coup by Pridi, disputes with royalists, and continued demands by the parliamentary groups in the United Parties for cabinet seats, military leaders (on 29 November 1951) carried out an auto-coup, dissolved parliament, and banned political parties (Wilson, 1962: 230–240).

From 1951 to 1955, the military monopolised power. MPs could only sit in parliament as independents. By outlawing political parties, the coup group was able to ensure that potential rivals could no longer threaten its power position. Elected representatives were not even permitted to meet in large groups. The major political figures in this period were PM Phibul Songkram, Police Chief Phao Sriyanond (allied with General Phin Chanhavan), and Army Commander Sarit Thanarat. The Phao-Phin clique was called *Soi Rajakru* whereas the Sarit group was known as *SiSao Theves*.¹

During the mid-1950s, there was an outpouring of public criticism regarding Thailand's lack of democracy and the country's continuing domination by the military. Phibul thus announced the first political party act in 1955 to strengthen his popularity and power base vis-à-vis Phao and Sarit. The new law allowed registration of a political party by at least 10 MPs or 500 voters (Rathamarit, 1984: 81–82).

Ultimately, sequencing is a principal reason why Thai factions have tended to have greater longevity than parties. Thai factions began to exist in 1933. But it was not until 1946 (and again in 1955) that political parties were legally allowed to compete in the parliamentary arena. This pre-existence of factions ahead of parties helped to entrench them as political actors which parties would later depend upon for capital and vote-canvassing needs.

Historical Legacies

Historical-cultural *legacies* tend to help build and reproduce factionalism. Historical legacies are prior contextual conditions of the past, which, once created, become quite self-reproducing and entrenching (Collier and Collier, 1991; Pierson, 2004).

In Thailand today, a long trajectory of authoritarianism as well as entrenched regionalism has affected the character of factionalism. Prior to 1932 there was royal absolutism, and thus no room for party politics. But even this autocracy was regionalised in two senses. First, localism had long been an embedded phenomenon since local kings exerted their clout in regional principalities (e.g. the current Thai provinces of Lanna, Phrae, Nan, Lampang). At the same time, royal officials were often forced to “live off the land,” which meant that they had to find their own subsistence and thus develop regional or local financial interests. In addition, before 1932, the monarchy and military shared power in an asymmetrical political partnership, with the latter as junior partner (Chambers and Waitookiat, 2016: 426). Thus, the armed forces played a key role in guaranteeing the monarch's overwhelming clout across the country. After the end of royal absolutism in 1932, the military dominated the country (1932–1944; 1950–1957) and again with the monarchy (1947–1951; 1957–1973; 1976–1988; 1991–1992; 2006–2008; 2014–2019). Such enormous political power by monarchy and military left a long shadow across Thailand, which ensured that democratic institutions would be slow in forming.

In many cases, intra-party factions and some parties themselves were simply the creations of former military factions (e.g. Chart Thai Party). But little by little, these parties, though initially led by entrepreneurs based in Bangkok, became dominated by provincial business people. Chart Thai, Chart Thai Pattana, Social Action, Democrats,

and New Aspiration came to depend on the capital and vote-canvassing networks of the local factions of regional areas (McCargo, 1997).

In Thailand's Deep South (Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani provinces), a particular variant of factionalism developed. That is, Malay-Muslims seeking greater autonomy from Bangkok developed the Wadah faction, which was a grouping built around the ethnic, religious, and linguistic parameters of Southern Thai Malay Muslims. Wadah's leaders were associated with former insurrectionists and the faction over time shifted from being hosted by the Social Action Party (SAP), to the DP, to the National Action Party, and finally to the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party (Utarasint, 2005).

Ultimately, historical legacies have been crucial to the establishment of factionalism in Thailand. The country has had a deep tradition of regionalism, authoritarianism, personalism, and patron–client relations (e.g. Buddhist *bunkun* ties) whereby urban or rural business elites, retired military or civilian bureaucrats, former rebels, or ethnic leaders lead informal entourages of loyalists in shared geographical areas.

Path Dependence

This term is defined as an evolutionary trajectory whereby, once actors make certain institutional choices, “the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice” (Levi, 1997: 28). Path dependence is central to other historical institutionalist factors because other factors can only help determine, strengthen, or weaken the path – but these factors are themselves not the path on which the historical trajectory is dependent.

In Thailand, beginning with the country's first election in 1933, the concepts of increasing returns and negative externalities have served to entrench factionalism. To get elected, politicians have needed factional assistance. Such assistance has been important because factions have tended to control local vote-canvassing networks. At the same time, if a politician wants a chance at obtaining a key political post, he/she usually needs to belong to a faction (unless the politician is extraordinarily rich, famous, or well connected). Furthermore, if a political party wants its candidates elected or a sizeable number of legislative seats, factions can most ably guarantee this because of their longstanding influence at the local level during election time. As for negative externalities, with more and more politicians joining factions, the cost of not being in a faction has increased. Ultimately, based on the election needs of politicians and parties, as well as factions' quest for the spoils of office, factionalism has tended to reproduce itself over time. From 1979 until 2001 there evolved a trend whereby a growing number of parties competed in elections and there was a corresponding increase in the number of intra-party factions (Chambers, 2008). This pattern of increasing units and subunits in Thai party politics reflects the path dependence of continuously reproducing factionalism. Such factionalism has persisted in reproducing itself in varying degrees in elections until the latest 2019 election. The persistence of factions and factionalism has built increasing returns for politicians participating in cliques, while decreasing return for those who do not belong to them. This has entrenched a *path dependence* of factionalism. This

situation has meanwhile been exacerbated by persistent coups, which have punctuated the development of democracy, weakening it, while producing a tendency towards loosely connecting political parties. Such parties have tended to be decentralised in organisation. Party leaders within decentralised parties have relied on factions, which again boosts factional clout.

