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## THE JANUARY 1975 THAI ELECTIONS: PRELIMINARY DATA AND INFERENCES

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Jeffrey Race

THIS ARTICLE PRESENTS preliminary data and tentative hypotheses resulting from the January 26, 1975 National Assembly elections in Thailand. I have also gone back to compare the outcome of this election with the results of the 1957 and 1969 elections. This permits some significant trends to emerge which go far in explaining the difficulties experienced after the January election in forming a stable government.

The election obviously needs further study using far more detailed information than is now available. My purpose here is simply to offer some preliminary conclusions based on data available in the Bangkok newspapers a few days after the election.

### *January 26: The Basic Data*

Table 1 presents the results of the election. Of the 42 parties, only 22 succeeded in gaining seats in the assembly. The table is organized according to political orientation, using a scheme that makes the results easier to understand. Since this was one of the cleanest elections in Thai history, the impressive vote for the military-affiliated parties seems to prove that the military has nothing to fear from free elections *per se*. The behavior of senior military leaders, eschewing any public participation in the campaign, was also a favorable precedent for the future.

A disappointing aspect of the election was the low turnout, some 33.65% in Bangkok and about 47% nationwide. This could have been predicted partly on the basis of the large and confusing number of candidates, but it appears also to have resulted from a feeling that "it doesn't matter anyway." Our figures show, however, that it indeed "does matter."

*Political Geography:* Table 2 is abstracted from the data presented in Table 1 and illustrates the regional distribution of seats by political tendency. The UTPP successor parties, representing the military right in alliance with local notables, were strongest in the Central Plain and the Northeast. The Democrat successor parties, representing the civilian right in alliance with their own network of local notables, did best in Bangkok, almost matching

TABLE 1: The January 26, 1975 House of Representatives Election in Thailand

Party	Number of candidates	Number elected						Percentage elected	Percentage of total house
		BKK	C	S	N	NE	TTL		
<i>UTPP successor parties</i> (the military right)									
1. Social Justice (Dharma Sangkom)	237	—	14	7	6	18	45	19.0	16.7
2. Thai Nation (Chart Thai)	210	2	9	3	3	11	28	13.3	10.4
3. Social Nationalist (Sangkom Chart Niyom)	146	—	7	1	2	6	16	11.0	5.9
4. Social Agrarian (Kaset Sangkom)	121	—	4	1	10	4	19	15.7	7.1
<i>Democrat successor parties</i> (the civilian right)									
5. Democrat (Prachatipat)	231	23	11	17	16	5	72	31.1	26.8
6. Social Action (Kit Sangkom)	230	1	2	3	7	5	18	7.8	6.7
7. Democracy (Prachatipatai)	82	—	1	1	—	—	2	2.4	.7
8. People's Sovereignty (Athipat)	25	—	—	1	—	1	2	8.0	.7
<i>The middle</i>									
9. New Force (Palang Mai)	106	—	2	—	3	7	12	11.3	4.5
10. Thai (Thai)	45	—	1	—	2	1	4	8.9	1.5
<i>The left</i>									
11. Socialist (Sangkom Niyom)	82	—	—	2	2	11	15	18.3	5.6
12. Socialist United Front (Naew Ruam Sangkom Niyom)	74	—	—	—	—	10	10	13.5	3.7
<i>Minor parties</i>									
13. National Revival (Fuenfoo Chart Thai)	97	—	1	—	—	2	3	3.1	1.1
14. Peaceful People (Santichon)	78	—	5	—	3	—	8	10.3	3.0
15. Economist (Sethakorn)	74	—	—	—	—	1	1	1.4	.4
16. Agriculturalist (Kasetkorn)	36	—	1	—	—	—	1	2.8	.4
17. People's Force (Palang Rasadorn)	32	—	1	—	—	1	2	6.3	.7
18. Free (Serichon)	31	—	—	—	1	—	1	3.3	.4
19. Labor (Raeng Ngarn)	28	—	—	—	1	—	1	3.8	.4
20. People's Justice (Pracha Dharm)	26	—	—	—	—	6	6	23.1	2.2
21. Thai Earth (Phaendin Thai)	22	—	—	—	—	2	2	9.1	.7
22. Provincial Development (Pattana Changwat)	1	—	—	—	1	—	1	100.0	.4

SOURCE: Adapted from *Nation*, February 1, 1975, p. 3.

