

POLITICAL TURMOIL IN THAILAND: THE HISTORICAL POSITION

ASIA

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Thailand has experienced intense political turmoil in recent years. In November 2008, a group clad in yellow occupied the Bangkok International Airport, and in April of the following year, a group dressed in red shirts piled into the ASEAN summit site and disrupted the assembly. Then, beginning in March 2010, the Red Shirts called for the dissolution of Parliament by occupying downtown Bangkok for over two months. Eventually, the group was pushed out by the military, resulting in 90 deaths and more than 1,800 injuries.

In the Thailand of the past, not even a coup d'état was enough to trigger a regime change; Japanese long-term residents in Thailand tended to liken the political environment of earlier times to factional disputes within the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan. That stability certainly owed a great deal to investment from abroad, particularly from Japan. Those who know this country well, then, must be puzzled by the recent political instability.

To understand the Thailand of the present, one cannot simply study the present conditions. Analysis of present-day Thailand or the Thailand of the future is impossible without reviewing the country's political history and development. Looking at Thailand from this historical viewpoint, one begins to see that the current tumult is a stage of the country's democratic development: right now, Thailand is experiencing a birth pang as its political system readies to take another step forward.

THE STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONFLICT

The current political conflict is between the supporters and opponents of Thaksin Shinawatra, the former Prime Minister (**Table 1**). The pro-Thaksin faction is centered on an action group called the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), which is characterized by its use of red. Its political alliance in Parliament is the Pheu Thai Party (For Thailand Party), accounting for the largest number of opposition seats in the assembly. On the other side, the political movements of the anti-Thaksin faction are led by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), which uses yellow as its symbol color. In Parliament, the group supports the ruling Democrat Party and its coalition partners.

Table 1: Pro-Thaksin vs. Anti-Thaksin, the Structure of the Conflict

	Pro-Thaksin (former Prime Minister) faction	Anti-Thaksin faction
Movement organization	UDD (United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship)	PAD (People's Alliance for Democracy)
Symbol color	Red	Yellow
Supporting classes	Lower classes	Middle/upper classes
Force in Parliament	Pheu Thai Party (opposition)	Democrat Party etc. (in power)

Source: Author

The focal figure of these two factions, Thaksin, assumed the position of prime minister in 2001 and became the centerpiece of Thai politics. He scored a sweeping victory in the 2005 general election, held after completing his first term. Soon after that, however, he was faced with growing anti-Thaksin movements in early 2006, and dissolved the lower house as an appeal to the confidence of the general public through another general election. The elections were boycotted by the primary opposition parties and annulled by the courts, leaving the government up in the air. Finally, in September, the army staged a coup, ending the Thaksin administration. The junta replaced the 1997 constitution by a new 2007 constitution and also attempted to expose the wrongdoings of Thaksin and his administration. Elections held over a year after the coup, though, restored the pro-Thaksin party (the People's Power Party) to power. The PAD went back to the streets and, at last, occupied the international airports of Bangkok. In the midst of this turmoil, the Constitutional Court ordered the dissolution of the People's Power Party. Though the party changed its name to the Pheu Thai Party in an attempt to retain power, during the cabinet formation process, a faction of the Pheu Thai Party decided to join the opposition, leading to the creation of the current Democrat Party Abhisit administration. The army is believed to have helped prop up the creation of this new coalition. To the Thaksin faction, then, the transfer of power was controlled by the might of the army, an intolerable course of action, which in turn brought the UDD out in protest.

NOT EXPLAINED BY CLASS DIFFERENCES ALONE

It has been widely observed – in Japan, as well – that the pro- and anti-Thaksin factions reflect the differences in their support bases. The pro-Thaksin group receives substantial support from the lower classes, while the anti-Thaksin group is rooted in the urban middle class. However, there was a sizable class-based gap in Thai society even before the conflict took shape (**Table 2**). Social classes did not appear overnight, nor were the lower and middle strata unaware of their differences. The key is that the people now perceive the conflict as a clash "of classes"; the imperative question is why political confrontation now takes the form of class struggle.