Plasticity of Formal Institutions

This term refers to the evolution of laws that constrain or compel but also offer opportunities for political behaviour because of rule changes. Formal institutions affecting factions include legal regulations pertaining to parties and the legislature, such as rules against party-switching, or electoral laws, such as the use of multi-member districts (MMD) in plurality systems, which are said to enhance factionalism (Köllner and Basedau, 2006; Waitookiat, 1999). Though such rules can matter in affecting the behaviour of factions, rule changes over time or interruptions in democracy can dull their effectiveness. As such, rules have “plasticity.”

Thai law has long helped to favour the prevalence of intra-party factionalism. This is due partly to the fact that there have been persistent discontinuities in Thai law. Indeed, given that Thai electoral democracy has had twenty constitutions from 1932 until the present, party politics has only embedded itself slowly. As a result, any laws governing parties and factions have not been deeply rooted. This interrupted nature of laws governing elections and political parties has served to encourage intra-factional maneuverings in Thai politics.

In addition, when Thai electoral democracy was practised in Thailand, laws did little to hem factions in under their host parties. Rules governing Thai parties had origins dating back to the 1946 Constitution and progressed through constitutions and codes afterwards, especially through the 1955, 1968, 1974, 1981, 1998, 2007, and 2018 political party acts. Legal loopholes encouraging factionalism were related to factors including the electoral system, party finance, party discipline, and the ability to switch parties. But only since the 1997 Constitution have there been any efforts to control factionalism (Chambers, 2008: 315).

In terms of the electoral system, MMD district plurality elections were utilised from 1933 until 1996 – the period of the country’s early democratisation. Like Japan, Thailand had a single non-cumulative, non-transferable vote and categorical ballot structure. Yet unlike Japan, Thailand’s ballot allowed voters to cast votes for up to three candidates at election time. As Waitookiat points out, Thailand’s allocation rule allowed for an “unlimited vote” in which voters had “the option of splitting [their] votes among different lists” (Waitookiat, 1999). The MMD engendered a situation where, as in post-1980s Taiwan and pre-1993 Japan, candidates from the same party were forced to run not only against candidates from other parties but against each other as well. A major purpose of the 1997 reforms (replacing the MMD system with a mixed one featuring four-fifths single-member districts [SMDs] and one-fifth proportional) was to institute a system whereby parties could only nominate one candidate per district and thus reduce the power of factions to influence local elections. The MMD system, leading to fierce

intra-party competition, compelled candidates to attach themselves to political party factions so that the former could generate necessary campaign funds to win elections against candidates from both within and outside their own political parties.

From 2001 until 2006, and again from 2007 to 2014, a mixed electoral system of SMD plurality plus proportionality was used. SMD makes it impossible for party candidates to compete against each other in the same province. In addition, SMD requires more money during elections. Each of these factors diminishes factional clout while raising the power of parties. As a result, when this mixed electoral system was utilised in Thailand, factions were weaker than before – though they continued to exist. Also of note is that for the 2007 election, Thailand used an electoral system combining MMD once again with proportionality in eight different regional districts across the country. This system helped to resurrect factional influence in Thailand. However, the point is that throughout Thai electoral history, there has been no consistent method of elections (Siripan, 2015). Such plasticity of electoral institutions has prevented factions from being overwhelmed by host parties.

Second, prior to 1997, laws did little to control the influence of factions in party financing. Less affluent candidates needed help financing their campaigns, while wealthy politicians or non-politicians could build a coterie of followers in parliament by financing the campaigns of less affluent candidates. Between 1974 and 2000, parties were generally decentralised in terms of party finance. Moreover, as the country's party system increasingly evolved, party size and party finance came to be inextricably linked together. Almost all Thai parties had (and generally continued to have) short lifespans. For smaller parties (in terms of numbers of seated members in parliament), party leaders could generally bankroll the entire party apparatus and thus dominate it completely. Yet because of their small size, such parties could rarely become powerful parliamentary actors. Meanwhile, in larger parties, more money was necessary. As few politicians possessed ample funds to singularly finance a dominant party in parliament, they turned to intra-party factions (regionalised groupings of politicians and their support networks) for assistance (Chambers, 2003).

Given that the pre-1997 decentralised nature of certain large parties had long made them depend upon factions for party financing, the political party acts of 1998 and 2007 relieved some of this dependence (Waitoolkiat and Chambers, 2015: 624). Henceforth, candidates now had to prepare and reveal their expenditure accounts through their political party. Also, the acts clearly opposed the use of vote-buying, a strategy controlled by the *hua khanaen* system of vote canvassers that is often controlled by regional factions and local godfathers. Furthermore, the 1998 setting up of the Election Commission of Thailand and (perhaps more importantly) the establishment of centralised vote-counting were conscious efforts to reduce vote-buying and other irregularities that have occurred at local levels – where factions had been most able to exert control – during elections. However, after 2007, there was a revision in the Political Party Act of 1998 such that henceforth parties obtaining annual subsidies must have won at least 0.5 per cent of the votes in the preceding election. The Act also changed the PPDF formula again, placing even further emphasis on numbers of elected politicians rather than membership or branches. The new formula weighed financial allocations as follows: 40