TABLE 2. Composition of Vote by Region

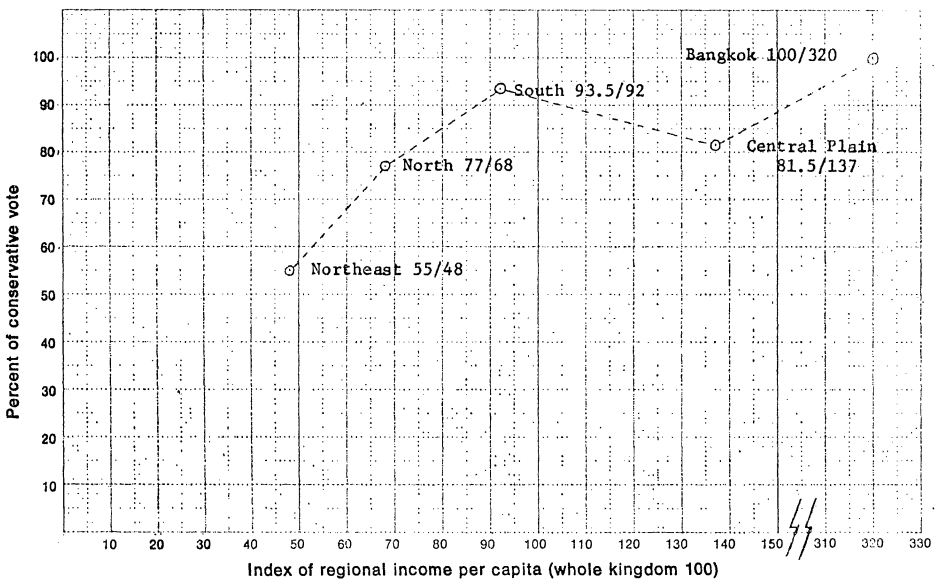
Region	Military right		Civilian right		Middle		Left		Other	
	Seats	percentage of region	Seats	percentage of region	Seats	percentage of region	Seats	percentage of region	Seats	percentage of region
Bangkok	2	7.5	24	92.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Central Plain	34	58.0	14	23.5	3	5.0	0	0.0	8	13.5
South	12	33.3	22	61.2	0	0.0	2	5.5	0	0.0
North	21	37.0	23	40.0	5	9.0	2	3.5	6	10.5
Northeast	39	43.0	11	12.0	8	9.0	21	23.0	12	13.0

SOURCE: Abstracted from Table 1

their record clean sweep of Bangkok in 1969. Their next strongest area of support was in the South.

The interpretation of the votes for the other three groups requires a more detailed interpretation. I had expected the "middle"—the Thai and New Force parties—to appeal to the new middle class, bureaucrats, and professional people, hence deriving significant support from Bangkok and the Central Plain. In fact almost completely the reverse occurred: the middle parties won no seats in Bangkok, and but three in the Central Plain. Their strongest support was in the North and the Northeast. We note a similar

CHART 1: Relationship between Conservative Vote and Regional Income Per Capita



SOURCE: Vertical axis: from Table 2; horizontal axis: *Income of Thailand 1972-73 Edition I Volume 6, Gross Regional Product (Bangkok, National Social and Economic Development Board)*; breakdown of central region estimate by "Jonathan Swift," *Bangkok Post*.

pattern for the left and "other" parties: no support in Bangkok, some in the Central Plain, and more in the North and Northeast.

