

rather than the proportional outcomes of the 1980s and 90s (Hicken 2013). In the end, the institutions worked just as we would expect. Finally, note that the 2019 election results reinforce the argument for the role of institutions. The changes to the electoral system in the 2017 constitution, namely the shift to a much more proportional system, did have the intended effect of helping to re-fragment the party system in the 2019 election (Hicken and Selway 2019).

In conclusion, I commend Dr. Caraway for her incisive analysis, and the interesting and productive debate it has generated; this is exactly what good social science is about.

**Allen Hicken** is Professor of Political Science, a Research Professor at the Center for Political Studies, and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Michigan. He is the author of *Building Party Systems in Developing Democracies* (Cambridge University Press). He is the editor of *Politics of Modern Southeast Asia: Critical Issues in Modern Politics* (Routledge) and coeditor of *Party and Party System Institutionalization in Asia* (Cambridge) and *Electoral Dynamics in the Philippines: Money Politics, Patronage and Clientelism at the Grassroots* (NUS).

#### NOTES

1. By way of comparison, the Gallagher index of disproportionality is 2.7 in 1996 compared to 11 in 2001.
2. For an analysis of the conflict between local political groups brought about by the shift to single-member districts, see Prajak 2014.

#### REFERENCES

- Hicken, Allen. 2009. *Building Party Systems in Developing Democracies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2013. "Late to the Party: The Development of Partisanship in Thailand." *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 1 (2): 199–213.
- Hicken, Allen, and Joel Sawat Selway. 2019. "Containment Failure? Military-Led Electoral Reform in Thailand." Working paper.
- Prajak, Kongkirati. 2014. "The Rise and Fall of Electoral Violence in Thailand: Changing Rules, Structures and Power Landscapes, 1997–2011." *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 36 (3): 386–416.

### *Joel Sawat Selway*

doi:10.1017/jea.2020.27

Teri Caraway is to be commended for making a provocative argument concerning the role of electoral rules in Thai Rak Thai's (TRT) rise to power. Usefully distinguishing between the initial rise of TRT in the first election under Thailand's new rules in 2001 and the subsequent reproduction of its dominance in subsequent elections, Caraway argues that electoral rules merely contributed to the scale of the victory in 2001 and helped TRT complete their term in the latter period. I maintain, however, that electoral reform was a necessary condition of TRT's initial victory as well and that Caraway's claim of a sufficient condition is too strong.

Moreover, I argue that financial muscle made a difference not solely (or even primarily) by inducing standing MPs to defect or in vote-buying, as Caraway suggests, but also in the political marketing of its policies, policies that were developed in response to the new institutional incentives that the PR upper tier created.

Lastly, Caraway ignores the existence of contamination effects in mixed-member systems: even though the upper tier was numerically smaller, the fact that elite politicians (e.g. party leaders and heads of factions) ran on this tier provided incentives for them to induce constituency candidates to emphasize policy.

#### THE SUFFICIENT CONDITION CLAIM: REQUIRED EVIDENCE

Was TRT's "financial muscle" a sufficient condition in "TRT's initial victory in 2001"? Before proceeding, it is important to clearly articulate what we mean by victory. TRT did not win a majority of seats, though some defections in the post-election period gave the party a majority. It is also clearly not all 248 seats (out of 500) that TRT won, since Caraway concedes that PR contributed to the "scale of TRT's victory." In her essay, Caraway emphasizes the numerically larger number of constituency seats as evidence that PR could not have been the decisive factor. So it could be that she is referring to all 200 constituency seats that TRT won. Another possibility is that Caraway simply means winning the most seats in the elections, i.e. having more seats than the second-placed party, the Democrat party with its 128 seats. While it is not entirely clear from Caraway's account whether she means just 129 or all 200 constituency seats, she does clearly state: "It was TRT's war chest that assured it victory in the vastly more numerous constituency seats that were essential to becoming the largest party in parliament."

So, the key question is whether Caraway provides enough evidence that TRT's financial resources were sufficient to secure 129 seats. The bulk of these 129 seats according to Caraway's argument consists of the approximately 100 standing MPs that defected to TRT from other parties. How did TRT's financial muscle play a role for these 100 MPs? First, we are told that "TRT used its deep pockets to suck up former MPs from other parties, paying them transfer fees, monthly allowances, and substantial election funds."<sup>1</sup> Do we have evidence that all 100 MPs defected for exclusively, or at minimum decisively, for financial reasons?