per cent reflecting the number of a party's MPs; 40 per cent reflecting the number of party list MPs; 10 per cent reflect the number of party members altogether; and 10 per cent reflecting the number of party branches. Moreover, the 2007 Act for the first time stated that no single political party would be allowed over 50 per cent of the total allocation granted each year (Political Party Act, 2007, Section 75). The alterations in the PPDF formula helped to increase the power of larger parties with more MPs at the expense of smaller parties with less MPs. The formula also worked to diminish the number of party branches in Thailand and enhance the power of regional politicians over branches. Party branches are theoretically linked to party power. Thus, by diminishing their clout and increasing the influence of regional politicians, the 2001 and 2007 changes helped to reinvigorate the power of factions and decentralised party finance in Thailand (Waitookiat and Chambers, 2015: 626).

Third, in terms of party discipline, political parties in Thailand had traditionally been unable to control the performance and voting behaviour of their members except through the use of money. However, Article 11.7 of the Organic Law on Political Parties (1998) for the first time allowed parties to adopt by-laws, which gave ambiguous party leadership control over "the rights and duties of members" (Kingdom of Thailand, 1998). Nevertheless, the Organic Law on Political Parties (2007) reversed this trend, stating that no party by-law could

(10.2) be contrary to the status and independent performance of duties of members of the House of Representatives under the constitution. (Kingdom of Thailand, 2007)

Section 10.2 thus facilitated a break from strict party discipline such that party sub-leaders or factions could have greater independent voice from the party leadership on parliamentary bills or resolutions.

Fourth, in terms of party switching, factions had suffered few hindrances prior to 1997. But under the 1997 Constitution, MPs had to be members of political parties for a consecutive period of not less than ninety days before applying for candidacy in an election (Section 107, 4). Meanwhile, elections had to be held within forty-five days after the dissolution of the Lower House of Parliament (Section 115), and sixty days after an unexpected dissolution (Section 116). This provision put an end to factional defection to other parties, since MPs who lost their seat if they defected would have to skip one term of parliament before becoming MPs again.² Under previous constitutions, there was no such requirement, which made party migration during election time easy and convenient.

But the 2007 Constitution changed the rules again. Chapter 6, section 101 (3) stated that candidates to the Lower House must be members "of any and only one political party, for a consecutive period of not less than ninety days, *except in a general election following an unexpected House dissolution, in which case he or she is required to have been a registered member of a political party not less than thirty days continuously up to the date of an election* [italics added]." Following parliamentary dissolutions, elections must be held between forty-five and sixty days afterwards (Sections 107, 108). This gives MP factions a window of at least fifteen days to change parties. While this section

would “free” MPs to migrate to their preferred party following a dissolution that is not the end of the parliamentary term, it also encourages MPs and factions to engage in party hopping while diminishing party power over its members, hence weakening political parties.

Two other sections of the new constitution also facilitated party switching. As such they indirectly weakened party discipline, thus assisting factions seeking to defect to other parties (see the following text):

- (1) Under Section 106 (7) of the 2007 Constitution, if an MP’s membership in the House of Representatives is terminated by at least three-fourths of the Executive Committee and MP party members together then the MP in question has thirty days to join another party. This rule gives factions the chance to defect to other parties within thirty days if a party majority wants the MPs out.
- (2) Under Section 106 (8), if membership in the House of Representatives terminates because the political party itself is dissolved by judicial order, then the MP in question has sixty days to join another party. Under this rule, factions could defect to other parties within sixty days despite a party’s dissolution.

Taken together with critical juncture, sequencing, historical legacies, and path dependence, the plasticity of Thai law over time has helped to entrench factionalism within Thai politics, and keep political party executives from reining it in. Until 1997, Thai law did little to control rampant intra-party factionalism. Only under the 1997 Constitution were regulations imposed to limit factionalism. But that of 2007 allowed for factionalism’s resurgence.

Factionalism’s Persistence in Thailand (2007–2014)

The evolution, entrenchment, re-entrenchment, and perpetuation of factionalism in Thailand – owing to path dependence – have sustained it over time. Nevertheless, under Thaksin Shinawatra’s 2001–2006 elected government, Thai politics appeared to have become much more centralised under party leaders such that factions had finally been tamed. Thaksin’s TRT parliamentary majority, its huge coalition majority, Thaksin’s seemingly endless supply of money, his use of mergers to enlarge Thai Rak Thai, and his balancing of factions within TRT all contributed to the leveraging of party leader power vis-à-vis TRT factions. Added to these factors were the new laws of the late 1990s, which constrained factionalism. Party unity was legally enforced, party members had to sit out one parliamentary term if they wished to switch parties, and party leaders had overwhelming control over executive committees. Such reforms guaranteed party stability and discipline for TRT (see Chambers, 2006).

However, following the 2006 military coup and enactment of the 2007 Constitution, the new charter’s authors made several constitutional changes, among which was to diminish the centralising power of party leaders. As a result, from 2008 until 2014, Thailand experienced factionalism – albeit to a lesser extent than the pre-2001 period. Indeed after the return to elected civilian rule in 2008, the argument could be made that

intra-party factions once again mattered in Thai parliamentary politics. They continued to matter due to historical legacies in Thailand of frail democracy and constant coups, the path dependence of deeply entrenched factionalism, and the plasticity of changing constitutions. During this period, the significance of factions was felt across three levels: regularly determining the allocation of cabinet seats, on one occasion jettisoning a PM from power, and on another occasion overturning a ruling coalition.

