CLIENTELISTIC NETWORKS IN THE 2019 THAI GENERAL ELECTION:

EVIDENCE FROM ROI-ET PROVINCE[*]

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Abstract

Thailand's March 2019 election results have become noteworthy evidence of the power generated by local forces within constituencies. This article questions how political parties and local networks work toward achieving success in elections, particularly the upcoming local elections. Qualitative fieldwork was conducted in Roi-Et province, the strong political base of prominent anti-Junta parties and a region closely watched by the Military Junta. The study found that clientelistic strategies are used in electoral mobilization. This comprises cooperation between local politicians and vote canvassers, as well as vote-buying, including through infrastructure projects launched by the Junta government. Furthermore, the political landscape of the province is dominated by clientelistic networks, which involves political figures and potential group members who are perceived according to their function and are generally part of the families attached to political parties. Observation of various parties' involvement in elections demonstrated that political families are at the core of both competition and cooperation at several levels. These families also actively engage in local activities to maintain and strengthen their authority.

Keywords: Thailand's Election, Clientelism, Local Networks, Political Party, Roi-Et Province

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I. Introduction

The 2019 general election was the first general election in Thailand after the army took power in 2014 under the name of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). Political competition and activities throughout the election period were intense due to new rules, which had been criticized for their bias against anti-Junta parties. Likewise, various forms of campaign activities had a stronger impact than they did in previous elections due to the large number of candidates and parties in each constituency. These circumstances encouraged a dramatic increase in political awareness across the country.

Over the years, scholars of Thai elections (Somchai, 2008; Prajak, 2009; Siripan, 2013; Suthikarn; 2013), particularly in the Northeast region, have criticized earlier work for its disproportionate focus on people's voting behaviors and electoral fraud (Anek,1996). The primary focus of this article, then, is to determine how political parties and local networks work toward achieving success in the general election, which also impacts the upcoming local elections. The article begins by outlining the approach and research methodology used before explaining the difficult conditions of the election that were present as a result of the coup. The next section analyzes the degree of competition, voter turnout, and election results in the selected area, and provides further discussion of the clientelistic strategies used to obtain votes in support of certain parties or candidates. Next, the article outlines the operating patterns of major parties and significant candidates in their efforts to succeed in the election. The last section will discuss the effects of the general election on provincial local politics.

II. Methodology and Scope of the Study

This research utilized qualitative methods to collect data. Fieldwork primarily consisted of interviews, focus group discussions, and observation of related political activities in Roi-Et province between February 2019, when the Election Commission of Thailand announced the election date, and May 2019, when it officially endorsed the results. Thirty-three key informants were selected from party candidates, local politicians, community leaders, vote canvassers in the areas where significant competition appeared, and university lecturers who conducted research on local and electoral politics. Moreover, documentary data was also reviewed.

Roi-Et province was selected as a case study for monitoring voting behavior and observing political competition and cooperation among local actors. As a prominent area in Northeast Thailand, Roi-Et has been designated as the origin of the practice of vote buying, the so-called "Roi-Et Disease". This practice has long been reproduced and has spread to other provinces across the region (Callahan and McCargo, 1996:378, Pasuk et al., 1998, 261), starting with the 1981 by-election. Furthermore, this province is widely known as the "Art-Samat model," initiated by Thaksin's government in 2006. This district was the area in which former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra launched his five-day reality show dedicated to the poverty eradication program (see: Pasuk &

Baker, 2009). These factors are further augmented by the growing number of redshirt communities, which led powerful mass demonstrations (see: Patana, 2012; Saowanee & McCargo, 2019) and two constitutional referenda against the Junta in 2007 and 2016.

This study employs clientelistic networks as a theoretical framework in order to analyze the operation of local actors and political parties[1]. This theoretical framework also enables the analysis of resources and exchange of clientelistic strategies for electoral support (see Nichter, 2010). The research contends that understanding the electoral competition in Thai politics today has requires not only providing a picture of power relations between political parties and voters, but also involves other actors with more complex relationships. This argument mainly applies the idea of clientelistic cluster networks in the Philippines as introduced by Julio Teehankee (2013) to assess how networks operate in terms of electoral politics. This approach examines network operations among three clusters, namely brokers or operators, machines, and clans as the crucial players in cementing the ties that bind these networks. Roi-Et is examined here as a case of families' power bases at local levels, as can be seen in figure 1. In an effort to incorporate the broader context of Thai politics, this study also includes cohorts of friends in socio-political groups, or *"Phak Phuak,"* which are preserved by their personal connections. These informal groups have significant roles as a means of inclusion, particularly in local communities (see: Ockey,1996; Mulder, 2000; Nelson, 2007).