Table 2:
Differences between Agricultural Communities and the Middle Class in Thailand

	Agricultural communities	Middle class (1)
Percent of the workforce (2)	38%	18%
Yearly income (3)	120,000 baht	320,000 baht
Percent with college degree (4)	1%	53%

Notes : (1) In terms of income, the "middle class" refers to mprofessional, technical, and administrative workers plus clerical, sales, and service workers. In terms of population and college graduation percentages, the "middle class" refers to legislators, senior officials, mangers, professionals, technicians, and clerks.
 (2) Percentages correspond to July-September, 2005 (farming season).
 (3) Yearly incomes are calculated from monthly incomes reported in the 2004 household expenditure survey.
 (4) The percentages of the total work force that graduated from university, advanced technical school, or teachers' college for July to September (farming season) of 2005.

Source: Population and college graduate figures are taken from the National Statistical Office (NSO), *The Labour Force Survey Whole Kingdom Q3: July-September 2005*. Bangkok: NSO. Income figures are taken from the National Statistical office (NSO), *Report of the 2004 Household and Socio-economic Survey, Whole Kingdom*. Bangkok: NSO.

Class differences exist in every country, and each class division has certain advantages and disadvantages. These differences sometimes generate political and factional conflict. There is no country in which all citizens agree on every issue. Still, most governments remain stable because citizens are able to accept some problems, even though they may not be satisfied with their current conditions. In Thailand's current turmoil, however, there is no end in sight. When an election is held, the Thaksin faction emerges victorious, the anti-Thaksin faction takes to the streets, the judiciary and military step in, and the administration collapses. That calls for another election, which sets the entire cycle in motion once again. Why is it that the election process fails to reconcile the differences in social strata-based support? This question is another crucial element of the problem. After all, elections in Thailand are monitored by an election board independent of the government, and, while there are some electoral violations, the fairness of the election process itself has not been questioned.

THE HISTORY OF DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN THAILAND

With these questions and issues in mind, we must now explore how postwar Thai democracy has developed - albeit in a broad, rough overview - to better understand the Thailand of the present. Until 1973, Thailand was under the almost exclusive rule of military dictatorships. For 14 of the 28 years from 1945 to 1973, the regime prohibited the establishment of political parties, and only six elections took place during those 28 years. The leader of the military served as the prime minister and presided over a government backed by the physical force of the army and police.

Students were the ones that led the public revolt against the authoritarian regime. The booming student population, buoyed by steady economic growth, began to take a firm and collective political stance around 1972. Then, on October 14, 1973, the army fired on students and citizens that had filled the area around the Grand Palace in a demonstration against government corruption and unlawful arrests, killing many (the October 14 Incident). The King intervened and ordered the exile of the prime minister, and the government was returned to civilian rule. Not long after, however, the military regrouped, right-wing activity gained momentum, and leaders of agrarian movements in rural areas were assassinated one after the other. In October of 1976, the army quashed a group of university students by force (the October 6 Incident), and Thailand reverted back to power leadership.

Survivors of the massacre and agrarian activists fled into forests, united with the Communist Party of Thailand, and continued an armed war of insurgence against the government. The military, realizing the limits of power governance, adopted a policy designed to nullify rebel power by actually reducing poverty in rural areas. Prem Tinsulanonda, who became prime minister in 1980, spearheaded the military's policy reversal. He had led the army in the northeast, where Communist Party guerilla opposition had once been most fierce, and later became the Commander-in-Chief of the Army.