The 23 December 2007 general election, which saw a landslide victory for the pro-Thaksin People's Power Party (PPP), led to the formation of a government dominated by five PPP factions, and the coalition that it dominated took office under PM Samak Sundaravej in February 2008. Throughout that year, PPP factionalism led to party instability (Ockey, 2009: 319). The five PPP factions were distributed across the cabinet as follows: seven ministerial posts for Thaksin Shinawatra's Wang Bua Ban, five for Newin Chidchob, three for the Central Plains faction of Surapong Suebwonglee, and six for the highly disorganised Bangkok faction (with two for the sub-faction headed by Sudarat Keyurapan, three for the sub-faction led by PM Samak, and one for sub-faction head Chalerm Yubamrong). Finally, the faction of Bangkok's Chalerm Yubamrong received one post. A small fifth PPP faction led by Sora-at Klinpratum received no posts.

The overwhelming power of Newin's "Friends of Newin" faction (with thirty-seven core loyalists and thirty-six more extended followers) made it difficult for other factions to be heard – even placing pressure on Thaksin's Wang Bua Ban. In September 2008, Thailand experienced violent political divisions while a court case threatened to cut short Samak's tenure as PM. On September 9, the country's constitutional court found Samak guilty of taking money while appearing on a cooking show, disqualifying him as PM. On the heels of the court decision, the Newin and Central Plains factions took the lead to try and vote Samak back into office. They used their clout to ensure he was re-nominated by the party. Then on September 12, the PPP called a Lower House meeting to re-invest Samak as PM. However, MPs from the five coalition partner parties – Chart Thai, Pracharat, Matchimatipataya, RuamjaiThai-ChartPattana, and Puea Paendin – as well as seventy non-approving MPs from Wang Bua Ban and two other PPP factions failed to show up at the meeting thus depriving it of a needed quorum (Kazmin, 2008). Though the meeting was put off, it marked the death knell for Samak, who withdrew his name from consideration. Afterwards, the Newin Group proposed Surapong Suebwonglee (Leader of the Central Plains Group) as an alternative PM to Samak. However, by that time, the other PPP factions (led by Wang Bua Ban) had already galvanised the PPP majority to support Somchai Wongsawat, brother-in-law of former PM Thaksin. In the end, it was a grouping of factions that deprived Samak of a return to office, and that helped Somchai ascend to the PM's post.

On September 15, seventy-three MPs (members of the Newin group) publicly announced their opposition to Somchai as PM, hinting that the military might stage a coup should Somchai become PM. The PPP leadership had to use "carrots" of cabinet posts and "sticks" of a possible house dissolution to cajole the seventy-three MPs to change support Somchai (Srivalo and Jaikawang, 2008). After this, factional jockeying for cabinet seats began in earnest with the Newin faction demanding six portfolios. However, the Somchai government, upon coming to power on September 17, only gave

the Newin clique two seats. Following this loss of cabinet power, Newin group's size diminished from seventy-three to about thirty to thirty-seven MPs (Srivalo, 2008).

On 2 December 2008, Thailand's Constitution Court ruled to dissolve the Palang Prachachon, Chart Thai, and Matchimatipataya political parties on the grounds that executive members had committed election irregularities for which the party was responsible. The effect of the ruling was to fell PPP's ruling coalition. All 109 party executives (the 3 parties together) were banned from politics for 5 years – until December 2013. Until that time and date, the banned party bigwigs/faction leaders placed relatives or trustworthy loyalists in positions of power upon the boards of successor parties.

Per the 2007 Constitution's section 106 (8), the MP members of the three now defunct parties had sixty days to register as a member of another political party. The far majority of the former PPP MPs herded into the Puea Thai Party (PT), while those in Chart Thai entered Chart Thai Pattana. The twenty-three members of the PPP's "Friends of Newin" faction eventually joined with eight of the eleven MPs of the dissolved Matchimatipathai to form the Bhumjai Thai (BT) Party. The dissolved Chart Thai Party became Chart Thai Pattana Party (CTPP), led by Chumpol Silpa-archa, brother of banned leader Banharn. The new parties had previously been registered for just such a possibility. Finally, the dormant SAP was revived by Suwit Khunkitti and it drew in a few MPs.

Meanwhile, though Somchai Wongsawat had resigned as PM, Acting PM (and "Friends of Newin" Chidchob member) Chaowarat Chanweerakul refused to dissolve the Lower House. In this situation, Thailand's military began to encourage Newin Chidchob to desist from aligning his now thirty-seven-MP-strong faction-dominated BT party with Puea Thai. Rather, they suggested that Newin abandon PT and instead help form a coalition with the Democrats and other, small parties. With such powerful interests pressing his faction, Newin became amenable to their preferences.

On December 6, Army Chief Gen Anupong Paochinda invited key politicians to offer them "advice" on which parties might be suitable in a coalition government. By the end of the day, Anupong and Democrat secretary-general Suthep Thaugsuban had cobbled together a loose alliance of MPs, including those from the former Chat Thai, Newin faction members, Ruamjai Thai Chat Pattana, Puea Paendin, and Matchima Thipataya parties (Rojanaphruk, 2008). Indeed, Suthep apparently convinced Newin to support Abhisit Vechachiwa over Chuan Leekpai as PM, stating that Abhisit would be more flexible than Chuan in offering cabinet positions (Thip-Osod, 2008).

