

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Family Ties that Bind: Decentralisation, Local Elites and the Provincial Administrative Organisations in Thailand

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Abstract

Growing rapidly before the early 2000s, literature on provincial Thai politics has dwindled in recent years. This article makes a small attempt to redress this trend by highlighting one distinctive yet understudied emerging electoral dynamics in provincial Thailand. Specifically, drawing mainly on Thai-language primary sources, this paper shows that in the majority of Thailand's provinces, the Provincial Administrative Organisation, an electoral institution that has received an unprecedented amount of state funding in the post-1997 age of decentralisation, has enabled influential political families to retain and even increase their power. As political and economic power has been decentralised from Bangkok, it has ironically been centralised in the hands of a limited number of oligarchic provincial elites. This phenomenon is not an historical aberration; rather, it should be viewed as one manifestation or product of Thailand's enduring patrimonial culture, in which public officeholders' positions are regarded as an extension of their personal or familial property. I conclude by discussing the Thai case theoretically and comparatively.

Keywords: decentralisation; Parliament; Provincial Administrative Organisation; political family; patrimonial culture; oligarchic local elite

Introduction

Before the early 2000s, research on local politics was one of the 'growth industries' in Thai studies. A steadily increasing number of studies were published during this period that analysed the domination of rural-based politicians (notably the 'godfather' phenomenon), the changing nature of electoral contests, and other related issues (e.g., Anderson 1990; Arghiros 2001; Askew 2008; Bowie 2008; McVey 2000; Nelson 1998; Nishizaki 2011a; Ockey 1992; Somrudee 1993; Viengrat 2008; Walker 2012). These studies represented a wholesome trend, departing from the previous Bangkok-centric scholarship on Thai politics.

During the last decade or so, however, the lion's share of scholars' attention seems to have shifted to more sensational issues in Bangkok, such as violent street protests, military and judicial interventions, Prayut Chan-ocha's repressive military or quasi-democratic regime, the monarchy and growing anti-monarchical discourse, and so on. Studies examining local Thai politics have appeared only intermittently (e.g., Chaiyon and Chainarong 2016; Keyes 2014; Pattana 2012; Prajak 2016; Saowanee 2021). The recent scholarly trend makes it seem as if provincial Thai politics did not matter as much as it once did or research on it had been exhausted.

Actually, it remains critically important to study provincial Thailand, and a lot more research needs to be done to uncover the structure of local power relations or the types and backgrounds of provincial politicians, about which we still know precious little. Some scholars have analysed these issues in relatively large provinces or the provinces where nationally famous godfathers have wielded power (see the works cited above), but smaller and lesser-known provinces have received scant scholarly attention.

This study makes a modest attempt to fill these lacunas in research and redirect scholarly attention to provincial Thai politics. It does so by unravelling one distinctive yet previously understudied general

electoral trend in provincial Thailand. Specifically, this paper shows that in the majority of Thai provinces, the Provincial Administrative Organisation (PAO), an electoral institution that has received unprecedented amounts of state funding in the post-1997 era of decentralisation, has been controlled by influential political families that have produced members of Parliament (MP). Although some previous studies have highlighted the close nexus between the PAO and political families, many of them are rather outdated. Their findings are also limited to one or two particular provinces or elections, and they tell us little about whether the pattern identified in a particular province or election can be observed in other provinces and elections (e.g., Achakorn 2007; Arghiros 2002; Montesano 2020; Nelson 2004; Punchada 2021). By contrast, this paper presents systematic data on all PAO presidents elected in all 76 Thai provinces (except Bangkok) up to the present and on their family relationships to former or incumbent MPs. These data highlight one deeply ironic outcome of the Thai government's much-touted decentralisation policy: As political and economic power has been devolved to the provinces outside Bangkok, a limited number of well-entrenched oligarchic elites have centralised it in their hands. What was a well-intended policy has turned the PAO into a new institutional territory for these elites.