Figure 1: Mapping of Political Families in Roi-Et Province
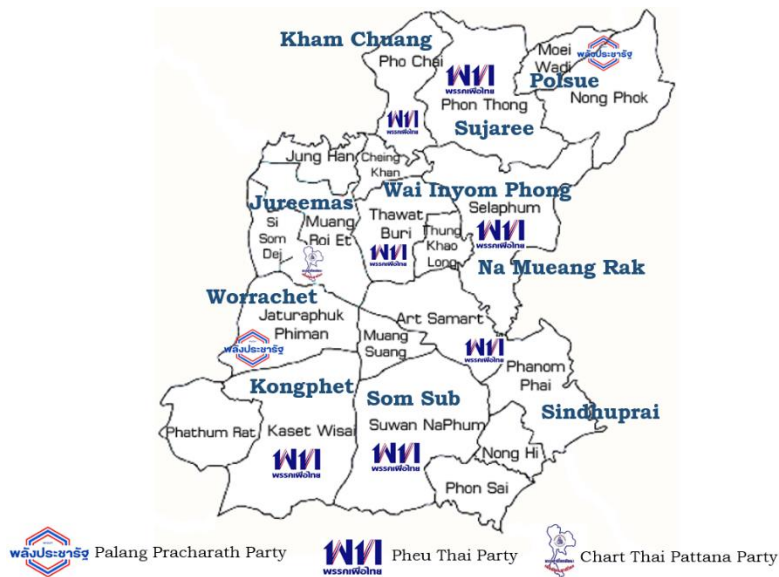
Source: Author's own figure

III. Political Obstacles of the First Election after the 2014 Coup

Five years after the coup, without having had elections at either the national or local level for an extended period of time and facing an increased degree of military control, Thai politics have moved toward authoritarianism. It could not be ignored that the military government would play a significant role in the election (Ellis-Petersen, 2019), beginning with the drafting of the new constitution through its promulgation. The Junta's regulations resulted in significant complications during the election. It is nearly impossible for the opposition to overcome the Senate's vote, or to recruit allies, to form a majority in the government (Patpicha & Johnson, 2019). The transition to a mixed-member apportionment system under the 2017 Constitution provided an opportunity for major parties to strongly contest the 350 constituency seats in first-past-the-post voting. Meanwhile, medium- and small-sized parties were able to do welling parliamentary seats from the allocation of 150 party lists seats, proportional to each party based on the number of votes they received nationwide. However, the methods used to count such votes were not clear, resulting in widespread criticism of the outcome. Many attributed this to the fact that the rule was designed to maintain the power of pro-military forces within a pro-military coalition government, affecting the party landscape of Thai politics (see: McCargo, 2018; Punchada,2019a; Siripan, 2019).

Another issue with the general election was that the number of constituencies was reduced, and new constituency boundaries were created in favor of the pro-Junta Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP). Some journalists compared this to gerrymandering in the United States (Abuza, 2019). Roi-Et province was reduced by one constituency, with new district boundaries covering all of the constituencies that had been dominated by the Pheu Thai party since the 2001 election. Changing boundaries significantly affected candidates' popularity base within various districts. Seksit Wainiyompong, a former MP and a founder of the Club Directors of Roi-Et United, could not be a candidate in the new constituency and had to run instead in the local election as a candidate for Chief of Provincial Authoritative Organization.

Additionally, the Junta controls political activities and the media. As Roi-Et is a strong political base for prominent anti-Junta parties, it is monitored closely. The military-led government assumed control and conducted political activities in local areas previously identified as the powerbases of political resistance. The most significant incident involved charging the red-shirt and grassroots movement leaders, including activists, who were known to be in opposition to the coup[2]. The Junta also established new regional and provincial military units and widened their budget to include the monitoring of political activities, especially in the North and Northeast. Additionally, anti-Junta political parties have faced obstacles and restrictions on their activities, including making speeches, holding rallies, and holding party meetings (Kaweewit & Tassanee, 2019).

Moreover, the roles of elected local politicians were also monitored and the budgets of local administrative

organizations were significantly reduced. Officials operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Interior were encouraged to promote the PPRP at the grassroots level. Most significantly, the government has been campaigning across the country through so-called Mobile Cabinet Trips, advocating for populist policies and the Pracharat scheme, and promoting the names of the Pro-Junta parties. This became an excellent opportunity to criticize politicians and the previous elected government. It could be said that these factors created a gap not only between political parties or former MPs and voters, but also between political parties and local politicians.

IV. Degrees of Competition and Voter Turnout

According to the party's popularity and the forecast of the voting results, it could be said that Roi-Et is one of the crucial power bases of the Pheu Thai party and the Red Shirt movement. Although there are many candidates and political parties in the electoral competition, candidates from large political parties, or those who have strong popular bases, gained significant attention and soak on leading roles in the election campaigns. Figure 2 shows the different levels of competition in the province, divided into three types, with a borderline referring to the level of intensity in the area, as follows:

Figure 2: Levels of Competition of Party Candidates in Each District of Roi-Et Province
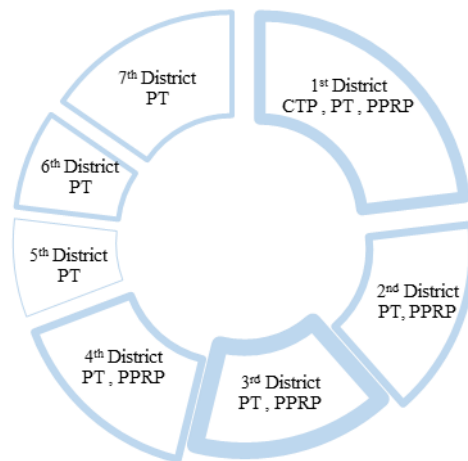
Type 1: Competition among Three Party Candidates

This characteristic occurs in the First District, which has three former members of the House of Representatives from different parties who compete within the constituency. The most prominent

candidate is Anurak Jureemas, a candidate from the Chat Thai Pattana Party. He held leading roles in running the campaign and engaging in political activities before the polling day. Others are Warawong Pansila from the Pheu Thai Party and Sanit Wongsanthanaphong from the PPRP.