Ultimately, it was army-exploited intra-party factionalism that allowed the Abhisit government to come into existence. However, in the allocation of cabinet seats, the PM had to grant quotas deriving from not only party size (in parliamentary seats) but also faction size. A major purpose of cabinet reshuffles was to give other factions as well as other members of factions a rotational chance to extract rent from the holding of a portfolio. Only by appeasing both party and factional actor in this way was Abhisit's government able to persevere.

The Democrat-led coalition under Abhisit was composed of four region-based DP factions, while it also had to manage the five other coalition parties and their factions.

These included Newin's new Matchimapatipataya (or BT) Party with two factions, Puea Paendin with four factions, CTPP (the newly created clone of the dissolved Chart Thai Party) with two factions, RuamjaiThai-Chart Pattana having one clique, and Social Action with one. Factional disagreements were rife. Intra-party bickering between Abhisit (DP Bangkok faction) and Suthep (DP South faction) especially grew regarding the selection of a new national police chief in 2009. A commission to choose the new chief included politicians from the BT party as well as Suthep and Abhisit, who served as director of the commission. In late August Abhisit failed to gain enough votes to push through his chosen candidate. Suthep voted for BT's favoured nominee. But Abhisit did not relent and eventually succeeded in pushing the appointment of Pol General Prateep Tanprasert (The Nation, 2014).

Turning to the Puea Thai-led administration of Yingluck Shinawatra (2011–2013), factions and factionalism continued to exist. As PM Abhisit had dissolved the Lower House before the end of the term, MPs could switch parties as they had at least fifteen days to do so (Section 101). And indeed some did. For example, Pracharaj party leader Sanoh Tienthong defected to Pheu Thai in return for becoming a top party list member. Three MP members of his family also joined. However, the other three Pracharaj MP members joined BT (The Nation, 2011). Pracharaj had only served as a holding company for Sanoh's Wang Nam Yen faction MPs, but he kept the party active in case it would be needed again.

Under Yingluck, the coalition was composed of five parties and fifteen intra-party factions. During her term, as with previous governments, cabinet allocations were made based on the party level and intra-party level. Moreover, party and factional squabbles occasionally created chaos with the coalition. Yingluck, with help from Thaksin and sister Yaowapha, was compelled to placate factions by giving financial incentives as well as granting cabinet posts to different faction leaders or sub-leaders in rotation.

In December 2013, Yingluck dissolved the Lower House in preparation for a new general election. As this was before the end of the term, MPs could once again switch parties given that they had to be a member of a new party thirty days before the next election (which must be held at least forty-five days after the dissolution). Using this window of opportunity, some factions did switch parties such as a nine-MP contingent from the Matchima faction (of Somsak Thepsutin) of the BT Party which defected to Puea Thai (Thai PBS World, 2013).

Nevertheless, the February 2014 election was voided by the Constitution Court and a 22 May 2014 military coup forced an end to Thai parliamentary and party politics altogether. Following the putsch, unlike after the 2006 coup, the post-2014 National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) did not void political parties, but instead forbade new parties from being formed, banned existing parties from engaging in activities, and suspended political party funding. Factions under the junta thus became more surreptitious in their meetings.

The 2017 Constitution's Effects on Factionalism in Thailand

In April 2017, the NCPO enacted a new constitution, Thailand's twentieth (Kingdom of Thailand, 2017a). The charter and accompanying organic laws, like those implemented

in 2007–2008, continued to weaken political parties while assisting factionalism. For example, the new electoral formula used in the 2019 election made it difficult for any party to gain a Lower House majority (Reuters, 2019). As a result, Thaksin devised a counter-strategy, forming several small parties in addition to Puea Thai, which would work together with the latter following the election (*Bangkok Post*, 2019e). These smaller parties had previously been factions within Puea Thai and included the Palang Prachachart Party, previously the Deep South Wadah faction (six MPs), and the Puea Chart Party, a group of former Red Shirts (five MPs). In the end, as a result of this formula, the 2019 election produced no majority for any party, though there was a pro- and anti-junta coalition, each having close to the same number of MPs.

In addition, the 2017 Constitution and subsequent organic laws contributed to the persistence of intra-party factionalism. For example, Article 14.4 of the 2017 Political Party Act mirrored the regulation in the previous 2007 Political Party Act, forbidding any party by-law from “dominating or hindering the independent performance of members of the House of Representatives under the Constitution” (Kingdom of Thailand, 2017b). This clause could be applied where an MP acted or voted against the will of the party leadership, thus diminishing party discipline and promoting party factionalism. Three other sections of the new constitution allowed factional party-switching to persevere. Sections 97, 101, and 103 of the 2017 charter were almost a “copy-and-paste” from the 2007 Constitution’s Sections 106, 107, and 108. By continuing to facilitate party-switching, these sections assisted factions seeking to defect to other parties and thus indirectly weakened party discipline.

Ultimately the 2014–2019 period of military rule under Thailand’s NCPO was significant for factionalism for four reasons. First, under the junta there was no elected parliament and thus no political system under which intra-party factions could thrive. Second, the absence of a party system allowed factions to have enough time to join other parties in anticipation of the 2019 election. Third, military rule facilitated the passage of Thailand’s twentieth (2017) constitution – an institution that enshrined laws, which helped factionalism to persist in Thailand’s parliament. Fourth, by 2018, in preparation for post-junta politics, NCPO leaders had created their own political party – *Palang Pracharat* – and were informally enticing factions from other parties to join it. Only in December 2018, after factions had committed to *Palang Pracharat*, did the junta lift a ban on political party activities, allowing them to begin campaigning for the impending 2019 election (*Bangprapa* 11 December 2018).