Caraway gives us no evidence on this front. There is reference to some literature that discusses financial inducements as incentives to defect, but that literature is mostly anecdotal, with reference to one or two specific examples at most, and mostly reporting what was broadly perceived amongst TRT's opponents and observers of Thai politics (the media, academics). This does not mean it is not true, but smoking-gun evidence would be a detailed list of all 100 MPs and their stated motivations for leaving. Only then could we overturn several detailed accounts that rely on interviews with MPs, party leaders, and voters that the new electoral rules mattered in the 2001 elections.

Second, we are also told that "Only those with great confidence in the solidity of their networks were likely to refuse TRT's financial support." The converse, then, is that only those with low confidence in their networks were likely to be induced financially by TRT. This implies that they were, on average, weaker candidates less likely to win. Caraway claims that TRT used its financial muscle to assist these candidates in winning in two ways: buying off vote canvassers and other key local figures, such as

local politicians to build traditional Thai political clientelistic structures and “providing ample sums of money to deliver the clientelistic rewards that voters expected.” That both these activities occurred is not in question here. What is in question is the degree TRT’s national party brand and public policies—both of which were direct products of the new institutional environment—also played a role in helping them secure victory. The evidence we would need is from the voters: why did they choose TRT candidates over others? While Caraway does not provide that evidence, institutionalist accounts have, showing that party branding and communication of TRT’s policy platform was a key part of campaigning in constituencies.

We would also need to ask the same question of the 29 additional constituency seats in question.<sup>2</sup> How was TRT’s war chest a sufficient condition for these 29 seats? The same two logics of buying off traditional local political networks and providing money for clientelistic rewards seems to be the answer. We would again need similar evidence of voting intentions.

We don’t have to address the remaining 71 constituency seats victors in order to assess the sufficiency claim that Caraway posits about TRT financial resources, unless we conclude that money was not the deciding factor in some of the 100 defector seats. Regardless, the evidence we would be looking for is, again, the voting intentions of the electorate.

Either way, to support Caraway’s “TRT finances as a sufficient condition” we would need to see that voters did not consider policies or the party brand in their decisions, and that old-style clientelistic relationships were decisive. On the institutionalists’ side, if we can provide evidence that the new electoral rules contributed to a count of 119 seats or more—rather than just 48 seats—then the sufficiency claim is disproved.

A necessary condition seems more plausible. It is hard to demonstrate that candidates, even those that defected to TRT, did *not* campaign on TRT policy and that voters—whether the local candidate campaigned on TRT policy or not—had not heard about TRT policy from other sources (e.g. the news, where it was widely discussed) and developed a policy preference external to local campaign efforts. Thus, whether they believed policy credible or not does not mean that it had no effect in swaying their vote choice.

#### EVIDENCE: PARTY SWITCHING DUE TO FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

TRT was established on July 14, 1998. Between that time and the January 6, 2001 elections, roughly 2.5 years, approximately 100 MPs defected to TRT. However, we have no evidence as to how many of those 100 candidates defected due to financial incentives. Caraway cites several studies that state that TRT offered financial incentives. Simply asking MPs whether they switched due to financial reasons would result, as it often did during this period, in stark denials and the citing of other motivations. We do know that the Democrat Party regularly accused TRT of trying to buy off its members<sup>3</sup> through up-front payment (switching fee),<sup>4</sup> a monthly salary<sup>5</sup> or allowance as a candidate of the party, and campaign financial support in various guises, from use of an office to marketing and even vote buying. Even with financial incentives, though, there were likely other reasons for switching party.

Media reports frequently noted defections, but financial inducements were not always part of the reports. I surveyed news reports from the English-language newspaper

*Bangkok Post*. Sixty-one articles that mentioned “Thai Rak Thai” and “defect” were examined; in the Appendix to this roundtable, I provide more evidence from this survey. Although not an exhaustive list of all defections, the survey does reveal that financial inducements were one frequently cited motivation for switching parties. These financial inducements were not exclusive to TRT, though the evidence seems to suggest they offered higher average levels of the various types of inducements.<sup>6</sup> However, this survey also reveals that they were not the primary reason—whether found in claims made by defecting MPs or by leaders of the original party.<sup>7</sup> Other justifications included MPs disagreements on cabinet posts,<sup>8</sup> ideological reasons,<sup>9</sup> personal fallouts with party leaders,<sup>10</sup> following a faction leader in defection,<sup>11</sup> increasing support for TRT among constituents,<sup>12</sup> fatigue with the governing coalition,<sup>13</sup> no reason at all,<sup>14</sup> and the desire to join a successful party.<sup>15</sup>

It is also instructive to examine whether MPs defected to other parties, and if so, their stated reasons for switching. Many other MPs switched to other parties during the same period. If it were financial reasons alone, and TRT dominated in that area, then it is difficult to explain switching to any other party at all, other than TRT perhaps filling up. Yet we know that most of these other defections were to the Democrats, the other large party.<sup>16</sup> Why this party as the alternative defection destination?