Prem continued to serve as the prime minister until 1988, a period when Thai politics was described as a "half-democracy." Why "half?" First of all, political party activity was permitted during the Prem administration, and elections too were held, but the ruling coalition had endorsed Prem for prime minister despite the fact that he was not a politician (and of course not a participant in elections). The cabinet was composed of top lawmakers from the ruling party, but the Prem administration oversaw policy by appointing officials to key positions in national administration and economic administration, in particular. Prem also benefited from the support of the military and the King. "Half-democracy" might be thought of as a system that had "only been half-democratized," a rather negative perception, but, considering the conditions prior to 1973, it could also be thought of one that had "already been half-democratized," which has a more positive connotation – and Prem, a former military officer, was the one behind the progress. In other words, his administration oversaw a military-based stage of democratization.

After retiring from politics in 1988, Prem was appointed to the Privy Council (which he later headed), a group that advised the King on various matters. Meanwhile, the government at last made a move toward "complete" democracy, adopting a policy of installing the leader of the winning party into the prime minister post. However, the administration was plagued by cabinet corruption, leading to a coup in 1991 that hoped to "correct the corrupt regime." The actual reason behind the coup was dissatisfaction with the appointment of defense minister, but the slogan of the movement garnered a considerable amount of public support. As soon as an army commander assumed the position of prime minister, however, criticism of the government exploded; in May of 1992, the anti-government movement had begun to swell at a staggering

rate. Participants in the uprising were sometimes called the “cell phone mob” as they used mobile phones to contact friends and spread information. At the time, mobile phones were still quite expensive and primarily available to the urban middle class; basically, the members of the urban middle class confronted the military-led government with strong voices of opposition. Reminiscent of past events, the military again cracked down on the uprising with force, killing dozens of protesters (the Black May Incident). The conflict was once again resolved via the intervention of the King, and the prime minister was forced to step down.

WHAT WAS THE POLITICAL REFORM?

Although military government had been rendered impossible, party politics still had many flaws. The Thai governmental system required radical changes, and consequently, the 1990s became the age of political reform. The 1997 constitution, demonstrating the aims of the reform, was inlaid with measures to limit the self-serving behavior of politicians. It also created harsh penalties for electoral violations and established the condition that candidates must have at least a college degree. A new single-seat constituency system also restricted the ability of politicians to create small parties and control votes for their own interests.

Further, the constitution created a system to monitor lower house members. Expecting upper house to play a supervising role to lower house, the constitution prevented upper house members from belonging to political parties, as well placed strict limits on election activities. Several organizations independent of Parliament and the cabinet (Election Commission, National Human Rights Commission, etc.) were established with supervisory functions over politicians. Finally, the new rules made it effectively impossible for a politician elected from a constituency to join the cabinet after being elected.

The driving forces behind the reform were people that could very well be called “new elites”. The person chosen for the chair of the political reform steering committee was Dr. Prawese Wasi, a professor from the national university’s medical faculty who had for many years devoted his energies toward further expanding medical services to the general populace. The primary framer of the constitution was Borwornsak Uwanno, a professor of public law at Chulalongkorn University. The constitution proposal was drafted at a council made up of academics outside of the political sphere (legal experts and political scientists) and citizens picked from provincial areas. The public hearing of the draft, held outside the city, was attended by the middle class of provincial areas, such as government officials, educators, intellectuals, NGOs, and businesspeople – not politicians, soldiers, or authoritarian bureaucrats. There were still many well-educated people who were deeply invested in the social issues facing Thailand and had lived through the student movements of the 1970s. These people and their energies, which had been sapped during the 1980s, reemerged in the 1990s under the banner of a civil society ideology.

Thus, the political reform of the 1990s, founded on the belief that politicians are fundamentally corrupt

(politicians from constituencies were prone to buying votes and accumulating wealth after being elected), can be conceived as the creation of systems by new elites to control and discourage corrupt activity. The reform applied the logic that because people in outlying areas vote for candidates that spread money around during election season, elections cannot produce any decent, honest politicians unless the government enacts some sort of control – a line of thinking that smacks of condescension toward the “ignorant masses.”

WHAT DID THAKSIN DO?