My findings are based primarily on the Assets and Liabilities Declaration Files (บัญชีแสดงรายการทรัพย์สินและหนี้สิน), available at the National Anti-Corruption Commission of Thailand. These files, of which there are more than 2000, contain invaluable data on the personal, familial and economic backgrounds of all MPs and PAO presidents elected since 2007. In this paper, these files are abbreviated as NACC, followed by the names of MPs or PAO presidents. I supplement these documents with various other primary and secondary sources.

I emphasise that this paper concerns the effects of introducing the elected PAO presidency on the broad *structure* or *distribution* of political power in provincial Thailand. This is not a micro-level study of how specific PAO presidents have achieved electoral success and have performed in office, or how they are viewed by voters. Their election campaigns and performance in office do not directly impinge on my argument. My argument is not that the political families in question are detrimental to Thailand's sound democratic governance because they have used illegal means (e.g., vote-buying) to win the PAO presidency or that they have misused their public office and have failed to meet their constituents' needs. As will be shown below, some of these families had their reputations damaged with allegations of wrongdoings *before* winning the PAO presidency. My point here is only that the well-intentioned decentralisation policy has enabled even these families to maintain and expand their power and that their electoral success has contributed to the entrenchment of the already influential political elites. I take a critical view of these and other elite families because I believe that their dominance over the PAO presidency is antithetical to pluralist democracy. Collectively, they have raised and constitute formidable structural barriers to entry into the most important elected local office for those who do not have powerful family connections.

Note also that this paper is limited to one local-level institution: the PAO. This is not a comprehensive study of how political families dominate all other local electoral institutions, such as municipal governments and the Sub-district Administrative Organisations (SAOs).¹ My specific focus is justifiable because the PAO, situated above municipal governments and SAOs and controlling a much larger amount of funds, is the most powerful electoral institution in provincial Thailand at present. An analysis of how various political families have controlled this institution offers a good insight into the unbalanced structure of power in provincial Thailand.

The PAO Politicised: Background and Rationale

Originally called the Provincial Council (*sapha jangwat*) in the 1933 Municipality Act, the PAO was created by the 1955 Provincial Administrative Act. Under this law, provincial governors, appointed by the Interior Ministry in Bangkok, served as ex-officio PAO presidents. The PAO constituted one means by which the central government effectively oversaw, controlled, and subordinated local administration. As such, the PAO had minimal autonomy to undertake its main duty: infrastructure development. In addition, funds for performing this function came from meagre central government subsidies. The PAO did not have sufficient economic resources to initiate development projects. It remained a low-key,

¹Situated at a lower level and smaller in size than the PAO, the SAO is another local institution created by the Thai government's decentralisation initiative.

nondescript, provincial-level institution in the centralised bureaucratic state (Bowie 2008: 487–488; PAO Chachoengsao 2021).

What has transformed the PAO into the highly visible and powerful cash-awash institution it is at present is the promulgation of the so-called ‘People’s Constitution’ in 1997. Drafted by prominent liberal royalists, such as Prawes Wasi and Anand Panyarachun, and other reformists, this constitution (section 284) sought to decentralise political and economic power from Bangkok, albeit not entirely (Supasawad 2010: 11–12). In the post-Cold War global neoliberal regime that worships efficiency, transparency, accountability and rationality, the *de jure* devolution of power has become a fashionable slogan driving political reforms in many countries, including Thailand (Hadiz 2011: 11–12, 18–19). Before the late 1990s, excessive political and economic power had been vested in the central government and bureaucracy in Bangkok, often resulting in opaque, arbitrary and inefficient decision-making—a legacy of the absolute monarchy that had reigned supreme before 1932 and the so-called ‘bureaucratic polity’ that appeared after 1932.² As Prawes lamented in 1995, this ‘monopolisation of politics by a minority’ was one of the shortcomings of Thai politics (McCargo 2015: 332). Rectifying this imbalance, sometimes referred to as ‘internal colonialism,’ was one of the primary motivations behind the 1997 constitution (Connors 1999; McCargo 2002). The constitution “sought to establish a broader political system than the one that had long been monopolised by traditional politicians and bureaucrats” (Naruemon 2002: 195).