These candidates frequently organized speeches, both in the municipality and in the villages, and used the vote canvassing machine to support their campaigns.

Type 2: Competition between Two Party Candidates

Competition between candidates from the Pheu Thai and Palang Pracharat parties occured in the Second, Third, and Fourth Districts. It cannot be denied that even though these districts have been dominated by the Pheu Thai Party for a long time, the PPRP's candidates also are outstanding politicians who maintain high popularity in various districts. The Third District became the most competitive area due to the competition between Niramit Sujaree, a former MP from the Pheu Thai Party, and Aekkaphap Phonseu from the PPRP Party, a former MP from the Thai Rak Thai party and also one of the key players in campaign planning for the Northeast region.

Type 3: The Strong Base of the Pheu Thai Party

This competition characteristic is prevalent in the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Districts in which Pheu Thai candidates have been Members of Parliament for a long time. The new general election candidates and their parties, thus, could not convince voters to take part in political activities within their constituencies. An exceptional case in the Fifth District is the new candidate Jiraporn Sindhuprai, who gained the most votes in the province. She is the daughter of Nisit and Aim-orn Sindhuprai, former MPs, and a leader of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), or Red Shirts as it is commonly called. The family has continuously worked in the District,

leading to its strong support and close relationship with local voters.

Concerning political activities and the role of the junta in the province prior to the election date, it was mentioned that they investigated both by direct visit to the area and by playing a role in the negotiation and mediation of various disputes. The junta also exerted indirect influence through development projects. Moreover, their activity in the area included surveying popular opinion about the political parties and the government[3]. Furthermore, the Junta's machines played a role in monitoring and observing the campaigns and other activities. When the candidates of anti-Junta parties gave speeches or attended public meetings, they were subjected to intermediation through practices such as taking photos, recording videos, and observation.

The number of outstanding candidates and the degree of party popularity along with the junta's intervention affects forms of campaigning in constituencies. These factors shape the nature of competition among party candidates, including using their machines to achieve success in the election. Furthermore, the possibility of political parties forming a government after the election, including the preference for parties and candidates was important by voters[4]. Conditions differ from previous elections in 2007 and 2011 where party branding was a significant factor in motivating voters' decisions.

V. The 2019 Election

On 24 March 2019, the national ballot was released, and followed by long-delayed results in May. According to fieldwork and participant observation, it is clear that public and private sectors alike, including civil society, participated less in voter awareness campaigns or providing information about new rules. On the contrary, candidates and their campaign staff took more action to introduce voters to a new form of polling card.[5]

Figure 3: Comparison of Voter Turnout in the 2007, 2011, and 2019 Thailand General Elections in Roi-Et Province
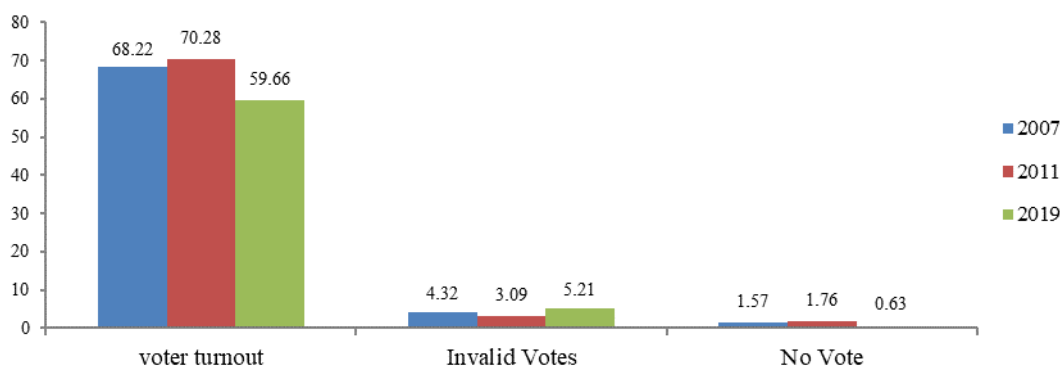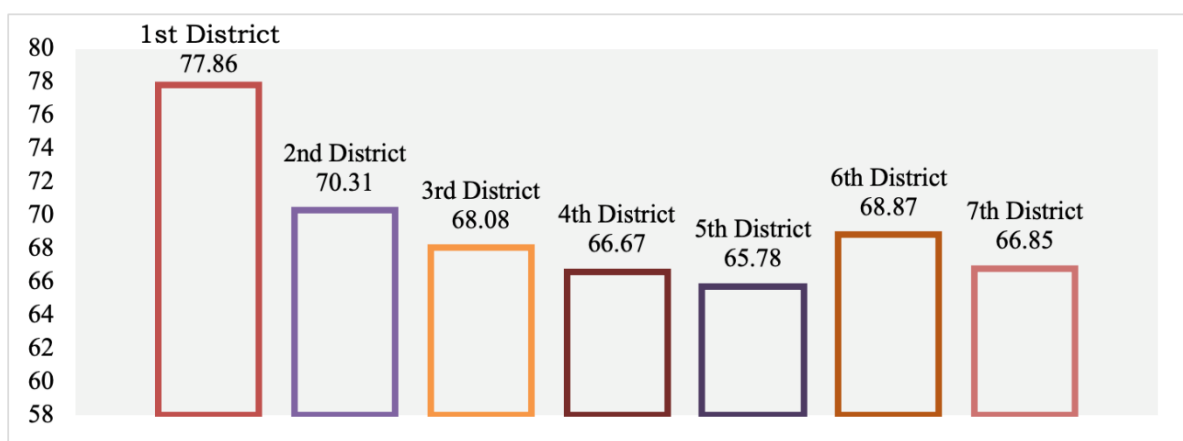