The first general election based on the 1997 constitution was held in 2001, and the Thaksin-led Thai Rak Thai party defeated its opposition handily, winning over half of all parliamentary seats. Thaksin, a former police official and the owner of an enormous fortune, amassed his wealth through his own computer and telecommunications businesses. Using his considerable assets to bring leading legislators into his party, he went into the election touting specific policies aimed at rural citizens and members of the urban lower class, promising to launch low-cost health care (only 30 baht, roughly 70 cents per patient), one million baht village funds for microcredit, deferment of debt repayments for farmers, and financing for small businesses of low income earners in urban areas. Essentially, it was a “manifesto election.” Once in power, Thaksin began putting the policies in place while citizens of agricultural communities reaped the benefits. Thaksin also increased national budget reserve funds (the portion which was not appropriated to specific ministries and public agencies) and gave himself the authority to make autonomous decisions on this fund to respond to pressing needs of local people. The people of Thailand began to believe that all they needed to do to secure a new road or bridge was to ask Thaksin.

Thaksin’s landslide victory in the 2005 elections, in which his party won two thirds of all seats, indicates that voters were extremely supportive of his policies. Under the single-seat constituency system, people were essentially voting for Prime Minister Thaksin. For residents of agricultural areas, a vote was no longer something to be sold for a few hundred baht, but rather a way to choose policies (and an administration) that would benefit them. Thaksin, seeing the power in vote counts, mobilized his private resources and government resources to round up backers. In a way, Thaksin reconstructed the politics of numbers.

POLITICS BY GOOD PEOPLE – THE STATEMENT OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

Thaksin, having secured an overwhelming majority in Parliament, became increasingly arrogant, refusing to turn an ear to criticism and choosing policies to benefit himself and his cronies. Basking in the warm glow of the reception he received in outlying areas, Thaksin seemed to some to be slighting the King. The middle class saw restrictions on free speech as intolerable. Unfettered competition was the law of the land, so they reacted critically against corruption and nepotism. Moreover, members of the upper class treasured their intimacy with the royal family. Disillusion spread quickly throughout the middle class, but its limited population size eliminated any chance of victory in elections. The middle class, which emerged as a main

actor of Thai politics in the 1990s, had lost its political power.

By using the charismatic image of the King (and his symbolic color of yellow), the middle class asserted the legitimacy of its movement and went to the streets in fervent protest, partly to draw out the power of the judicial system and military. Still, the real adversary was an administration controlled by a party that had somehow or other gained significant numbers of votes in elections that were both democratic and free. PAD needed to define the democracy its members envisioned.

In 2008, with the PAD still on the attack against the pro-Thaksin administration, its leaders adopted a slogan of “new politics,” summarized in **Table 3**. According to this new stance, the group suggested that under the current election scheme, more and more bad politicians would be elected. “Good politics” is a system where good people (in Thai, khon dee) govern the country, meaning that the government would need to permit the participation of political representatives not chosen via election from a constituency. Calling it nothing more than an example, the PAD also laid out a specific plan of a parliament in which 30 percent of legislators would be elected from voting districts, with the remaining 70 percent appointed by other means.

How, then, was Thailand to find the “good people” for politics? PAD, apparently believing that the best way was to select representatives from occupational groups, wanted to create associations of lawyers, doctors, teachers, laborers, farmers, students, retailers, vendors, and traders to facilitate selection. Indeed, under such a system, people who would ordinarily be unable to run for election would have a chance to win seats.

Table 3: PAD’s “New Politics”

(Summary of PAD’s September 8, 2009 statement)

1	The current election format is controlled by money, and elected politicians undermine the government by engaging in corrupt activities and interfering with the judiciary. Each election produces the same results, so the following reforms are needed.
2	“New Politics” refers to a democracy in which the King is the true head of state. The system is intended to: 2-1. Entrust the country to good people 2-2. Create a political system that allows not only elected politicians but representatives of ordinary citizens to participate in lawmaking
3	The following steps must be taken in order to achieve “new politics.” 3-1. Force the current administration to resign 3-2. Solve the problems created by Thaksin and create a political system in which citizens are free to participate The idea of “70% citizen representatives and 30% elected politicians” that has been supported at previous PAD assemblies is nothing more than an example intended for discussion purposes.