The growing prominence of allegedly unscrupulous MPs gave an added impetus to the decentralisation drive. Tainted by allegations of malfeasance, electoral fraud, violence, unprincipled party-switching, links to the underworld or other misdeeds, these people or their family members were successful in winning parliamentary seats in various provinces. Once elected to Parliament, they allegedly funnelled massive state funds into their respective constituencies, skimmed profits off those funds and amassed even more wealth. Their expanding wealth helped make their already large clientelistic networks even larger and cement their local bases of electoral support (McVey 2000; Pasuk and Sungsidh 1996). As electoral politics took deeper root before the late 1990s, political and economic power became increasingly concentrated among these local elites, representing the worst excesses of Thailand’s electoral democracy.

Deeply alarmed about these developments, neoliberal elites, with support from King Bhumibol, launched a noble movement to reform electoral politics in the early 1990s. Implemented as one integral component of this reformist project, the decentralisation project allocated state funds directly to the PAOs, bypassing the powerful local barons-cum-MPs who otherwise would have been the dispensers of those funds. The neoliberal reformists hoped that this policy would reduce the dependence of local governments and voters on such MPs for state funding and wrest political and economic power from them. This goal also received support from the advocates of ‘localism’ (e.g., grassroots nongovernmental organisations), who argued for empowering rural communities and people. Although these localists’ wariness of globalisation diverged from neoliberal pundits’ sanguine views, the two camps “shared a common opposition to the strong, overpowerful state” (Pasuk and Baker 2004: 21).

Based on these rationales, the central government has channelled unprecedented amounts of funds since 1997—at least 25 per cent of national revenues—to various units of local administration, including PAOs. In 2016, for example, the government allocated more than 28 per cent of its revenues to local administration—an exponential increase from 8 per cent in 2000, when the decentralisation programme was not yet fully enforced (Ockey 2017: 270; cf. Viengrat 2019: 227). Some provinces have been allocated annual budgets exceeding one billion baht and nearing two billion baht (Peerasit 2015). The PAO has been one major beneficiary of this new fiscal policy; it has become an institutional conduit through which abundant economic resources flow regularly from Bangkok.

Furthermore, the 1997 PAO Act, enacted with the 1997 Constitution (section 285), dictated that PAO presidents (and councillors) be elected directly by voters to four-year terms. Before the 2014 coup, three PAO elections were held—in 2004, 2008, and 2012 (except in provinces where PAO presidents won by-elections held in intervening years). The PAO presidents in office at the time of the 2014 coup had

²The ‘bureaucratic polity’ refers to an essentially nondemocratic system, in which the bureaucracy, especially the military, held enormous decision-making power to the exclusion of non-bureaucratic forces, such as Parliament, political parties and interest groups. Not ideologically bound, the bureaucratic polity was permeated by cliques that constantly jostled for power. Power rotated among these cliques, often via military coups (Riggs 1966).

their terms extended until the most recent PAO elections in 2020.³ There are currently 76 PAO presidents, one for each province except Bangkok.⁴ Elected by direct popular vote, these PAO presidents have gained the authority, subject to PAO councils' approval, to use enormous state funds in various districts, sub-districts and villages within their jurisdiction.

In a way, the decentralisation strategy has been successful. The PAO has now emerged as an institution considerably (if not completely) independent from the Interior Ministry.⁵ Every PAO has implemented numerous development projects on its own initiative. Countless local residents have benefited from such projects.

PAOs and Family Rule: Unintended Outcomes

In some other ways, the decentralisation plan has failed to achieve its intended results. As is well known, the majority of PAO presidents and councillors are local capitalists, especially contractors, eager to profit from the vast financial opportunities created by the infusion of state funds. The PAO council has been dubbed the 'contractors' council' (Arghiros 2002: 233, 237–238). Unsurprisingly, when the idea of abolishing the PAO was proposed in 2001 and 2013, PAO presidents (and councillors) throughout Thailand voiced vehement objections (Peerasit 2015).