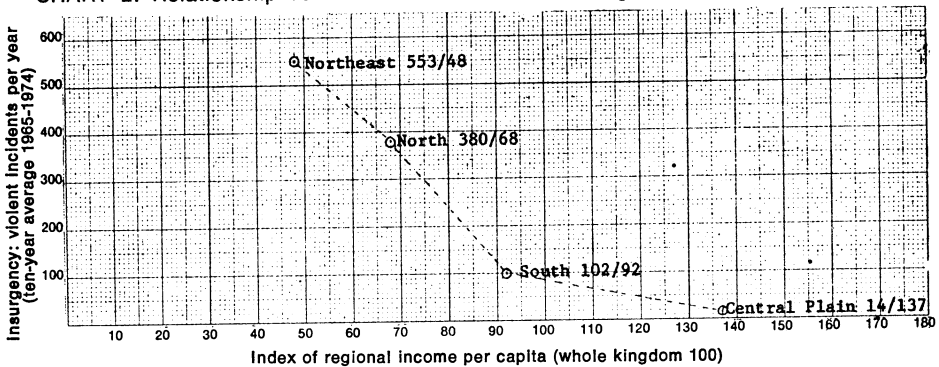
One interpretation thus suggests itself: the votes for the left *and the smaller parties* not affiliated with either the UTPP bloc or the civilian conservative bloc represent a protest against the economic and political domination of Bangkok. And although the Thai and New Force parties made a somewhat different appeal in their platforms, they were yet perceived in this way.

There is some rather striking evidence to confirm this hunch that the pattern of electoral results represents a rural protest against the dominance of Bangkok. Chart 1 demonstrates the relationship between conservative vote and relative regional income per capita. The vertical axis is computed by adding the percentage of seats in the region for the military and civilian conservative groups, while the horizontal axis is the index of regional per capita income with the whole kingdom as 100. The resulting curve shows a marked, though not perfect and not linear, correspondence between the income of a region and its enthusiasm for the conservatives. The Northeast, poorest of all, gave 55% of its seats to the conservatives (still an impressively high percentage), while Bangkok, richest, most powerful, and with the most to protect, gave the conservatives 100% of its seats.

Chart 2 shows an even more striking relationship which increases our confidence that significant segments of the rural population are dissatisfied and trying to say so. Chart 1 illustrates the connection between legal protest and regional income. Chart 2 does the same thing for illegal protest: violent incidents in the rural revolt (in this case, the vertical axis shows the ten-year average of violent incidents). The relationship is quite clear: the higher the regional per capita income, the lower the violence.

*The New House:* Table 3 presents data on the composition of the new House of Representatives again broken down into political tendency categories. Several conclusions are readily apparent. First is the large proportion of the house going to the UTPP successor parties, the military right, testi-

CHART 2: Relationship between Rural Violence and Regional Income Per Capita



SOURCE: Vertical axis: *Bangkok Post*, January 26, 1975, Section II p. 1. The figures for the southern region do not include the four southernmost provinces which are the base for the Muslim separatist organization. Horizontal axis: same as for Chart 1.

mony to the solid conservatism of the Thai voter or, from a different political perspective, proof of the extent to which the ignorant farmer is still fooled about his true interests. The percentage of the house in the hands of the civilian rightwing parties is only slightly less and, in combination with the vote to the military right, confirms our point about the overwhelmingly conservative nature of Thai politics. The left, by comparison, has but 9.3% of the seats.

TABLE 3: Composition of the House of Representatives

Political persuasion	Number of candidates	Number elected	Percentage elected	Percentage of house
Military right	710	108	15.2	40.1
Civilian right	568	94	16.6	34.9
Middle	147	16	10.9	6.0
Left	156	25	16.1	9.3
Other	678	26	4.2	9.7

SOURCE: Abstracted from Table 1

A second inference we may readily draw is that while Thai are broadly conservative, they are unable to make up their minds which brand of conservatives should represent them and rule the nation: the seats are split almost evenly between the two claimants to the conservative mantle.

We may draw yet a third very interesting inference from these data. Two of the rallying cries of the campaign were that the right was "buying votes" and that "money is all that matters." As evidence such critics now point to the large percentage of seats obtained by the wealthy military-affiliated parties. In fact, of course, such a large percentage might have come about due to the actual popularity of such parties and their candidates. The only way to know which is true is to look at the percentage of candidates elected, adjusted for money spent. If money is the critical factor, the wealthy parties would be able to get a higher percentage of their candidates elected, despite presumably less appealing candidates. A look at the data, however, shows the reverse to be true: the military affiliated parties actually succeeded in electing a *smaller percentage* of their candidates (15.2%) than either the somewhat less wealthy civilian rightists (16.6%) or even the *impecunious leftists* (16.1%). This inference is a bit tentative, since we do not have, and probably cannot get, exact campaign spending figures, and moreover many parties contested seats only where they felt they had support. Overall, however, I believe the conclusion is warranted: the voters have more intelligence and integrity than they get credit for.