Factionalism Since 2019

Since the resumption of frail electoral politics in Thailand in 2019, factions have once again proven to be alive and well. While factions have continued to be important in the parties of Palang Pracharat, Puea Thai, Chart Thai Pattana, and BT, factions have specifically weakened and splintered the Democrats. Other parties have been too small to matter. We detail factionalism in five principal parties in the following text.

Palang Pracharat

This junta proxy party was constructed in 2018 by drawing in factions from other parties. At its core, *Palang Pracharat* revolved around the faction of the NCPO junta leadership (Charuvastra, 2019). This included retired Generals PM Prayuth Chanocha, Deputy PM Prawit Wongsuwan, Interior Minister Anupong Paochinda, party founder and Prayuth's pre-cadet school classmate Col. Suchart Jantarachotikul, Deputy Defense Minister Gen. Chaichan Changmongkol, Deputy PM Wissanu Krea-ngam, and Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai. The second and largest faction was *Sam Mitr* ("Three Friends"), led by Deputy PM (and long-time junta member) Somkid Jatusripitak, along with billionaire Suriya Jungruangkit as well as Somsak Thepsutin, who brought with them sixty politicians (mostly former MPs) from other parties (Bunyamane, 2018). A sub-faction of Sam Mitr was the Ban Rim Nam group of perennial politico Suchart Thancharoen (approximately twenty MPs) (*The People*, 2019). A third faction was composed of ex-Democrats who had belonged to the PDRC³ (about eleven MPs). A fourth was the Chonburi faction of the Khuenpluem family (six MPs). A fifth faction was the Nakorn Ratchasima group of the Ratanaset family (six MPs). A sixth was the Petchabun faction of Santi Prompan (six MPs). A seventh was Col. Suchart's "Thai Axe Handle" clique of southern MPs (thirteen MPs) (Thai PBS World). An eighth was the faction of the Tiengthong family, which dominates Sa Kaew province (three MPs). Ninth was the Varathep Ratanakon faction of Kampaengphet (four MPs). The tenth faction was the Asavaheme clique in Samut Prakan (six MPs). The eleventh and final faction was that of coalition "enforcer" and Prawit confidante Deputy Agriculture Minister Captain Thammanat Prompao with ten MPs representing Payao, Tak, and Mae Hong Son Provinces and in the party list (*Bangkok Post*, 2019c; Posttoday, 2019).

When the Prayuth-led coalition government was formed in July 2019, Palang Pracharat held eighteen out of thirty-six cabinet posts. Of these, eight belonged to the NCPO group, six belonged to Sam Mitr, two to the PDRC, and one each to the Prompat and Ratanaset clans. The Sam Mitr (Ban Rim Nam) faction took the powerful Deputy House Speaker slot. To mollify other factions that did not initially receive ministerial posts, it is likely that the smaller factions will rotate in holding them.

Since the inception of the Palang Pracharat-led government in July 2019, controlling intra-party factionalism has proven to be crucial in terms of sustaining the coalition because the coalition is razor-thin (254/500 seats) and thus factional loyalty is essential. To keep factions together, the Deputy PM's office has reportedly funneled finances from opaque state sources to the party's various groups, including through Col. Suchart to the southern faction, Captain Thammanat to the northern faction, and through other military officers to the Sam Mitr faction. Such officials cajoled and coerced MPs to boost party and coalition discipline.⁴

To further strengthen their hold on power, government leaders have secretly gathered the backing of twenty Puea Thai MPs (representing two to three factions). These twenty, though they did not join Palang Pracharat (which would have automatically annulled their status as MPs), were willing to vote at the latter's direction (*Bangkok Post*, 2019b). Meanwhile Palang Pracharat factions have competed for ministerial and Lower House

committee chair positions. In particular “Thai Axe Handle” and “Sam Mitr” have clashed in their attempts to increase their share of cabinet posts (Thai PBS World, 2019b). Sam Mitr clique leader Somsak Thepsutin even threatened to defect to Puea Thai with thirty MPs unless his group was given the Agriculture Ministry portfolio (*Bangkok Post*, 2019d). Such factional instability has helped to make Palang Pracharat perpetually unstable and could diminish the party’s chances of leading a government for the rest of the parliamentary term.

Democrat

Following the 2014 military putsch, Suthep Thaugsuban, increasingly unhappy with the Democrats, resigned from the party and formed the Action Coalition for Thailand. Nevertheless, he continued to exert enormous sway upon the Democrats’ southern faction. Meanwhile Party Leader Abhisit, from the Democrats’ Bangkok faction, became increasingly disillusioned with the junta. But after a miserable performance in the 2019 election, Abhisit resigned. His once-powerful Bangkok clique had now diminished to zero seats (Waitoolkiat and Chambers, 2019). Abhisit’s successor as Party Leader was Jurin Laksanawisit from the now-dominant and more conservative southern faction, which, following the 2019 election, had thirty seats (*Bangkok Post*, 2019a). The southern faction’s preference for Prayuth contributed to the party joining the Palang Pracharat-led coalition following the 2019 election. This faction’s power was mirrored in its allocation of seats upon Prayuth’s 2019 cabinet. Of the eight seats the Democrats obtained, the southern faction received eight, as well as the post of Lower House Speaker, compared to two seats for the Democrats’ northern MPs and one for central plains MPs.