The elected PAO presidents have used their newfound political and economic resources to construct a large, province-wide patronage pyramid (Arghiros 2002: 233, 235–236). Lower-level local administrators (e.g., sub-district heads) find it expedient to curry favour with PAO presidents. A patron-client network consisting of these individuals has enabled many incumbent PAO presidents to win re-election.⁶ Of all 181 PAO presidents elected nationwide since 2004,⁷ nineteen have served an uninterrupted four terms. That is, they have monopolised the PAO post, having won all four elections held thus far (author's research; see appendix).

Some other PAO presidents have successfully groomed their family members as their successors and have achieved a dynastic transfer of public office. In 29 (38 per cent) of Thailand's 76 provinces, all four PAO presidential elections held in the 2000s have been won by members of the same family or kinship group. In another sixteen provinces (21 per cent), a particular family or its kinship group has held a semi-monopolistic grip on the PAO, having won three of the four PAO presidential elections in the 2000s (appendix). The introduction of the elected PAO presidency has facilitated concentration of power among these elite families.

Another noteworthy feature is the ambiguous boundary between PAO presidents and MPs. Of all 181 PAO presidents elected up to the present, 48 (26.5 per cent) had served as MPs prior to winning the PAO presidency.⁸ Given the recent volatility of Thailand's national-level parliamentary politics,⁹ these former MPs now prefer controlling the more stable and lucrative local-level PAO office to avoid the risk of being in opposition in Parliament or being subordinated to prime minister (Hadiz 2011: 110). Another seventeen (9 per cent) of the 181 PAO presidents represent an opposite pattern, having become MPs after their terms as PAO presidents ended (appendix), while simultaneously bequeathing the PAO presidency to their relatives. For these latter MPs, the PAO presidency has been a steppingstone to the national Parliament.

In addition, of all 181 PAO presidents elected so far, 107 (59 per cent) are related, by blood or marriage, to at least one former or incumbent MP. Of these 107 PAO presidents, 79 come from families that have produced more than two MPs (appendix). In a typical pattern, one or more former or incumbent

³Thanks are due to Viengrat Nethipo for clarifying this point.

⁴Before Buengkarn was upgraded to provincial status in 2011, there were 75 PAO presidents.

⁵The PAOs are dependent on the Interior Ministry for funds, and they are officially accountable to provincial governors appointed by the ministry. However, the ministry does not directly interfere with PAOs' use of funds and other internal affairs. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, PAO presidents and councillors are now directly elected by local voters. In these respects, PAOs have acquired considerable, if not unfettered, autonomy.

⁶In recent years, many successful candidates have received implicit or explicit endorsement from major political parties. These endorsements have also contributed to their electoral success.

⁷The 181 individuals include those who resigned, died, or were stripped of their posts after winning the PAO presidency.

⁸The 'MPs' here refer to three types of elected politicians: constituency MPs, party-list MPs, and senators.

⁹MPs never know when a coup or a politicised court ruling might strip them of their political rights. The PAO posts are less affected by such national-level developments.

MPs from a particular family, including those previously accused of multiple misdeeds,¹⁰ help their relatives win the PAO presidency in their respective provinces. The PAO presidency then enables the already influential MPs to consolidate their power and enhance their chances of re-election as MPs (although re-election is not guaranteed). In a reverse pattern, former or incumbent PAO presidents use their influence to secure their relatives' electoral success as new MPs. In both patterns, the PAO presidency has become an institutional vehicle for dynastic power sharing and transfer among local elites.

Female PAO presidents have constituted one small yet important part of this phenomenon. Of all 181 former and incumbent PAO presidents elected to date, only 25 (14 per cent) are women, reflecting the male-dominant nature of Thai politics (Nishizaki 2018). It would be erroneous to view these 25 female PAO presidents as representing a new emerging type of provincial political leadership. Virtually all ($n = 21$) of the 25 female PAO presidents have come from families that have produced at least one male MP. These women possess superior electoral resources (e.g., money, patronage networks) that their male relatives have acquired as MPs.