The same column on percentage of candidates elected reveals in another way that the voters have the ability to discriminate. Contrast the percentage of candidates elected as between the "middle" parties and the "other" group:

both, we concluded, are perceived as protest vehicles. Yet the "middle" parties were two and one-half times as successful as the "other" parties in having their candidates elected; hence they must have had some other advantage. Since it wasn't money, it must have been the appeal of the party.

### *Past, Present . . . Future?*

It's useful to know where Thailand is now, but even more to know where it is going. We can get a bearing on this by comparing data on the 1975 election with the results of two earlier elections: those of 1969 and February 1957. The comparison is summarized in Table 4, and the trends, and continuities, are quite striking. The drop in the "military right" vote is very large in 1975; this might be due either to a real drop in the popularity of the military right, or to the greater honesty of the 1975 elections (the military had control of the Ministry of the Interior in both 1957 and 1969).

TABLE 4: Changing Patterns in House of Representatives Composition

Political persuasion	1957		1969		1975	
	Party	Percentage of house	Party	Percentage of house	Party	Percentage of house
Military right	Seri Manangkhasila Progovernment independents Progovernment fragments of other parties	61.5	UTPP Progovernment independents	67.5	Social Justice Social Nationalist Thai Nation Social Agrarian	40.1
Civilian right	Democrat	20.5	Democrat	25.0	Democrat Democracy Social Action People's Sovereignty	34.9
Middle	—	—	—	—	Thai New Force	6.0
Left	Free Democrat Economist Hyde Park Freedom	14.5	People Economist United Front Democratic Front	6.0	Socialist Socialist United Front	9.3
Other	Antigovernment independents	3.5	Antigovernment parties and independents	1.5	Other parties (see Table 1)	9.7

SOURCE: 1957 data: Wendell Blanchard et al., *Thailand, Its People, Its Society, Its Culture* (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1958), p. 2.

1969 data: Clark Neher, "The Politics of Continuity," *Asian Survey*, 10:2, (February 1970), p. 162.

1975 data: from Table 1

There is also an unmistakable rising trend in the electoral strength of the civilian right: from 20.5% in February 1957, to 25% in 1969, to 34.9% in 1975. As stock prospectuses say, there is no assurance that present trends will continue, but on the other hand it would be foolish to ignore them. The strength of the left parties hovers in the range  $10\% \pm 4.5\%$ , indicating that the decline in the vote for the military right was shared principally by the civilian right and the middle, and to a lesser extent by the "other" parties.

The 1975 election confirms the essential conservatism of the Thai electorate, but it poses the problem of the inability of the Thai at present to decide whether military or civilian elites should rule. The other point confirmed by the elections (as if the meaning of the gunfire in the countryside needed confirmation) is that there is serious discontent with the current distribution of economic benefits in the kingdom. It would be an error, however, to conclude that income is all that is at stake here. It is the distribution of power overwhelmingly in favor of Bangkok which permits this distribution of income to persist, and that is the real issue.

For the short term, the ambiguous outcome of the election virtually assures that the government in Bangkok will be weak, with power slipping to those who have trained themselves to rule while seeming to obey—the military and the bureaucracy. It seems unlikely that the government will be able to act decisively against the problems confronting the kingdom—inflation, land alienation, income inequality, agricultural backwardness. Hence we may expect protest movements to continue, and perhaps expand.

The people who should be happiest with the outcome of the election are thus the Thai military and bureaucracy, foreign and local investors, and Thailand's foreign allies, for the three elections examined here show no evidence of a shift to the left. There is a shift, but it is from military elites to the kind of civilian conservative and middle class parties which are successfully in charge of business as usual elsewhere in the world. The current problem is simply that the underlying long-run trend has brought the military and civilian conservatives so near to equality in elected seats that Thailand is falling between two stools; neither faction can take effective command, though either might do so successfully.

In due course a much more detailed breakdown of the vote should become available, which will permit stricter tests of the hypotheses advanced here and the development of new ones. Account should be taken in this regard of such factors as changes in electoral procedures between 1969 and 1975, urbanization, and shifting voter turnouts from election to election. I believe, however, that these preliminary data still offer powerful insights into the course and meaning of Thai political and economic development.