Source: Office of the Provincial Election Commission of Roi-Et

Figure 3 compares the rates of voter turnout in the 2007, 2011, and 2019 elections. Turnout for the 2019 election was lower than the two previous elections. This may be because the 2007 election was the first election following the 2006 coup, and the 2011 election occurred in an atmosphere of political conflict, with an increased number of invalid votes and non-voting ballots as compared to the previous elections. It could be said that increased voter turnout is a result of extreme political situations, which influence an increased desire to vote. In 2019, there were a high number of candidates and keynote addresses were organized many times for leaders of various political parties within the province. Moreover, the expansion of access to social media and the combined experiences from a decade of political turbulence and dissatisfaction with the economy, especially among farmers as the primary economic sector of the province, strongly impacted people's awareness of the election[6]. These factors are what drove people from their houses to the ballot boxes, not only to express their opposition, but also to defend the Junta. It could be said that voters were discouraged from voting in 2019 because they recognized the junta would win the election.

Figure 4: Proportion of Voter Turnout in Each District of Roi-Et Province

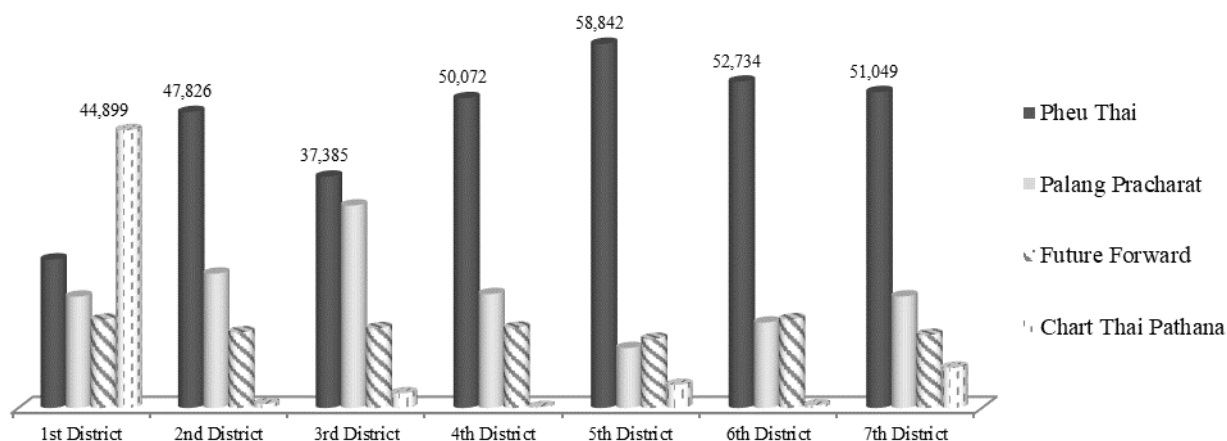*Source*: Office of the Provincial Election Commission of Roi-Et

Concerning the relationship between the intensity of competition and the level of voter turnout, this study observed that the higher the intensity of competition, the higher the voter turnout. In contrast, the constituencies with lower rates of competition tend to have lower rates of voter turnout (Norris, 2004; Jordan, 2017). Figure 4 demonstrates that the First District had the highest percent of voter turnout, while the Fifth District, which was completely dominated by a candidate from a powerful family, had the lowest percentage of voter turnout. This is similar to the Seventh District, where there was only one outstanding candidate in the constituency who dominated the popular base and party popularity. Within the areas of high-competition between candidates from the two major parties, namely the Second, Third, and Fourth Districts, the ratio of voter turnout did not vary much. Unlike the First District with its high rate of voter turnout, this district faced competition between three former MPs. Thus, it can be said that the number of prominent candidates in each constituency is one of the factors that motivates people to exercise their voting rights.