Given the rationales underlying the post-1997 decentralisation policies, these outcomes are nothing short of ironic. The elected PAO presidency has allowed many former MPs and their families to acquire even more political and economic resources. Far from emasculating these families, the new institution has unintentionally *empowered* them and has contributed to expanding family rule in Thai politics, extending from the national level to the provincial level (see Nishizaki 2018; Ockey 2015; Stithorn and Wichuda 2016 for data on family rule). This is a nationwide phenomenon, not specific to a few provinces or regions. In short, the decentralisation initiative has backfired, at least as far as the PAO presidency is concerned. In its very effort to redress centralisation of power, this initiative has inadvertently perpetuated and exacerbated it. Political and economic power has not become diffuse; its scope has become narrower *because of* the decentralisation policy.

The process through which this unintended outcome has transpired has not been always seamless, however. Given the extremely high stakes involved, the PAO presidency has become a much-coveted political post, and PAO presidents have attempted to eliminate threats to their positions by using every means possible. Likewise, their rivals have resorted to various tactics, including illegal and violent ones, to win the PAO presidency. As one testament to these vicious rivalries, five PAO presidents have been assassinated in office (appendix). Although such murders are relatively rare, PAO presidential elections in many provinces have generated intense competition, pitting various political families against each other. In the 2020 PAO election, the winning candidates in 46 (61 per cent) of the 76 provinces competed against former MPs or candidates whose relatives had previously served as MPs (author's research).

In the next section, I shed light on the political families that have controlled the PAO presidency in twelve provinces. These provinces represent all four regions of Thailand and differ greatly in physical and population size, as well as in their levels of economic development and urbanisation (Table 1). None of these geographic, demographic or socioeconomic factors have significantly affected political families' ability to win the PAO presidency.

Nakhon Ratchasima

One such family is the Suwanchaweeks in Nakhon Ratchasima Province of the northeast. Mrs Ranongrak Suwanchawee, former PAO president (2012–2020), has married into this family. Her father, Lert Hongpakdee, had served as a constituency MP for Nakhon Ratchasima (1983–1988), after which his son-in-law (Ranongrak's husband), Pairote Suwanchawee, served five terms in the same role (1992–1996, 2001–2006). Ranongrak followed suit by representing Nakhon Ratchasima as a senator (2006) and as a constituency MP (2008–2011), before launching a successful bid for the PAO presidency in 2012. Pairote and Ranongrak were succeeded by their son (Lert's grandson) Polapee as a Nakhon

¹⁰Other than the examples given below, Withaya Khunpluem, son of the (now deceased) murderous godfather Kamnan Po, has controlled the PAO presidency in Chonburi since 2008. Before 2008, Withaya and his two brothers had served as Chonburi MPs. Similarly, since 2011, the PAO in Chonburi's adjacent province, Samut Prakan, has been monopolised by the Asavahems, led by an alleged drug trafficker, Watthana. Watthana's son, Chonsawat, served as PAO president until 2020, when he was succeeded by his ex-wife, Nanthida Kaewbuasai.

Table 1. Demographic and economic profiles of the provinces in the case studies

| Province | Population (2008) | Area Size (square km) | GPP per capita in baht (2007) | Extent of urbanisation (2006)* |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Chainat | 335,952 | 2,470 | 72,243 | 12.2% |
| Chiang Rai | 1,227,317 | 11,678 | 45,467 | 18.1% |
| Chumphon | 484,722 | 6,009 | 91,809 | 20.1% |
| Lamphun | 405,125 | 4,506 | 150,659 | 26.6% |
| Lopburi | 753,801 | 6,200 | 91,065 | 18.3% |
| Mae Hong Son | 252,692 | 12,681 | 41,390 | 7.6% |
| Nakhon Ratchasima | 2,565,117 | 20,494 | 54,362 | 19.6% |
| Petchaburi | 458,975 | 6,225 | 112,263 | 33.8% |
| Phrae | 463,477 | 6,539 | 42,558 | 20.9% |
| Rayong | 598,664 | 3,522 | 1,035,536 | 37.7% |
| Sisaket | 1,441,412 | 8,840 | 29,174 | 7.8% |
| Sukhothai | 603,817 | 6,596 | 47,643 | 18.3% |

Sources: *Thailand in Figures* 2009; National Statistical Office 2007, 21–22.

