

Thailand's election highlights deep crisis of bourgeois rule

Robert Campion
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Thailand's February 8 general election highlights the political crisis facing the ruling class. None of the major bourgeois parties expects to secure a parliamentary majority, with opinion polls showing a sharp collapse in popular support compared to the 2023 general election.

Since the formal end of the military junta in 2019 and the much vaunted "return to democracy" by sections of the political establishment after the defeat of military-backed parties in 2023, the parliamentary apparatus has become increasingly discredited. Now alongside the present election, an effort is being made through a constitutional referendum to contain popular opposition by give the profoundly undemocratic political system a democratic facelift.

Recent polling by the National Institute for Development Administration (NIDA) underlines the political impasse. A nationwide survey over January 5–8 found People's Party leader Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut the most preferred prime ministerial candidate, but with just 24.76 percent support.

He was followed by Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul of the right-wing Bhumjaithai Party on 20.84 percent. Pheu Thai, which formed the government after the 2023 election, polled a mere 9.64 percent for its candidate Yodchanan Wongsawat, trailing even the number of undecided voters.

These figures contrast starkly with polling ahead of the last general election. The Move Forward Party (MFP), the predecessor to the People's Party (PP), recorded almost double the support for its prime ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat at 48 percent, while Pheu Thai's nominee Paetongtarn Shinawatra polled three times its present amount at 29 percent.

This collapse represents a crisis not just for Thailand's traditional oppositional parties, but the

parliamentary system as a whole. In the eyes of broad layers of workers and youth, there has been a succession of betrayals since the last election.

The MFP, a party representing an emerging capitalist class in urban centres, won the popular vote in 2023 by cynically exploiting popular opposition that erupted against the military dictatorship of Prayut Chan-o-Cha. However, it was blocked from forming government by the military-dominated Senate.

Rather than mobilising the population in defence of democratic rights, the MFP leadership lamely accepted the authority of the courts, the military and the monarchy-linked establishment. The party repeatedly pledged its commitment to "stability" and the capitalist order, even as it was dismantled.

After campaigning in 2023 on the claim it would not form an alliance with any of the military-backed parties, Pheu Thai reneged on that pledge and joined hands with parties that ruled under the military junta, including the United Thai Nation Party and the Palang Pracharath Party. This was despite two Pheu Thai governments being removed in military coups in 2006 and 2014 and its Red Shirt supporters being subjected to bloody military repression in 2010.

The two prime ministers who led the unstable Pheu Thai-led government were ousted through judicial and parliamentary manoeuvres that amounted to coups by the conservative Thai establishment centred on the military and monarchy. On the grounds of "ethics violations" the Constitutional Court removed PM Srettha Thavisin in August 2024 and a year later his replacement Paetongtarn Shinawatra was removed in August 2025 amid a nationalist and militarist campaign over border clashes with Cambodia.

The MFP's successor, the so-called progressive, democratic People's Party (PP), propped up

parliamentary rule by supporting the minority government of Anutin's pro-military, pro-monarchy Bhumjaithai Party on condition that it hold elections within four months as well as a toothless, constitutional referendum.

The PP explicitly abandoned any attempt to reform the *lèse-majesté* law, infamous legislation that declares any criticism of the monarchy a crime punishable by up to 15 years in jail. The PP's predecessors had won significant support among broad layers of youth particularly during mass demonstrations in 2020.

In the final analysis, the leadership of the PP fears provoking a mass movement of the Thai youth and working class far more than the repression by the capitalist state. To this day 44 members of the former MFP are facing charges by Thailand's anti-corruption agency over their sponsorship of a bill to amend *lèse-majesté*.

Both PP and Pheu Thai—parties formed by wealthy business families—function as safety valves for opposition to the traditional ruling elites making populist appeals to young people, workers and the rural masses.

Now amid a worsening economic and social crisis, the two parties are conducting a minimal election campaign. Public debates are limited; rallies are almost entirely absent. Anutin Charnvirakul, leader of the Bhumjaithai Party, has refused to participate in election debates.

The ruling class faces a new political crisis as the next government will be compelled to preside over a program of austerity and rising social tensions, all compounded by the global geo-political instability fuelled by the fascistic Trump administration's economic warfare and militarist rampage.

The Bank of Thailand has maintained its 2026 growth forecast at just 1.5 percent, a projection echoed by Siam Commercial Bank's Economic Intelligence Centre. This follows flagging growth of 2.2 percent in 2025 and 2.5 percent in 2024, the weakest performance in three decades.

This slowdown is part of a broader global downturn over which the Thai bourgeoisie has no control. It is compounded by escalating trade tensions with the United States, including punitive tariffs of 19 percent that threaten Thailand's export-dependent economy.

Official inflation figures conceal the reality facing

working people. While headline inflation remains low, the price of essential goods—particularly food—has risen sharply over the past decade, far outpacing wage growth. At the same time, Thailand's households are among the most indebted in the region. Total household debt stood at around 86.8 percent of GDP in mid-2025, a clear measure of the extent to which families are already stretched merely to survive.

With no progressive answer to mounting social tensions, the Thai ruling class has sought to deflect internal tensions outward through a border dispute and military clashes with Cambodia. Last year saw over a hundred soldiers and civilians killed, with an estimated 640,000 civilians fleeing border areas according to World Vision.

The People's Party's promotion of the constitutional referendum as a supposed democratic breakthrough is a fraud. The referendum does not propose a new constitution, the abolition of military's overriding veto powers, or curtail the political role of the courts. Instead, it merely authorises a drawn-out process tightly controlled by parliament and the judiciary.

This has been made explicit by the Constitutional Court, which has ruled that "Parliament cannot allow the people to directly elect the drafters of the constitution." Under the framework now being advanced, the process would unfold through multiple referendums, parliamentary approvals and judicial reviews, with no binding timetable and no guarantee of implementation.

Whatever the immediate outcome on February 8, the next government will be even more unstable than the last as it is compelled to implement deeply unpopular policies to meet the demands of big business and the imperialist powers.



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