Regarding election results, figure 5 shows that the candidates from the Pheu Thai Party were elected in six districts from a total of seven constituencies, representing 321,908 of the provincial votes, or 47.20 percent. Meanwhile, the Palang Pracharat Party, without an elected candidate, received a total of 132,328 votes, placing it in second place with 19.40 percent. The Future Forward Party was in the third rank with 89,628 votes or 13.14 percent. However, the Chart Thai Pattana Party, which only received a total of 58,836 votes or 8.63 percent, won a seat in the First District where it counted 44,899 votes or about 76 percent.

Figure 5: The 2019 Thailand General Election Result in Roi-Et Province

Source: Office of the Provincial Election Commission of Roi-Et

The voting results in each constituency can be divided into two categories based on the total number of votes received by each candidate. The first category is the constituency in which the winner had a decisive lead. Most of the winners in most of the districts gained over 20,000 more votes than the candidates who came in second place. This is particularly true in the First District where there was a sizeable margin between the votes for Anurak Jureemas and the second-highest elected candidate from the Pheu Thai Party. Throughout Roi-Et province, the Pheu Thai Party received its lowest number of votes in the First District.

Another category is the constituency in which the winner does not have a large lead in the vote. This means that the winner in each district did not receive a significantly higher number of votes than the runner-up. This situation occurred in the constituencies where there was a high level of competition between strong candidates. In the Third Constituency, Niramit Sucharee from the Pheu Thai Party defeated Aekkaphap Phonseu, a

candidate from the PPRP, by just 4,670 votes. This led to an electoral offenses complaint, which is being processed by the Provincial Election Commission.

VI. Clientelistic Strategies

Concerning the strategies used in the election, patron-client ties have returned as the most fundamental type in Thai politics as branding less important. It can be seen that vote canvassers and vote-buying as the old-style strategies still exist along with new technologies that enable network operations. Within the context of socio-economic and institutional changes, clientelistic networks have different forms that are illustrated through political activities as follows:

Network of local politicians and vote canvassers

The first model of a vote canvassers' network is a horizontal structure that it is divided into three layers - the district government, sub-district, and villages. This strategy is mainly used by brokers who have the authority to contact and distribute resources to lower brokers and voters. This type of network is usually led by local officials and local politicians in the area. As a traditional model, it is mostly based on face-to-face relationships (see Anyarat, 2010), as most participants already know one another. According to the fieldwork, many vote canvassers had worked for a specific candidate for a long time and the election brought them back together again. The influence of the candidate and relevant brokers is a significant factor that impacts the efficiency of these networks.

Figure 6: The Three Layers of the Vote Canvassers Network
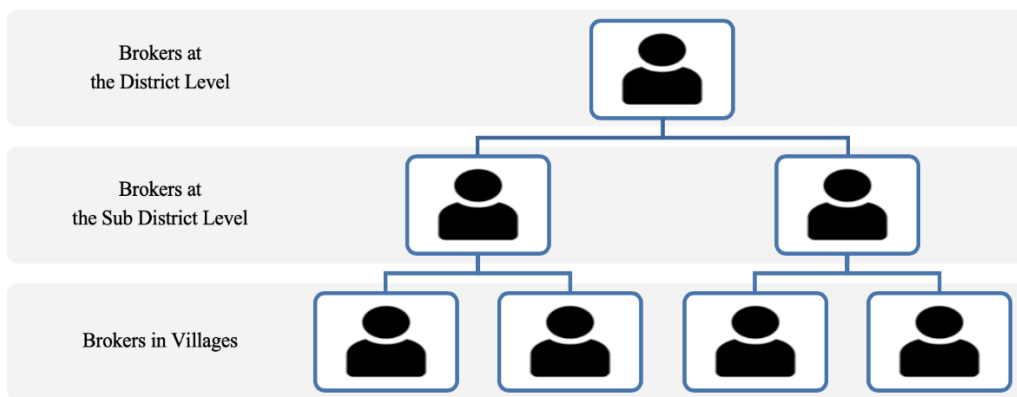
Another type of network is more vertical than that of the previous model. As can be seen from Figure 7, the candidate takes part in this network by working through the coordinator to contact and share information with the vote canvassers and supporters in each area. The networks in the area also support the candidate by organizing events for speeches and campaign rallies. Most members within different nodes have never met one another in person. They typically share information and communicate through group messenger applications, especially LINE, which has become a popular tool for communication. Such applications increase access to information and provide various channels for people to interact, both with each other and with political parties and their candidates.

Figure 7: The Two Layers of the Vote Canvassers' Network
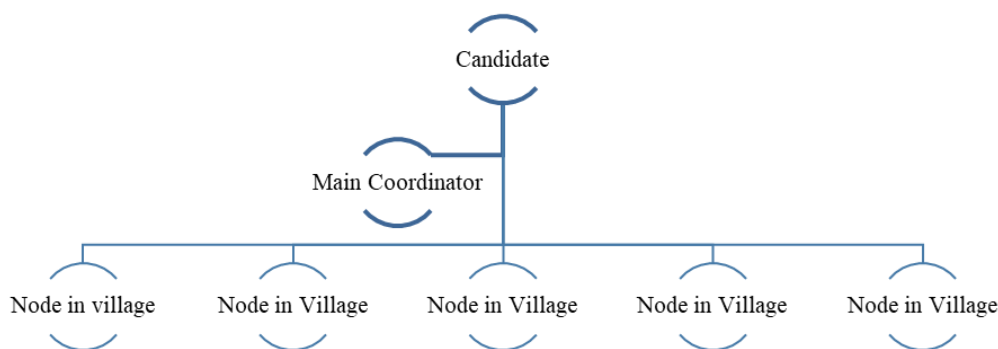
Vote-Buying