* Measured by the municipal population divided by the provincial population.

Ratchasima constituency MP (2008–2014) (CREM Lert Hongpakdee 1993: 23–24; CREM Pairote Suwanchawee 2012: 12; NACC Ranongrak Suwanchawee 2008).¹¹

In 2011, the Suwanchawees were debilitated by Pairot's death from cancer at age 61. In 2019, Polapee lost his re-election bid to Thasanapon Ketmetheekarun, a female Palang Pracharat-backed candidate related to the Ratanasets, a rival political family.¹² With no family member elected to Parliament in 2019 and her political fortunes waning, Ranongrak did not run for re-election in the 2020 PAO race, nor did any of her relatives.

Another prominent political family, the Wangsupakitkosols (Figure 1), has now gained control of the Nakhon Ratchasima PAO presidency. The new PAO president, Mrs Yolada (formerly Wichuda) Jitrapitaklert, is married to Weerasak Wangsupakitkosol, who was elected a Bhumjai Thai party-list MP in 2019 and served Prime Minister General Prayut as deputy commerce minister until March 2021.¹³ Weerasak is currently deputy transportation minister in Prayut's cabinet (NACC Yolada Wangsupakitkosol 2021; NACC Weerasak Wangsupakitkosol 2019).

Prior to Weerasak's electoral success, Yolada's elder brother Wichai Jitrapitaklert had served as a Nakhon Ratchasima constituency MP for the Chart Thai (CT) Party from 1986 to 1988. Yolada's younger sister Jitrawan also served as a representative of Phuea Phaendin Party from 2008 to 2011. Jitrawan has married Weerasak's younger brother Somsak Wangsupakitkosol, a Nakhon Ratchasima senator elected in 2006. Yolada and Jitrawan, who are full-sisters, have married into the same family, and their husbands have been elected to Parliament, besides Jitrawan and Wichai (NACC Jitrawan Wangsupakitkosol 2008) (Figure 1).

Bound by intricate marital ties, these two families have produced four MPs since the 1980s, and their local power base has become even stronger, with Yolada currently serving as PAO president. This political base has a strong economic base. The two families have extensive joint investments in starch production

¹¹'CREM' stands for a 'cremation volume,' a booklet issued to commemorate the death of a prominent Thai individual. 'CREM' is followed by the name of the deceased.

¹²Thasanapon's elder sister Thasaniya has married into the Ratanaset family. Running under the Palang Pracharat banner, these two sisters, together with Thasaniya's husband (Wirat) and her two sons (Athirat and Thawirat), were elected as Nakhon Ratchasima MPs in 2019. Altogether, five members of the Ratanaset kinship group are incumbent MPs. They constitute the largest political family in Thailand at present.

¹³Weerasak previously served as *kamnan* (sub-district chief) from 2012 to 2015.

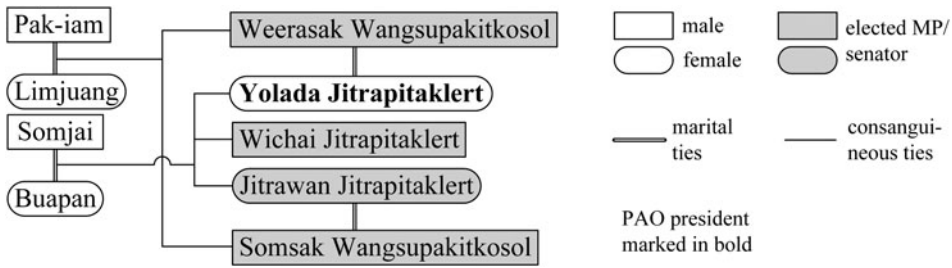


Figure 1. Politicians from the Wangsupakitkosols and Jitrapitaklerts.