POLITICS OF NUMBERS: THE STATEMENT OF THE LOWER CLASS

The stance of the Red Shirts is simple - "dissolve the Parliament" (hold an election) – which strikes a contrast with the PAD's "politics by good people" rallying cry. To the Red Shirts, determining the country's leaders is the right of each citizen, and the only way to achieve this vision is through an election. In other words, the UDD calls for power to be returned to the people.



Photos laid on the ground at a UDD rally.
Top, center is Prem Tinsulanonda,
President of the Privy Council

The UDD turned to its widespread, popular character to legitimize the movement, and decided to call itself phrai, a slightly dated term. The word, used in the class system that was in place until the middle of the 19th century, once referred to common people charged with work for the royal family and aristocracy. Of course, such a class ceased to exist many years ago, but by using the word the UDD was able to express its collective identity.

Group leaders have consciously implemented folk elements in their modes of collective action as well. Blood collected from movement members was spread in front of the Prime Minister's Office, the Abhisit residence, and Democrat Party headquarters as an appeal to the magical, spiritual, and other supernatural beliefs that color general society. Mo Lam, a style of traditional folk song and story telling originating in the northeast region, was performed at Red Shirt assemblies. A replica of a cap worn by the former Communist Party of Thailand was sold at the gatherings. It is well known that former Communist Party members had positions at the UDD leadership level, but considering the prevailing negative perception about the communists among Thai people until very recently, their resurgence is intriguing. Perhaps the Communist Party is being reconceived as a positive force – an ally of the oppressed.

The UDD employed another old-fashioned term – ammat – to refer to the opposing side. The word, which denotes high-ranking civilian personnel, is basically meant to convey the concept of the elite. The PAD principle of khon dee was seized by the UDD, reworded as ammat, and used as a potent form of counterattack. Their main target, of course, was the "good people" prototype – Prem. Shortly after the 2006 coup, the UDD, claiming that Prem was behind the takeover, organized a demonstration at his residence and have refused to let up on criticism ever since. The picture shows photographs of anti-Thaksin leaders that were laid on the ground at assembly locations. Prem's photo is in the center of the top row. Participants, then, were able to step on and walk over his face.

SELF-AWARE CLASSES EMERGED

In present-day Thailand, people have awakened to their class affiliation and the conflicts emerged along this consciousness. By grouping themselves into one group and others into another, people grew their collective identity as demarcated by social class category and recognized the conflict between the classes. As described above, the class gap is not a new phenomenon – so why has it become a part of collective awareness?

The beginning came with Thaksin's policies that targeted specific beneficiaries. These measures, combined with the single-seat constituency system, gave the rural population and the urban lower class the power to select the administration (and policies) via the election process, thereby opening their eyes to the magnitude of their political might. The urban middle class, meanwhile, became aware of their powerlessness – in all, the significance of elections for the two sectors began to draw a stark contrast.

Second, collective action itself cultivated self-awareness among its participants. In addition to the symbolic colors of yellow and red, PAD and UDD created devices with different shapes (a palm of the hand for PAD, a foot for UDD) that produced a louder handclap and gave life to assembly rallies. Participants at a gathering shared all of the information given by the speakers, which in turn led supporters to adopt shared terminology and logic.

The third point was the provision of a viewpoint for separation (framing), a prime example of which is the phrai and ammat phraseology used by UDD leaders. These frameworks helped lump “we” and “they” into groups and succeeded in making the differences especially salient. Even more, the words resonated particularly with the lower classes – the people who had been constantly looked down upon by the rest of society – and became a source of strength.

