

Military-aligned BJT wins most seats in Thai election

Robert Campion
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Thailand's general election on February 8 resulted, for the first time, in a plurality of seats for the right-wing Bhumjaithai Party (BJT), which helped to prop up the military junta of 2014–2019 and is a staunch supporter of the monarchy.

To date, the BJT has returned 193 seats in the 500-member House of Representatives, a huge increase from the 51 seats it won in the 2023 election, which placed it as a kingmaker. As the party with the most seats, it will be asked to form a government but will have to find coalition partners, most likely with the Kla Tham party, which won 58 seats.

The People's Party (PP) won 118 seats, a substantial decrease from its predecessor, the Move Forward Party (MFP) in 2023, which took 151. The Pheu Thai Party trailed behind with 74 seats, almost half what it achieved in 2023 with 141. Both parties have promoted themselves as defenders of democratic rights and opponents of military rule.

The BJT win was a product, above all, of the political bankruptcy of the People's Party and Pheu Thai, which have regularly betrayed the democratic and social aspirations of Thai workers and youth. Rather than mobilise opposition to the right-wing traditional elites linked to the military and monarchy, these parties have caved in time and again to military coups and legal machinations.

Across the country, voter turnout was 65 percent, down sharply from the 76 percent recorded in the 2023 election when voters were animated by opposition to the domination of military-linked parties led by ex-generals responsible for the 2014 coup.

Since that election, Thailand has been roiled by political instability. The MFP, which won the popular vote, was blocked from forming a government by the military-appointed Senate and then subsequently

banned on trumped-up charges. Pheu Thai, which initially agreed to form a government with the MFP after the election, instead formed a coalition government with the BJP and parties of the military.

Since 2023, two Pheu Thai prime ministers were toppled in legal coups, following a no-confidence motion and court interventions. In the aftermath of the ousting of Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra last August by the military-appointed Constitutional Court, the People's Party helped install the BJT as an unelected, minority government, with its leader Anutin Charnvirakul as prime minister.

The BJT, with the support of the military, shaped the campaign by whipping up Thai patriotism and militarism through border clashes with Cambodia over disputed territory. While currently a tenuous ceasefire is holding, the conflict overshadowed the election. Involving artillery and fighter aircraft sorties, reportedly over 100 people were killed and half a million displaced, far deadlier than the 2008–2011 Preah Vihear crisis.

The BJT exploited the dispute to project itself as the guardian of national sovereignty, mobilising conservative layers among rural and suburban voters to divert attention from the flagging economy. In Trump fashion, Anutin pledged to "build a wall" between the two countries and strengthen the military. It also proposed to annul previous peace agreements with Cambodia which would amount to a *de facto* return to a state of war.

In December 2025, the government approved a supplementary 5-billion-baht (\$US161 million) budget for the armed forces to support "sovereignty protection," details of which have been kept hidden from the public.

Pheu Thai and the PP did nothing to challenge the

war-mongering of the BJT and military, and tacitly facilitated it even as Paetongtarn Shinawatra was ousted last August over her supposed kowtowing to Cambodian strongman Hun Sen. Framed as an “ethics violation” for undermining the military, she was removed as prime minister by the Constitutional Court. She and Pheu Thai meekly accepted the ruling without so much as a word of protest.

The Pheu Thai government collapsed after the BJT quit the coalition, creating a major political crisis for the ruling class as no party other than the PP had the numbers to form a government. The PP stepped in to save the day, pledging to prop up a minority BJT government by not supporting any no-confidence motions. In return, it called for early elections and a referendum to allow discussion on changing the current constitution drawn up by the military junta in 2017.

Anutin used his few months in office to stir up the patriotic campaign over border tensions with Cambodia, not only to appeal to voters but to win over parliamentarians. More than 60 MPs defected from their own parties, including from Pheu Thai, to join the BJT.

The referendum took place alongside the election, with 60 percent of respondents voting in favour of constitutional change—indicating the depth of popular opposition to its deeply anti-democratic character. Any changes, however, will be left to parliament, now under the control of the BJT, which has explicitly ruled that drafters of the constitution cannot be elected.

The PP had already signalled a marked shift to the right and accommodation to the military and monarch following the dissolution of its predecessor, the MFP. This is expressed programmatically in the dropping of its efforts to abolish conscription or reform the reactionary *lèse-majesté* legislation that makes it an offence to criticise or disparage the royal family, which is punishable by up to 15 years in jail.

In a bid to win big business’ support, the party also fielded more technocratic, conservative candidates—economists, lawyers and former civil servants—rather than the democracy activists, labour organisers and community campaigners mobilised by the MFP in 2023. As its shadow foreign minister, it appointed Pisan Manawapat, who served as ambassador to the US for the military junta from 2015–2017 and was a vociferous defender of the 2014 coup.

The response of the traditional ruling elites has been to accelerate its attacks on the PP. In the months leading up to the election, 44 ex-MPs from the former MFP were still being investigated by the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) for “ethical violations” for proposing to amend the *lèse-majesté* law. On Monday, the Commission found the accused guilty and forwarded their case to the Supreme Court, which will now consider the imposition of lifetime political bans.

Fifteen of these political figures are currently sitting within the PP, and 10 won seats in the election, including the party’s candidate for prime minister, Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut. The party’s response is a legal challenge which, like similar cases in the past, will prove utterly futile.

Workers and youth, who are facing a worsening social crisis amid the drastic slowing of the Thai economy, need to draw the necessary political conclusions. None of the parties of the bourgeoisie, including Pheu Thai and the PP, are capable of waging a political fight for the democratic and social rights of the vast majority of working people. All of them fear that any mass mobilisation of the working class will threaten capitalist rule.

The only alternative is a socialist perspective and a turn to the mobilisation of the working class to overturn capitalism and refashion society to meet the pressing needs of the majority, not the profits of the wealthy elite.



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