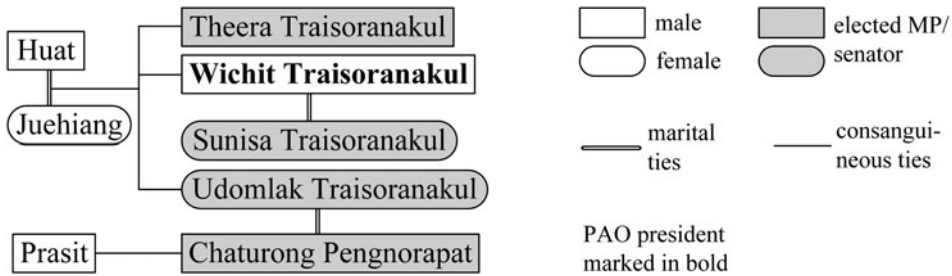


Figure 2. Politicians from the Traisoranakuls and Pengnorapats.

(DBD/MC 1993a; DBD/MC 2000; DBD/MC 2004), transportation (DBD/MC 2001) and gas (DBD/MC 2007) in Nakhon Ratchasima and its surrounding provinces.

Sisaket

The PAO presidency in another northeastern province, Sisaket, has been monopolised by the Traisoranakuls. One member of this family, Wichit, has served four consecutive terms as PAO president since 2004 (Figure 2). In 2006, two years after Wichit became PAO president, his wife, Sunisa, was elected to the Senate representing Sisaket. Wichit’s elder brother Theera Traisoranakul also entered electoral politics, winning a seat as a Sisaket constituency MP in 2007 and 2011 under the banners of pro-Thaksin parties (People’s Power and Phuea Thai, respectively). Re-elected on the Phuea Thai ticket in 2019, Theera is an incumbent Sisaket MP. In 2007 and 2011, Wichit and Theera’s youngest sister, Udomlak (Traisoranakul) Pengnorapat, was also elected a Sisaket constituency MP on the tickets of the Matchima and Bhumjai Parties, respectively (NACC Theera Traisoranakul 2019).

These MPs followed in the footsteps of Udomlak’s husband, Chaturong Pengnorapat, who had served four straight terms as a Sisaket constituency MP from 1995 until the 2006 coup, long before Wichit first won the PAO presidency in 2004. In the 2007 Constitutional Court ruling, Chaturong, a high-ranking member of Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party,¹⁴ was banned from holding political office for five years. He was re-elected a Sisaket MP for the Phuea Thai Party, a reincarnation of TRT, in 2019. As of 2022, Chaturong still holds this post, along with Theera Traisoranakul, while Wichit serves as PAO president (NACC Chaturong Pengnorapat 2019).

Lopburi

The PAO presidency in Lopburi Province of the central region has also been dominated by one family, the Jiraphanwanits, who run two successful construction companies (DBD/MC 1992; DBD/MC 2005). The patriarch of this family, Kamol, now 89 years old, served seven times as a Lopburi constituency MP for the CT Party from 1983 to 2005. He solidified his control over provincial politics in 2004,

¹⁴Chaturong ran for MP under the TRT banner in the 2001 and 2005 elections.

when he succeeded in having his eldest son, Suban, elected as PAO president. Suban was re-elected PAO president in 2008. While Suban was still PAO president, Kamol was re-elected as a Lopburi MP under the CT banner in 2007. Once Kamol received a five-year political ban in the 2008 Constitutional Court ruling (for being a CT executive), his daughter (Suban's younger sister) and PAO councillor Manlika assumed control as a new Lopburi MP following the January 2009 by-election (NACC Manlika Jiraphanwanit 2009).

The Jiraphanwanits were given a jolt in June 2011, when the two-time PAO president Suban was murdered due to political conflicts stemming from his role as vote canvasser (Prajak 2013: 168). Nevertheless, this murder did not weaken the Jiraphanwanits politically. Following a by-election held in August 2011, Suban's widow, Oraphin, former PAO councillor, became new PAO president. Re-elected in 2012 and 2020, she currently holds the office of PAO president. For her part, Manlika won re-election as a Lopburi constituency MP in 2011 and 2019, while her father, Kamol, has retired from electoral politics. Manlika is an MP for Lopburi as of 2022.