An institutional story provides the answer. Prior to the emergence of TRT, the Democrats were the largest party in the Thai political system and it was under Democrat rule that the new constitution was ushered in. The Democrats had historically been the most policy-oriented party in Thai history, and this new constitution was largely seen as consolidating their rule. This is something Bangkok capitalists would have been eager to ensure given the corrupt, pork-barrel politics that largely caused the financial crisis in the first place.

What this pattern seems to suggest—switching to the two largest parties—is that candidates understood something about the new electoral rules and how it favored large parties. Thus, even without financial inducements, it made sense to defect to the Democrats since they were predicted to win the next elections for most of post-reform period and prior to the first elections under the new constitution (1997–2001). Indeed, one of the latest polls in December 26–27, 2000, by the Rajabhat Institutes had the Democrats on top.<sup>17</sup>

In sum, financial incentives were not the sole reason for defection.

#### EVIDENCE: MONEY AND ELECTORAL SUCCESS

Even though these 100 MPs switched to TRT, did TRT's financial resources guarantee them victory? The assumption at first appears to be one of incumbency advantage: the candidates were guaranteed to re-win their seats and thus the very act of switching guaranteed TRT these 100 seats. First, incumbency clearly wasn't everything since TRT itself won at least 100 constituency seats against mostly incumbents. However, Caraway also argues that the MPs most sure of their networks (i.e. the most likely to win in a new election) had the least need for money and therefore did not switch. This is not entirely true. Some defectors were powerful local figures and did not need TRT's finances. The most well-known defector was Sanoh Tientong, leader of a powerful faction of MPs in the lower Isan area. Sanoh not only had a virtual monopoly over local networks in the Eastern border, but also enormous financial capabilities. There were other Sanoh-like figures who defected to TRT. In short, not all 100 defected for financial reasons. This

is problematic for Caraway's argument—if only weak candidates switched, TRT's financial muscle in inducing them to switch did not guarantee them victory. We are then forced to look at the other ways money mattered. If strong MPs switched too, then they likely did not switch for purely financial incentives, if at all.

So, how else does Caraway say money mattered? These weaker defectors would benefit from TRT's financial clout in two ways: buying off traditional local political networks and providing money for clientelistic rewards. What pieces of evidence would we be looking for? First, we would want to know if these candidates ran their campaigns in this way and ignored, or greatly minimized TRT policy. In addition, voters were not unaware of TRT's policies since they were widely discussed in the news. Thus, we also need to know if voters made their decisions at least in part on policy.

Let's start with the TRT-nominated candidates, who tended to be new to politics, younger, highly-educated candidates who toed the party line. They were more versed in TRT policy and more ideologically committed to the party. TRT fielded such candidates in 300 constituencies around the country. This is one piece of evidence that clearly doesn't fit with the financial resources argument. Even if they did benefit from TRT finances, they still campaigned heavily on TRT policy. Thus, it would be crucial in these cases to consult voter motivations. They were clearly exposed to TRT policy in local contests, so simply saying money mattered more cannot pass the evidentiary bar.

Survey data from just after the 2001 election can shed some light on whether voters cast their vote for a party they believed in for policy reasons or just to the highest bidder (vote buying). The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) asks questions on whether voters were satisfied with the electoral process, whether political parties are necessary, and whether it makes a difference who is in power. These questions are by no means perfect indicators of why people voted in 2001, but we would expect low outcomes on all these questions if Caraway was correct. More importantly, if party policies and their willingness and ability to implement those policies once in power did not influence voters in their vote choice, then we are especially likely to see weak outcomes of the last two measures.

