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NOTES

1. By contrast, within Southeast Asian Studies, the literature on Philippine politics is notable for significant research that takes temporality very seriously. See, for e.g., Anderson 1996; Sidel 1999; Hutchcroft 2000. For a review of the relationship between comparative-historical analysis and Southeast Asian Studies, see Kuhonta 2014.

2. 800,000 individuals were laid off during the financial crisis. See ESCAP 2002–2003.

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I commend Teri Caraway for a careful and useful critical analysis of the rise and success of Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai party. The move to separate the origins of TRT and its subsequent consolidation is an important one—the factors that contributed to the first may not be the same as those that enabled the second. I also appreciate that Caraway's explanation gives due credit to Thaksin's resources and the way in which those resources enabled him to gain control of local political machines and power his party to victory. I agree with her assessment as to the importance of those resources. I also agree with her assessment that political institutions were crucial to the consolidation of Thaksin's power and the greater institutionalization of TRT. We disagree on two points: first, whether Thaksin's resources are a sufficient explanation for TRT's victory in 2001; second, the inferences we draw from the failure of the 2007 reforms to re-fragment the party system in the way the military junta had hoped.

On the first point, Caraway argues that Thaksin's resources were sufficient to explain his victory, and that the role of institutions was merely supplementary: Institutional reforms contributed to the scale of TRT's victory, but were not strictly necessary.

My view is different. I argue that *both* resources and institutions were *necessary*, but neither was *sufficient* to explain TRT's victory in 2001. Part of our disagreement stems from differences in what outcome we are trying to explain. For Caraway, the first outcome is the fact that TRT won the election. But to my mind the most interesting question is not why TRT emerged as the largest party, but why TRT was able to do something no other Thai party had ever been able to do: capture a near majority of the seats. Institutions are crucial to understanding why TRT won so decisively.

Consider two counterfactuals. Would TRT have won the election (captured the most seats) in the absence of the 1997 constitutional reforms? Caraway says yes, and I wholeheartedly agree. She clearly shows how, during a period of flux, with Thailand's two largest parties reeling from the Asian financial crisis, Thaksin's wealth enabled him to assemble a winning electoral machine. But, would TRT have captured a near majority without the 1997 reforms? The answer, to my mind, is almost certainly no. Let me elaborate.

Caraway characterizes the institutionalist argument as mainly focusing on the importance of the party list for reshaping the incentives for voters and candidates, and ultimately boosting TRT's margin of victory. Her push-back on giving too much weight to the role of the party list is welcome. But my focus on the party list was not just about explaining why TRT won, but rather about explaining why parties and candidates had an incentive to shift towards more programmatic campaigning, and why voters had incentive to support such efforts. We can debate about how important the party list was in reshaping candidate and voter incentives versus the machine Thaksin built with his resources. Ultimately it is impossible to know exactly why so many voters cast their vote for TRT. But there *is* evidence that something beyond just the party's local machine was attracting voters. TRT picked up substantial party-list votes (and thereby PL seats) in many areas where it lost. For example, TRT was unable to recruit a network of strong candidates in Amnat Charoen and Nakhon Phanom and so won no constituency seats, as Caraway details, but it nonetheless won the most party-list votes in 4 of the 7 constituencies. In short, throughout Thailand, many voters who were voting for another party for the constituency seat, were willing to give their party-list vote to TRT. These voters were presumably attracted to the party, even in the absence of a strong TRT machine. Is it a stretch to presume that some of the voters casting a vote for TRT in areas where it did have strong local candidates, were *also* attracted to the party in part due to its programmatic appeals?

Even if we concede that the effect of the party list was simply to top-up what was already a strong TRT victory, this still downplays the importance of the reforms to the constituency electoral system. Dr. Caraway correctly describes how the shift to single-member districts transformed the constituency electoral system into a winner-take-all system. She argues that this "intensified competition and amplified the importance of money," opening the door for Thaksin and his vast resources. She contrasts her argument with institutional arguments that emphasize the effect of the reforms on candidate and voter incentives to rely on candidate-centered versus party-centered strategies.

First, I note that both of these arguments are institutional arguments. In Caraway's story the shift to single-member districts heightens competition and the importance of money, giving an advantage to Thaksin. In the institutional arguments she cites, the shift to single-member districts heightens the appeal of party-centered strategies,

again, advantaging TRT. In both cases, institutions shape the incentives and behavior of political actors. Second, these two stories are not incompatible or inconsistent. Again, the primary goal of the institutionalist accounts was not to explain why Thaksin won, but to explain the evident shift in campaign strategies. The electoral reforms did two things at once. They increased the incentives to cultivate a party vote, including relying on more programmatic strategies, but, as Dr. Caraway demonstrates, they also ramped up political competition and increased the demand for resources.

Finally, Caraway focuses on those institutional accounts that emphasize the role of electoral reforms in producing a shift towards more programmatic politics. But this focus comes at the expense of neglecting other institutional arguments that focus on the effects of reforms on the number of parties (Hicken 2009). Let me focus on one of those arguments here. The shift to single-member constituencies in effect represented a shift from a winner-take-some system, with a high degree of proportionality, to winner-take-all, with much higher levels of disproportionality. At the constituency level the new electoral system ended the ability of voters to cast votes for more than one party, and for more than one party or political group to capture a seat. In my previous work I explored the effects of this change on the number of parties at the constituency level, but I did not outline the implications of this change for TRT specifically, since my focus was the party system. I am grateful to Caraway for encouraging me to more fully consider its effects on the outcome in 2001. An examination of the evidence I believe shows that this higher degree of disproportionality in the constituency elections chiefly benefited TRT and propelled it towards its near majority.

Before 1997 the gap between votes and seats for the winning party was between 1 and 3 percentage points: the percentage of seats the largest party captured was 1 to 3 percentage points higher than its vote share. For example, in 1996, the New Aspiration Party received 31.8 percent of the seats with a vote share of 29.1 percent. TRT's fortunes were better than NAP in the constituency elections, but only modestly so. Compared to NAP's 29.1 percent vote share, TRT managed to secure 35.7 percent of the votes. All of Thaksin's wealth secured him only 6.6 percentage points more than his predecessor had been able to secure. However, because of the change to the electoral system, that 35.7 didn't translate into 36 or 37 percent of the seats, but rather a whopping 50 percent—200 out of the 400 seats that were available.¹ In short, without the winner-take-all advantage that the new electoral system provided TRT, TRT would still have been the largest vote-getter in many constituencies, but rival political groups in those constituencies would have been able to secure some representation.² The result would likely have been TRT falling far short of a majority, with much less capacity to implement its policy promises.

Turning to subsequent developments, Caraway implies that since the 2007 changes to the electoral rules failed to produce a different outcome, the rules didn't matter much in the first place. However, the 2007 "surprise" outcome reflects the failure of the 2007 drafters to understand how and why the institutions operated, not the irrelevance of those institutions. The bloc vote produces multiple parties at the district level *only* where partisan attachments are weak, which was the case before 1997. However, voters had developed stronger party attachments over the course of the 2000s, as Dr. Caraway nicely summarizes. Thus, a return to the bloc vote in an environment with stronger party loyalties produced a very different outcome. With most voters now casting straight ticket votes the bloc vote produced a strong winner-take-all outcome,

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.

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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.

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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.