As a traditional clientelistic strategy, vote-buying remains a prevalent factor in elections. The fieldwork determined that some candidates bought votes during rallies and before the election, both in the suburbs and in some rural areas. People were mobilised to attend campaign rallies as they received 100-300 baht to participate, and drivers or vote canvassers who took these participants to the rallies received 500 baht. Moreover, voters were paid up until the night before Election Day, and even after the election ended. It was also observed that voters also requested money from the candidates, especially when they met the candidates at a public speech or when participating in campaign activities.

Money was not spent only on voters, but also on key persons who could be potential vote canvassers, such as local politicians, officials, and village health volunteers. Figure 8 shows the amounts of money that candidates from two of the political parties paid to vote canvassers. The vote canvassers were expected to assist candidates in sharing information about other candidates, mobilising people to attend speech events, and plan the campaign. It can be worthwhile for candidates to coordinate with these local influential figures because they do not only function in elections, but also operate over a wide range of political activities.

Table 1: Remuneration of Local Leaders in Various Positions for Running the Campaign

Positions	Candidate A	Candidate B
	Amount of remuneration for running the campaign (Bath)	
Mayor , Chief Executive of the Sub district Administrative Organization	10,000	2,000
Sub district Headman	3,000-5,000	3,000
Village Headman	2,000- 3,000	1,500
Assistant Village Headman	800	-
Village Health Volunteers	1,200	-

Source: Author's own fieldwork

It must also be acknowledged that the Junta's rules provide both rewards for allies and punishments for opponents. This could explain why key local actors work openly with the candidates of the PPRP while also maintaining good relationships with candidates from other parties. Furthermore, a higher degree of competition in the districts may influence local politicians and other relevant actors to design and implement their strategies more carefully in order to achieve their goal of sustaining power. This is due to the heightened resistance from voters against the junta that comes in a more competitive area.

Although vote canvasser networks and vote-buying are two separate phenomena, they are interlinked. The general way to explain the connection between candidates and voters focuses on establishing and extending networks, including strengthening the influence of vote canvassers to mobilise voters as candidates are not able to meet all of the constituents themselves. Nonetheless, the outcome of decentralization and the rise of the Thai Rak Thai Party created political networks that linked the voting bases of political parties and local politics. Ockey (2017) explains that such conditions often lead to cooperation amongst national and local politics, including integration of resources and strengthened collaboration through voter loyalties and political patronage. It can be said that even though the outcome of the 2014 military coup created a gap between national and local politicians, notably considering that deconcentrated bodies replaced the leading roles of elected local politicians, peer groups still exist for coordinating operations amongst political parties, candidates, and voters.

In the political campaigns of today's elections, vote canvassing and vote buying appear to be much less influential on the voter's decision than in previous elections. The factors that instead have a strong influence on people's choices include policy competition, loyalties developed from the decade-long ideological struggle of Thai political conflict, the economic growth at both national and local levels, and the popularity of the government in regard to the political situation at that time. Both traditional and modern methods of campaigning were used during this election. It was found that many social media applications became popular tools for communication, increasing access to information and providing various channels for people to interact, both with each other and with political parties and candidates. Moreover, online platforms provided an excellent opportunity to create space in the election campaign, facilitating reduced costs and decreased limitations for many candidates. These modern technologies are used in campaign management to link, expand, and strengthen networks.

To further understand the political context of the province during the electoral competition, three cases were selected to discuss how political parties campaigned during the election and what conditions shaped their strategies for success, as follows:

Pheu Thai: Political Family Alliances

The Pheu Thai Party has been popular in Roi-Et Province, and throughout the region, since the 2005 election when it ran under the name of the Thai Rak Thai Party (see Somchai, 2008) , and in subsequent elections as the Phalang Prachachon Party. Following the 2014 coup, the Pheu Thai Party and its affiliated politicians drastically reduced their roles in public activities. Although the Pheu Thai Party's candidates in some constituencies have been criticised for maintaining their ties with local people, the popularity of the party is still stable. The number of votes for the Pheu Thai Party illustrates the popular perception that their policy initiatives are high performing, respond to people's needs, and have the potential to be implemented as a government policy. Also, people's resistance to the Junta has strengthened the idea that non-democratic forces are unable to govern the country legitimately and efficiently (see Saowanee, 2019). Compared to previous elections, however, it can be said that the Pheu Thai Party and its candidates have faced significant hardship in accessing both state resources and opportunities to participate in various projects with local administrative organizations to maintain their popularity. Hence, the Pheu Thai Party's candidates must consider reviving old alliances, creating a new group of supporters, and creating anti-Junta campaigns.