First, 76.94 percent of respondents (N = 1032) said they were satisfied with the democratic process. This indicates an electorate which thinks the process is generally free and fair. This squares with the qualitative literature on vote buying in the 2001 election: voters took the money, usually from >1 candidate, and mostly made their decisions regardless (Hicken 2007b). Second, 81.59 percent of respondents indicated that political parties are necessary. Coupled with the results of the last question—69.33 percent of people think that it matters who you vote for—there seems to be evidence that a not insignificant percentage of the electorate in 2001 made their decisions not solely based on the amount of money local candidates wielded.

How could money have mattered? I think this is perhaps captured by a quotation from the election period: “Matichon says the telecoms tycoon (Thaksin) has yet to take on the part of Father Christmas. So far, the party has helped new members with bits and pieces such as campaign expenses, posters and such. It is no wonder Thai Rak Thai posters are seen everywhere upcountry.”<sup>18</sup>

Why posters? What did the posters say? The answer is “policy, policy, policy,” coupled with the party logo. And those elements then added to the local candidate's name and face. If money played any role, it was in political marketing. But political marketing played a very different role in 2001 than it did in any previous election. Why?

Because the institutional incentives had changed. The influence of the PR national tier coupled with money gave local candidates a huge boost from strong national policies. And voters were demanding them: Sutham Saengprathum said “During campaigning, we will repeatedly hear two questions: Who will rescue the country from the economic crisis? And which party has the proven integrity needed for political reform?”<sup>19</sup> The Thai electorate had a much higher understanding of policy than Caraway’s account affords.

#### CONTAMINATION EFFECTS

One final point Caraway ignores is contamination effects within mixed electoral systems. She is correct to point out that single-member districts eliminate intra-party competition. But that is only one part of the story. Thus, it is not just the number of PR seats, though more seats would have strengthened this effect even more, but the orientation of politics that the introduction of a single, national tier created, which had an effect beyond sheer numbers of seats. Contamination effects are a widely acknowledge part of institutional analysis in mixed-member systems, and they simply cannot be ignored here.

Caraway argues that the constituency tier is four times larger than the PR tier. Why then would voters care about this much smaller tier? Thai voters got a separate vote for the PR tier, thus parties’ success for these 100 extra seats (a not insignificant number given that the largest parties in past elections barely passed that number) relied solely on national prominence and party branding. Thai parties thus decided to run their top officials on this upper tier (Christensen and Selway 2017). They did so partly because said officials would be guaranteed these seats without having to campaign in the more uncertain constituencies. However, they also had strong incentives to build a list of individuals with national prominence. The result was that the campaigning orientation of the numerically-smaller tier contaminated dynamics in the constituency tier.

This is not to say that money and local *huakanaen* didn’t matter at all. They clearly did, but they were no longer decisive. Voters and candidates now also began to care about policy. National policies were now being talked about in a way never heretofore done. The incentives for party-list members at the margins to push the party’s policies to the constituency level were especially strong. My past work has shown that voters wanted to know the details of the policies and that MPs had to be versed in them in ways they did not have to previously (Selway 2011, Selway 2015).

Another important contamination effect has to do with party aggregation. Caraway treats local MPs as entirely independent from any consideration of national power and capturing of ministries. This was not true even in the pre-reform era. However, we know from electoral theory (Cox 1997) that PR is an important institutional aggregation incentive, predicting exactly what we observed in the 2001 elections: the transition from small, regionally-based parties to national ones. Caraway’s story is that a group of Bangkok-based capitalists funded the creation of TRT, buying off local MPs with money that they had *not* lost in the financial crisis.

Could there be even greater financial incentives from capturing ministries, though? Indeed, this was the big prize in the 1990s, and corruption and pork-barrel policies are strong evidence of that. The author seems to be implying that this all just stopped: that the money being offered by TRT and this group of rich capitalists was somehow bigger and that they did not care about ministry capture. There is no evidence given to

support such an assertion. If, in contrast, ministry capture was still the major prize of Thai elections, then perhaps being promised a safe PR seat associated with a ministership of vice-ministership was more valuable. Again, these PR-list candidates would then have incentives to play up party policy in the constituencies. The electoral rules gave incentives for local MPs to join the winning juggernaut—now not just a single ministry, but the entire government. In past elections, small groups of MPs could command a regional party and negotiate their way into a governing coalition, subsequently being awarded a ministry. However, under the new rules, there were strong signals that a single party would form and capture everything. Small parties were less able to compete. TRT brought professionals into the party to develop independent policy expertise (Harris and Selway 2020). They consulted ministries over pilot programs that they could bring into their party manifestos (Harris 2015). PR rules created strong incentives for aggregation across regions (Hicken 2009).