Bhumjai Thai

This party, founded in 2008, is dominated by the Chidchob and Charnweerakul families. Principal financier Newin Chidchob of Buriram province concentrates on Buriram United soccer team, while his brother Saksayam is BT Secretary-General and businessman Anuthin Charnweerakul has been Party Leader (Srivalo, 2012). The party’s financing derives from the Chidchob-owned Chiang Mai Construction and Sino-Thai Construction (a business conglomerate owned by Chanweerakul). Another financier was the late business tycoon Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha, the owner of English Football Club Leicester City and the profitable King Power duty free shop. Vichai, along with Newin and Anuthin, have close links with former junta Vice Leader (and current Deputy PM) Gen. Prawit Wongsuwan (The Nation, 2016). This military connection has surely helped to sustain the party. Smaller factions have assisted the party to expand its number of MPs. As with the Democrats, following the 2019 election, BT obtained eight ministerial posts in the cabinet and they were allocated among the factions as follows: two went to Charnweerakul, two to Chidchob, and one each to the following smaller factions representing the following provinces: Ratchakitprakan for Satun and Pattalung, Wongsu-phakijkoson for Nakorn Ratchasima, Wilawan for Prachinburi, and Thaiset for Uthai Thani.

Chart Thai Pattana

As a party long dominated by the personality of leader Banharn Silpa-archa, when he died in April 2016, Chart Thai Pattana appeared in limbo and potentially on the verge of break-up. Banharn's children were not politically adept. In addition, Banharn's brother Chumpol had died in 2013, as had faction leader Sanan Kachonprasert (Suksamran and Sattaburuth, 2016). Prior to the 2019 election, the mini-factions of Chongchai Thiangtham and Somsak Prissananthakul defected from the party, the first going to the PT and the second to the BT. The election left the party with only ten MPs led by the Silpa-archa clique but including the Phosuthon mini-group. In the current cabinet, the Silpa-archa faction holds one ministerial post while Secretary-General Praphat Phosuthon holds another. Prisananathakul has said that without Banharn, "Chart Thai Pattana is like a rudderless ship" (Luksanawang, 2016).

Puea Thai

Puea Thai (and its earlier compositions as Thai Rak Thai and then Palang Prachachon) has been the largest party in terms of seats held since 2001. As such, it has also had the most factions. At the time of the 2014 junta it comprised eleven factions, but by the time of the 2019 election it comprised eight.

Though one would assume that holding such a large number of groups together would be difficult, the factions have, since 2014, kept together for three reasons. These are (1) the charisma of Thaksin, (2) money coming mostly from the Shinawatra family, and (3) enhanced party unity built upon opposition to the 2014–2019 military junta. Such factors ensured the continuing popularity of Puea Thai among mostly rural and lower class voters. However, the junta demanded that several Puea Thai leaders report to the military, initiated prosecutions against other prominent ones, and placed others in detention. In June 2014, party leader Charupong Ruangsuwan fled abroad to avoid arrest, leaving Puea Thai with only an acting party leader (Lt-Gen Viroj Pao-in) (Thai PBS, 2014). Also, claiming to crack down on mafia networks, the junta ordered soldiers and police to arrest several Puea Thai politicians and associated "Red Shirt" dissidents (Prachatai, 2016). Finally, ex-PMs Thaksin Shinawatra and his sister, ex-PM Yingluck, were convicted by junta-allied courts of legal transgressions, making them constitutionally ineligible to participate in politics (The Conversation, 2015). These tactics were aimed at weakening Puea Thai through legal harassment of the party leadership, thereby diminishing party control and encouraging Puea Thai factions to defect. Revelations of such a tactic appeared weeks after the 2014 putsch when Puea Thai's Wang Nam Yen faction leader Sanoh Tienthong told his clique's members that the military wanted to "downsize" Puea Thai (*Bangkok Post*, 2014). In 2018, as the 2019 election approached, some Puea Thai factions did defect. Departing groups included MPs beholden to Suriya Jungrungreangkit and Somsak Thepsuthin who formed with Somkid Jatusripitak the pro-junta mega-faction Sam Mitr. Other factions leaving were Paknam of the Asavahame family, Warathep Rathanakorn, and some now pro-military Red Shirt politicians.

Following the 2019 election (in which Puea Thai won the most [136] seats), though the Shinawatra family continued dominating Pheu Thai (under Thaksin's aide Party Leader Sompong Amornwiwat), there were three regional mega-factions: the north-eastern faction with eighty MPs, the northern faction with twenty-five MPs, and the central plains faction with 17 MPs. There were also several provincial factions of enormous clout: Sudarat Keyuraphan's faction in Bangkok (nine MPs), Nonthaburi faction (five MPs), Pathum Thani (four MPs), Dechateerawat in Chiang Rai (five MPs), Shinawatra/Amornwiwat in Chiang Mai (eight MPs), Lampang (four MPs), Kalasin (five MPs), Khon Kaen (eight MPs), Mahasarakam (five MPs), Roi Et (seven MPs), Srisaket (six MPs), Surin (five MPs), Udon Thani (eight MPs), and Ubon Ratchathani (six MPs). Yet given that Puea Thai is currently deprived of the spoils of office, these Pheu Thai factions have bickered among each other over party offices and Lower House committee positions. Some are even susceptible to being lured to join Palang Pracharat (Thai PBS World, 2019a). Such party instability will likely persist until Puea Thai becomes part of a ruling coalition.