The selection of candidates to represent the Pheu Thai Party prioritized former MPs and political family members (see Ockey, 2015). This was particularly true of the Fifth District where Nisit Sindhuprai led the vote. As previously mentioned, he is a leader of the Red Shirt movement and a former MP of the Fifth District. For the 2019 election, Nisit supported his daughter's election, although his sister, Jureeporn Sinduprai, a prominent leader of the Red Shirt movement in the East region, and his brother, Wichienchanin Sinduprai, were also seeking the seat. Finally, his sister decided to move to a rival party, the PPRP, as a party-list candidate[7], while his brother joined the Future Forward Party.

While the Red Shirt movement has been a strong supporter of the Pheu Thai Party since its establishment in 2005; it has become weaker in its activism efforts. However, it still exists as a form of political resistance in the area. Most of the Red Shirts have continually supported the Pheu Thai Party, but recently many have spread out to support candidates from other political parties, especially the Future-Forward Party, a new party that has a strong stance against the Junta. Although many Red Shirt leaders in the province became campaign managers and vote canvassers for the Future Forward Party, some former Red Shirt leaders went back to supporting the candidates from the Pheu Thai Party, owing to the fact that the high level of competition in the Third District meant that the Pheu Thai Party could potentially lose its seat[8].

The election results demonstrated that although the Pheu Thai Party was the dominant political party in the province, it received fewer votes than in previous elections, meaning that voters are seeking alternative ways to support their political goals. However, political families in Roi-Et have strong bonds, supporting each other both in the election and in other

political activities. This strategy effectively helped the Pheu Thai Party to survive and maintain its power.

Palang Pracharat Party: Multiple Factions with State Resources

As one of the major parties of the election, the PPRP is recognized as being pro-Junta and as part of the Junta's machine, which provides it with significant competitive advantages. These advantages include an immense budget, campaigns supported by government policies, and both soft and hard infrastructure projects. The soft programs refer to non-infrastructure projects (Bjarnegård,2010), such as livelihood support programs that increase allowances for the elderly and grassroots fundraising. The hard programs refer to small infrastructure projects under the decentralized bodies, from governors to village heads. As the monopoly policy provider, rival parties cannot compete with the Junta's party in the provisions of resources.

Compared to parties on the opposing side, the PPRP is not watched closely by the Junta. This means that the PPRP's candidates are not controlled, but rather supported by government agencies. For candidate recruitment, the PPRP invited and encouraged both former politicians and new candidates who already had a strong base of supporters in the area. These candidates were selected from different factions (see Punchada, 2019b). For instance, the candidates in the First, Second and Third Districts were led by Aekkaphap Phonseu, while the candidate in the Fourth District was promoted by an influential party member, and the candidate in the Seventh District was close to Suchart Tanchareon's faction. However, the conflict that resulted

from competitive candidate selection also affected the party's political ties within the province [9].

On the other side, former Red Shirt leaders and local politicians became the candidates for the Fifth and Sixth Districts. It could be said that these candidates moved to the PPRP for various reasons. Some were looking to survive the current political struggles, some did not have a chance to become a candidate for the Pheu Thai Party, and others were seeking to gain resources for the next election. However, rumors spread through the media claiming that the PPRP paid political compensation, negatively impacting the image of the party and its candidates. Gaining popularity within the constituency, therefore, became more difficult. Based on the fieldwork, most candidates focused more strongly on their own campaigns instead of party branding. That being said, the lack of success of PPRP candidates throughout various constituencies in Roi-Et illustrates the area's high degree of resistance to the military government.

Anurak Jureemas: The Old Clan Revives

Even though the Pheu Thai Party is the dominant party in the province, it lost the First District seat to Anurak Jureemas, the candidate from the Chat Thai Pattana Party. Anurak is the most influential member of the Jureemas family as a former member of parliament in both the constituency and on the party list. Although he failed in the three general elections since 2007, his political potential garners local support. His networks within the constituency make him a good ally to have, for all concerned groups and the military, in the province. His supporters,

mainly based in urban areas, are a strong power base for Mayor Bunjong Kosajiranund, who is his brother-in-law and leader of the members of Roi-Et Municipality Council, team called 'Pithak Thongtin' or the 'Local Protector' Group. Bunjong and this local team have dominated the municipality for over twenty years without any challenges (Suthikarn, 2019), and these local officials and community leaders also support Anurak. Moreover, the weakness of the rivals, in terms of party loyalty and candidate popularity, is a significant factor that provides favorable conditions for his candidacy. Thus, the influence of the Jureemas family's power can be good evidence, meriting further investigation that the clientelistic networks organize around powerful families rather than political parties.

Figure 9: Policy Campaign of Anurak Jureemas in the 2019 General Election

Furthering the impact of his personal popularity, figure 9 illustrates the development plan of Roi-Et city as it aligns with Anurak's policy campaigns. These policies have been formulated in line with the plans supported by business and local sectors[10]. More importantly, the strong ties between Anurak and the municipality, including government agencies in the province, as well as his party's decision to remain moderate during the period of political conflict, are significant factors that led to Anurak's election in the district.