Finally, the fact that both factions had their own media outlets cannot be overlooked. Leaders on both sides, familiar with the mass media industry, established publicity stations using satellite broadcasting. Community radio, small-scale broadcast stations that have grown rapidly over the last decade, also ran political advertisements and programming. Thus, with PAD supporters listening to PAD broadcasts and UDD supporters tuning in to UDD broadcasts, members are able to share information with each other and no longer need to listen to statements and claims made by the other side. The use of satellite technology, too, allowed this fissure to spread nationwide.

THE RULE OF THE GAME IS IN CONFLICT

Clearly, the conflict is not simply between the supporters and opponents of Thaksin; in fact, the rules that would normally settle the conflict are at odds. While the Red Shirts suggest that resolution must come through an election, its opponents claim that an election would do little to correct the problem. As long as

the two sides are unable to reach an agreement on the rules of the game, there is no way to determine the real winner.

The conflict itself could be thought of as a clash over the ideal democratic vision. PAD believes a government driven by discussions between “good people” to be more democratic. The system that brings people into government through elections and other voting campaigns is flawed, they think, because it leaves government perilously in the hands of politicians who simply buy votes with money (in other words, in the hands of people who sell votes for money). This way of thinking is quite similar to the civil society argument, which advocates public-sphere decision-making based on consultations between representatives of various associations; in other words, the PAD vision is of “quality politics.”

The UDD opposes this logic by stating that elections are the arena and method for public participation in politics. The lower classes may be poor and less educated, but nonetheless have opinions and ideas on politics, just as the middle and upper classes do, and thus deserve equal rights to participate. The only way to enable the lower classes to make their ideas and intentions heard (and participate in the public sphere), the UDD claims, is the election process. Put simply, the UDD vision is a “politics of numbers.”

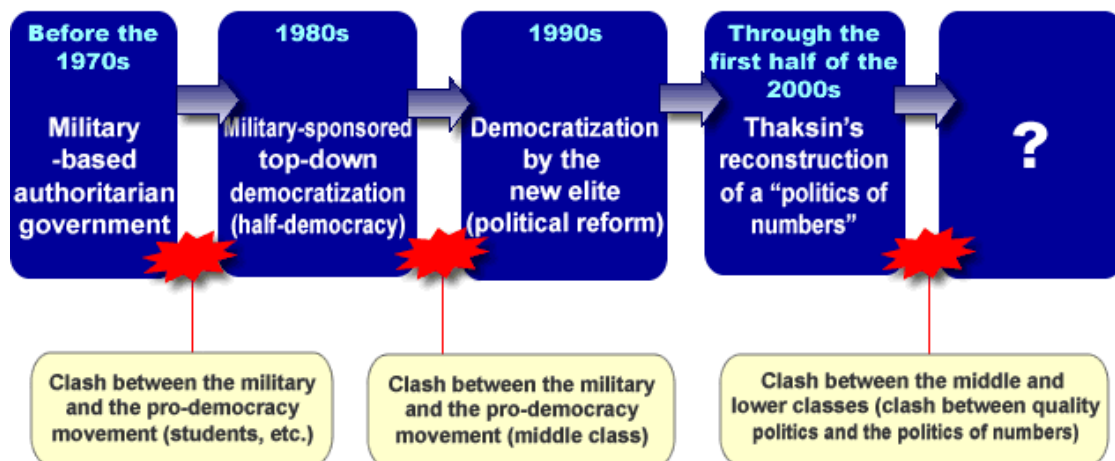
The foundations of the rules are set forth in the constitution, but PAD supports the 2007 Constitution, while the UDD calls for the reinstatement of the 1997 constitution. This stance may seem slightly odd, though, considering that the 1997 constitution was formulated by the political activity of the new elite. However, the 1997 constitution fostered the systems that gave rise to powerful politicians like Thaksin. Therefore, when the 1997 constitution was nullified by the junta, the activists that worked to create those institutions put up no resistance whatsoever. The 2007 constitution returned the constituency format to a multiple-seat system, switched roughly half of the upper house seats to a recommendation-based arrangement, and attempted to keep party politician influence from affecting election boards and independent agencies as much as possible (and also tried to maximize the sway of judiciary representatives in related matters). The people who pushed the stipulations of the 1997 constitution simply appreciated the constitution as far as it worked to their advantage, and the same goes for Thaksin’s support of reinstating the 1997 version: to him and his followers, it represents an advantageous form of “democracy.”