## CONCLUSION

Caraway has identified an important necessary condition that complements the work on the role of institutions in the rise of Thai Rak Thai. The evidence needed to establish a sufficient condition, however, is simply not there. Rather, I have shown that MPs defected to Thai Rak for a variety of reasons, not just money. Once under the TRT banner, they and other TRT constituency candidates relied on the party's financial resources for traditional Thai campaigning activities, such as recruiting vote canvassers and vote-buying. However, as past work has shown, those traditional activities mattered less in the 2001 elections. Instead, national policymaking became a crucial part of the electoral success of both the PR tier, made up of the party leaders and most prominent party members, but also the constituency candidates. TRT spent its money heavily on political marketing of its national policies. Those policies were all the buzz in any conversation during that election, and survey evidence shows faith in the democratic process, political parties, and the efficacy of their vote. That national policy mattered for constituency success is predicated by institutional theory, which theorizes about contamination effects in mixed-member systems. Contamination effects took on two forms: first, the party elite who were elected on the upper tier had strong electoral incentives to have local MPs disseminate information on party policies in order to maximize the separate PR vote. Second, the PR tier provided a national unit of analysis across which MPs would now aggregate—previously it had been limited to the sub-regional level, but now MPs were focused on national aggregation.

**Joel Sawat Selway** is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Brigham Young University. He writes on ethnicity and nationalism, the politics of healthcare, and constitutional design. Selway's first book, *Coalitions of the Wellbeing* (Cambridge 2015) explores the adoption of universal healthcare in the developing world. He has written extensively on Thailand with publications appearing in *World Politics*, *Journal of Asian Studies*, *Journal of East Asian Studies*, and *Southeast Asia Research*, among others. Selway's current projects include an edited volume with Amy Liu (UT Austin) on regionalism in Southeast Asia and a second book on nationalism and regional identities in Thailand. Selway is the co-editor of the ThaiDataPoints website (with Allen Hicken, Michigan) whose goal is to apply political science empirical and theoretical tools to contemporary Thai political issues in a timely manner.

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2020.27>.

## NOTES

1. Caraway cites Somchai 2008.
2. This minimal number of 100 seats against incumbents assumes that the 100 MPs that switched all won their contests.
3. “Chuan tries to play down remark about buying MPs,” *Bangkok Post (BP)*, 28 July 1999; “Democrats offered incentives to defect,” *BP* 19 March 2000.
4. The highest extreme was alleged to be 50 million baht! “My party’s rotten, says Boonchu,” *BP* 6 July 2000.
5. The monthly salary was purported to be 150,000. “Inprint—Election cheats denied their spoils,” *BP* 26 March 2000.
6. Chart Pattana and Chart Thai allegedly offered monthly salaries, with the latter said to be 30,000–100,000 baht compared to TRT’s 150,000. “Inprint—Election cheats denied their spoils,” *BP* 26 March 2000; “My party’s rotten, says Boonchu,” *BP* 6 July 2000.
7. I provide some examples in the following notes. A full list from the survey is provided in a supplementary appendix along with full citations.
8. For example, a group of Chart Pattana Party MPs left the party in October 1998 because they were not given cabinet positions in the previous cabinet reshuffle, *BP* 11 October 98. In September 2000, some democrat MPs left because Anant Anantakul was made secretary general instead of Sanan, *BP* 20 September 2000.
9. For example, Veerakorn Khamprakob, a Nakhon Sawan MP for the New Aspiration Party said he wanted to help “save the country”, *BP* 9 June 1999. Boonchu Trithong left Chart Thai because he opposed proposals to have party sponsors appointed as ministers, *BP* 6 July 2000.
10. For example, Chaturon and other “young turks” defected from the New Aspiration Party after a failed attempt to unseat Sanoh as party leader, *BP*, 8 May 1999. Laddawan Wongsriwong, the Democrat MP for Phayao, said she was not being “accorded due respect and dignity,” *BP*, 28 July 1999.
11. Pramual Roojanaseri defected along with Sanoh Thienthong’s entire 50-something Wang Nam Yen faction to Thai Rak Thai from New Aspiration, *BP* 23 Mar 2000.
12. Democrat candidate Laddawan Wongsriwong said most of her supporters in Payao had already switched to supporting TRT, “Terms of impalement,” *BP*, 31 July 1998.
13. “Opposition plays on Chuan fatigue,” *BP* 19 September 1999. The article discusses various parties and MPs and defection dynamics in response to fatigue with the Chuan-led government.
14. For example, no explanation was given for five Eastern Seaboard MPs defecting from Chart Pattana, *BP* 8 August 1999.
15. For example, many New Aspiration Party MPs defected to TRT because they wanted to join a successful party, *BP* 28 June 2000.
16. Three Ayutthaya MPs, Kumphol Savhavas, Boonphan Khaewattana, and Polruet Hongthong, defected to the Democrats with Somsak Thepsuthin predicted to follow soon, “Social Action Teeters on the Brink,” *BP* 21 December 1999; Ten Northeast MPs defected to the Democrats in August 1999, “Topple time?,” *BP* 15 August 1999.
17. Candidates also switched to other parties throughout the 1998–2000 period. From the NAP 11 defected to Chart Pattana, Sompong Amornvivat, the former labour and social welfare minister defected to Chart Thai, Prachuab Chaiyasam defected to Seritham, and Sunee Chairis defected from TRT to Chart Pattana, “The New Aspiration Party yesterday resolved to resign,” *BP* 25 June 2000; “Politics. Sompong assumes top post,” *BP* 5 October 2000; “Chart Pattana adopts defectors,” *BP* 6 October 2000.
18. “Inprint—Election cheats denied their spoils,” *BP* 26 March 2000.
19. “Sophon hits out at ‘evil’ campaign,” *BP* 1 August 2000.