These cases demonstrate that the capability of political parties and their candidates in the election relates is strongly related to access to resources. This includes the budget for running a campaign, but also includes link to networks and acquiring state authorities' support. Moreover, tightening relationships in clans and flexible collaboration among actors in networks provide advantages for maintaining and enhancing power under the current political conditions. These factors shape the different roles of actors in networks during electoral competition.

VII. The General Election and its Effects on Local Politics

The results of the 2019 general election illustrated the changes in the

political landscape and nature of political competition in Roi-Et province, particularly in local politics. This became clear after the endorsement of the election results. Compared to other parties in the province, Pheu Thai was the first party to be actively involved in campaigning for local elections by publicly announcing the candidacy of Seksit Wiyiyomphong for the role of Chief Minister of the Provincial Administrative Organisation under the slogan *'Better Roi-Et'*. This official announcement differs from previous local elections, as it is the first time that a local candidate represents its party with full support from both the party leaders and the MPs, including prominent politicians in Roi-Et province. It will be an excellent opportunity for maintaining and expanding the popularity of the Pheu Thai Party at the local level, especially while they are not in the government[11]. Likewise, the Future Forward party has already announced the names of the candidates for the upcoming election of Provincial Administrative Organization representatives.

Figure 10: A Campaign Poster of the Candidate of the Pheu Thai Party for the Election of the Role of Chief Minister Provincial Administrative Organization

In contrast, the PPRP did not actively operate local campaigns. This could result from two main factors. The first is that the nature of cooperation among party candidates lacks unity because they are under different factions. The second is that the party candidates have their own popular bases in their own constituencies. This is because party candidates and their networks tend to take part in local elections by separating from the party and focusing only on their own bases as opposed to party-wide campaigns. Most other small parties have not established local branches or member bases within the province. Potential candidates often move to a new party to increase their likelihood of being elected, both at local and national levels[12].

VIII. Conclusion

The election results in Roi-Et province demonstrate that party loyalty has loosened, meaning that voters are seeking alternative ways to support their goals. As a result, the political landscape of the province has changed to open-area politics from the previous domination of popularity by the Pheu Thai Party. Also,

the function of the clientelistic network has become unstable and can be adjusted by changing the level of competition and cooperation in different contexts, such as elections or political conflict. More significantly, this study found that the most efficient clientele-electoral networks are organized around families that have connections to the Pheu Thai Party. Moreover, networks are more likely to support candidates or powerful families than political parties. These changes will significantly impact party popularity within the province.

This research notes that the outcome of the general election will encourage former candidates and political parties to seek the opportunity to be elected in other political roles. In particular, the coming local elections will play an essential role in recruiting and supporting local political candidates. As the Junta government and its political machines control national politics, the opposition parties and other forces must settle for local elections to establish and maintain their power. Local politics will, therefore, not only become a significant platform for power, but the local networks will also become a bridge that connects both local and national forces.

However, the selected area and issues limit the content of this study. Collecting research across various provinces and regions would provide more empirical evidence and may find more patterns of competition in different contexts, particularly in areas that have more diversity of voters in terms of class, ethnic, and existing social cleavages. Moreover, the article would benefit from further consideration of the roles of new significant parties, such as the Future Forward Party, which could represent a new form of network in which party preferences were established via online platforms without the network operating in the area. Therefore, this would provide a better picture of the dynamic networks that are enabling new forms of relationships and linkages between parties and voters in modern Thai electoral politics.

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Notes

[1] Political parties refer to their party leaders, influential party members, and prominent factions, including their machines at local levels.

[2] Hundreds of activists and protesters were arrested after the coup. Moreover "attitude adjustment" has become a popular method used by the Junta to threaten its critics. See at https://www.scmp.com/news/ asia/ southeast-asia/article/1859533/attitude-adjustment-methods -used-thai-junta-silence-its (18 September 2015).

[3] Interview with local media in Roi-Et ,23 May 2019, and focus group discussions with local community leaders in Roi-Et,16 April 2019.

[4] Interview with candidate from New Economics Party, Roi-Et Province, 26 May 2019.

[5] Interview with candidate from Thai Citizen Party, Roi-Et Province, 20 May 2019.

[6] Interview with Pheu Thai MP for Roi-Et, Online interview, 8 July 2019.

[7]Interview with a member of the provincial council who supports a candidate of the Pheu Thai party, Roi-Et Province, 23 May 2019. However, Jureeporn was accused of switching her party because her business in Chonburi province had been threatened by the NCPO.

[8]Interview with former Red Shirt leader, Roi-Et Province, 20 May 2019.

[9]Interview with candidate from Palang Pracharat Party, Roi-Et Province, 1 May 2019 and local media, Roi-Et Province, 18 April 2019.

[10] Interview with former Chairman of Roi-Et Chamber of Commerce, Roi-Et Province, 24 May 2019.

[11]Interview with Pheu Thai MP for Roi-Et, Roi-Et Province, 28 May 2019.

[12]For example, Kan Chokklangdeun, a former candidate of the Prachathamthai Party in the Sixth District, switched to the Future Forward Party to run for Roi-Et Provincial Council. Likewise, Sinenart Wareerat, a former candidate of the New Alternative Party in the Second District, moved to the Pheu Thai Party for the upcoming local election.

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