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THAI DEMOCRACY

Now, let us turn our attention to how the current situation in Thailand fits into the development of Thai democracy, discussed earlier. At first, the Thai government was a form of military-based power leadership, which met with fierce opposition from 1973 to 1976. The government sponsored military-based top-down democratization until 1988 and, when the weight of the military was about to give, disorder erupted yet again. After the event of 1992, the decade of the 1990s became a period of political reform that created the systems that would give “good people” the responsibility of overseeing government functions. However,

Thaksin, who rode in on the waves of these new institutions, reconstructed a “politics of numbers,” which made the rural and urban lower classes conscious of their political force. Over this long historical process, participation in politics shifted from the military to politicians, from politicians to the new elite, and finally from the new elite to the general population, all the while growing in scope and involving increasing numbers of important players. Now, “politics by good people” and the “politics of numbers” have collided. In the past, transformations in government systems have been accompanied by heated conflict – and we are now witness to yet another transition period (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1: The Development of Democracy in Thailand



It is virtually impossible to push back the tides of history. There is no way that Thailand could possibly benefit from returning to a system in which the middle class powers the government and the lower classes sell their votes. The lower class itself is in the midst of change. In 1989, when the author was living and performing research in an agricultural community in the northeastern Khon Kaen province, very few children went on to further education after elementary school. However, research in the same village in 2000 showed that most farm youth were attending high schools and vocational schools. In 2005, when asked about their dreams for their future, several middle school students in the area said that they aspired to become medical doctors. In the past, they would have answered soldiers or police officers at most. Now, actually very few young people in agricultural communities remain in the village, with most moving to urban areas for work. These young people experience life in the city and get a glimpse of the urban, middle-class way of life. The middle class, too, is starting to realize that the agricultural and urban lower classes have mobilized for more than just money and that the statements of the Red Shirts appeal to a surprisingly broad range of supporters.

It is also difficult to crystallize the PAD’s vision of “politics by good people.” After the 2006 coup, NGOs and social activists in Thailand were divided on how to assess the coup, leading to fierce debate between the two sides. At least one side of “good people”, who had long been dedicated to serving Thai society, was somehow wrong. The UDD also launched intentional attacks against the “good people.” Now, it is more

and more of a struggle to find a person that all can agree is “good.” These issues will likely force Thailand come to terms with a framework in which the election process is the final judge. Even the PAD, which had criticized elections so determinedly, formed a party last year and is preparing for participation in elections.

If the two sides were able to agree on the rules of the game, their political stances would not warrant such a seemingly unbridgeable gap. Political parties after the Thaksin administration have all created party manifestos and implemented policies that target the massive lower class constituency. Even the Abhisit administration has carried on many of the policies enacted during Thaksin’s time. If the supporters and opponents of Thaksin calmed down and gave the situation considerable thought, they would realize that their policies are not all that different. The reason behind the rural enthusiasm for Thaksin is that he was the first to target the citizens of the outlying farming villages, giving him a kind of “original branding effect.” Given time, people will eventually make a rational decision on whether the “original” is all that good. When that happens, no matter how hard Thaksin and his followers play their pipes, the public will stop dancing to the music – and the entire Thai government will no longer be at the mercy of the conflicts within Thaksin himself and between his supporters and opponents.

That is when Thailand will become a state of popular democracy, one that goes about the business of choosing its humdrum government and its everyday policies through the election process. Though it may be less exciting, that is the realization of stable politics (not an administration). By clashing violently with the street activists of the pro-Thaksin faction, however, the country missed any chance it had of the country reaching a consensus on the rules that will govern how its people compete with each other in the future – and thus made the road toward political stability in Thailand that much more treacherous.