## REFERENCES

- Christensen, Ray, and Joel Sawat Selway. 2017. "Pork-Barrel Politics and Electoral Reform: Explaining the Curious Differences in the Experiences of Thailand and Japan." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 76 (2): 283–310.
- Cox, Gary. 1997. *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Harris, Joseph. 2015. "'Developmental Capture' of the State: Explaining Thailand's Universal Coverage Policy." *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 40 (1): 165–193.
- Harris, Joseph, and Joel Selway. 2020. "Exchange: Explaining the Passage of Universal Healthcare in Thailand." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 20 (1): 99–119.
- Hicken, Allen. 2007b. "How Do Rules and Institutions Encourage Vote Buying?" In *Elections for Sale: The Causes, Consequences, and Reform of Vote Buying*, edited by Frederic C. Schaffer, 47–60. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- . 2009. *Building Party Systems in Developing Democracies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Selway, Joel. 2011. "Electoral Reform and Public Policy Outcomes in Thailand: The Politics of the 30-Baht Health Scheme." *World Politics* 63 (1): 165–202.
- . 2015. *Coalitions of the Wellbeing: How Electoral Rules and Ethnic Politics Shape Health Policy in Developing Countries*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Somchai, Phatharathananunth. 2008. "The Thai Rak Thai Party and Elections in North-Eastern Thailand." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38 (1): 106–123.

***Teri L. Caraway Responds***

doi:10.1017/jea.2020.28

Perhaps one of the most enduring debates in comparative politics is the relative influence of institutions versus political economic factors on politics. In the study of Thai politics, this divide is apparent among scholars who have analyzed the rise of Thaksin. In one camp are those emphasizing the role of social policy as the glue holding together a cross-class coalition of Bangkok-based business interests and rural voters (Pasuk and Baker 2004; Hewison 2004); in the other camp are those who stress the importance of new institutions (Hicken 2006; Selway 2011). Several years ago, while working on another project, I revisited this literature and was impressed with its quality but surprised by the lack of robust debate among scholars regarding the Thaksin juggernaut. With the exception of the engagement between Allen Hicken and Michael Nelson in this journal more than a decade ago (Hicken 2006, 2007a; Nelson 2007; see also Chambers 2005), scholars have not argued much with each other—at least not in print. Since I was unconvinced by some of the key arguments in this literature, I temporarily set aside the other project and wrote "De-Thaksinizing Thailand."

I am thrilled that three of the most eminent scholars of contemporary Thai politics—Allen Hicken, Erik Kuhonta, and Joel Selway—agreed to participate in this roundtable. I thank them for taking the time to write such incisive commentaries. In this short response I will focus on three general topics: the attractiveness of TRT's policy platform to voters, why candidates flocked to TRT, and Hicken's arguments about single-member districts (SMDs) and the need for TRT to win a near majority in order to implement its program.