Conclusion

This study has argued that the evolution, entrenchment, and persistence of intra-party factions and factionalism in Thailand is due to a historical trajectory of critical juncture, sequencing, historical legacies, path dependence, and the plasticity of formal institutions across time. Sequencing and historical legacies entrenched a path dependence, which increasingly reproduced intra-party factionalism alongside weak party structures. Of all the historical institutionalist factors raised herein on the rise and sustainability of Thai political party factions, the factor that played the most important role in the longevity of factions and factionalism in Thailand was path dependence, because it represented the entrenchment of a phenomenon – factionalism – from which the country's party system has never succeeded in escaping.

By comprehending these factors and the centrality of path dependence, one can see why understanding the historical evolution of Thai factionalism is important in understanding why a factionalised party system exists in Thailand today. As such, historical institutionalism is a useful approach in understanding why factionalism has continued to rear its head in Thailand. Until 2001, intra-party factions were a dominant part of Thailand's party system, sometimes making and breaking governments, as well as destabilising party politics. A dearth of laws relating to factions facilitated this situation.

It is revealing that, following the first application of the 1997 Constitution to general elections in 2001, new laws succeeded in keeping factions more firmly under the control of party leaders; ensuring that faction members would vote the party line; discouraging factional divisions by cancelling the multi-member district electoral system; increasingly centralising party finance under the control of party executives; and diminishing the chances for MPs to switch parties. The ability of laws to weaken Thai intra-party factionalism shows that institutions do matter. Under Thaksin Shinawatra (2001–2006), the tools of (1) the 1997 Constitution, (2) party finance, and (3) enormous party size together helped to keep factionalism at bay.

However, in 2007, junta forces changed the constitution, resurrecting much factional autonomy. Thus, 2008–2014 was a period of enhanced party disunity and faction power. Meanwhile the military-imposed 2017 charter and related organic laws have, since the 2019 election, helped factionalism to persist. Since the July 2019 resurrection of Thailand's elected parliamentary politics, party leaders remain constitutionally unable to control MP behaviour and MP factions can easily migrate from one party to another. Thus, parties must now pay more attention to factional preferences. The year 2019 therefore marked a return to the factionalised party politics of 2008–2014 and pre-2001 Thailand. But such a situation should come as no surprise. It has been the very intention of Thailand's post-2014 military junta leaders and their aristocratic allies to modify institutions in order to debilitate pro-Thaksin parties, an objective that necessitates that party leaders enjoy no rule helping them control intra-party factions. In this sense, factions matter in Thailand because they are a useful mechanism designed to keep parties weak. Nevertheless, by not reining in factionalism, the 2017 Constitution gives party back-benchers a voice in seeking to influence the making of public policy. Factions thus remain important in Thai party and parliamentary democracy. It is interesting that one party that competed in the 2019 election – Future Forward – easily survived most attempts by Palang Pracharat to lure away some of the former's MPs. However, unlike most other parties, Future Forward was quite ideological, mostly devoid of materialist factions, and thus, perhaps because of this, material enticements to defect were largely unsuccessful (Prachatai, 2019).⁵ Instead, ironically, though junta forces earlier strengthened factions (via the 2017 Constitution) to weaken pro-Thaksin parties, the junta-created coalition-leader Palang Pracharat, in 2019–2020 suffers from factionalism the most. For better or for worse, the path dependence of the country's factionalised party system looks set to persist for years to come.

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Note

1. Soi Rajakru and Sisao Theves refer to the location of the residences of the two rival military cliques or factions (see Samudavanija, 1982: 14)
2. The ninety-day rule also gives premiers much greater control over the nomination process as they could select candidates within eighty-nine days of electoral candidacy application, thus jettisoning unwanted MPs out of their party. Interview with a senior Democrat MP, 18 July 2002.
3. The PDRC, or People's Democratic Reform Committee, was a group of demonstrators who in 2013–2014 protested against the continuation of the Yingluck government. Its leader was Democrat bigwig Suthep Thaugsuban.
4. Personal interview with anonymous long-time parliamentary official, Lower House of Parliament, Bangkok, Thailand, 13 September 2019.

5. Though Palang Pracharat was able to entice only a few MPs away from its nemesis Future Forward Party (FFP) in 2019, in February 2020 Thailand's Constitution Court dissolved FFP on controversial grounds. Slightly over 50 former FFP MPs then migrated into the Move Forward Party, FFP's successor. But the dissolution allowed a 9-MP faction from FFP to defect to Bhumjai Thai party.

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Author Biographies

Paul Chambers is a lecturer and special advisor on International Affairs at the Center of ASEAN Community Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand. Also, he is a research fellow at the German Institute for Global Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg, Germany, the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) in Frankfurt, Germany and is executive editor of the Taylor & Francis journal *Asian Affairs: an American Review*. His research is on the domestic and international politics of Southeast Asia, mostly Thailand, writing or co-writing five books as well as several articles and book chapters.

Napisa Waitoolkiat is a dean and associate professor at Faculty of Social Sciences, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand. She is also former-president and current executive secretary of the Asian Political and International Studies Association (APISA). She has published widely in SCOPUS journals, and co-authored the book *Khaki Capital: The Political Economy of the Military in Southeast Asia* (2017). Her research interests include party/electoral politics, democratization, peace studies, human security and migration in Southeast Asia.