Chainat

The PAO presidency in Chainat, another province in the central region, has been controlled, in succession, by two political families: the Songprachas and Nakhasais. The Songprachas, a capitalist family with far-reaching interests in construction (DBD/MC 1977), real estate (DBD/MC 1990a; DBD/MC 2016a), auto parts (DBD/MC 2011) and fruit sales (DBD/MC 2018), produced Chainat's first elected PAO president, a woman named Jirada, in 2004. She served in office until 2008. Before this, her father, Bunthong Songpracha, had served as a Chainat constituency MP for CT five times from 1983 to 1996. In the 1996 general election, Bunthong's son (Jirada's younger brother) Monthien took over as a new Chainat MP for CT. Monthien retained his parliamentary seat on the CT ticket in 2001, although he lost his re-election bid in 2005 and received a five-year ban in 2008 for being a CT executive. A year after this ban ended, he was elected as Chainat senator in 2014. Although his senatorial term was short due to a coup launched a month later, Monthien has now achieved a comeback as a Chainat constituency MP after winning the 2019 election under the banner of Prayut's Palang Pracharat Party (NACC Monthien Songpracha 2019).

Meanwhile, Monthien's younger sister Nanthana Songpracha served a term as a Chainat senator from 2000 to 2006, before winning a seat as a Chainat constituency MP for Bhumjai Thai Party in 2011. Re-elected in 2019 (alongside Monthien), she is now a party-list MP for the newly founded People Progressive (Pracha Piwat) Party. In addition, Jirada, former PAO president and Nanthana's elder sister, has been appointed to the Senate by Prayut (NACC Jirada Songpracha 2019; NACC Nanthana Songpracha 2019). Three Songprachas currently serve in Parliament.

Since Jirada's term as PAO president ended in 2008, Anuson Nakhasai has served in this role, having won three successive elections. Anuson's elder brother Anucha had served twice as a Chainat constituency MP for TRT (2001–2006). Anucha wields considerable economic clout, having owned Chainat FC in the lucrative Thai Premier League since 2009 (Wasan *et al.* 2014: 115, 132). Receiving a five-year political ban in 2007 for being a TRT executive, Anucha remained politically dormant until 2019, when he was re-elected as a Chainat constituency MP, this time on the anti-Thaksin Palang Pracharat Party's ticket (alongside Monthien Songpracha). An unprincipled political opportunist, Anucha has defected from the Thaksin camp to the anti-Thaksin camp led by Prayut (NACC Anucha Nakhasai 2019). Anucha is one of the 32 former pro-Thaksin MPs whom Prayut has recruited into his party, given their track record of electoral success (author's research).

During Anucha's initial term as Chainat MP, his (now divorced) wife, Ponthiwa, was elected to the Senate to represent Chainat in April 2006.¹⁵ Although the couple's terms were terminated by a coup five months later, and Anucha subsequently faced political suspension until 2012, Ponthiwa became a new Chainat constituency MP on his behalf by winning the January 2008 by-election on the Matchimatipatai Party ticket.¹⁶ She was re-elected in 2011 on the Bhumjai Thai party's ticket.

¹⁵Ponthiwa is a daughter of Surin Saksirwetkul, who owns the famous Poseidon massage parlour in Bangkok (DBD/MC 1995a).

¹⁶This by-election was held after the electoral victories of Monthien and Nanthana Songpracha were nullified by the Election Commission on grounds of fraud.

Meanwhile, Anucha Nakasai's elder sister (Ponthiwa's sister-in-law) Jitthana Yingthaweelapa served as senator for Chainat from 2008 to 2014 (NACC Jitthana Yingthaweelapa 2008). Thus, three Nakhasais have become MPs since before Anuson's term as PAO president started in 2008.

Rayong

The PAO presidency in Rayong Province, situated east of Bangkok, was initially held by two individuals from non-political families. Panajuepet Kritsanarat was elected PAO president in 2004. In early 2006, he resigned to run in the senatorial election scheduled in April that year, which he won. In a subsequent by-election, Sin Kumpa, a six-time former MP and a businessman,¹⁷ became the new PAO president by defeating his rival, Piya Pitutecha. The Election Commission, however, raised a yellow flag for Sin's victory and held another by-election in July 2007. This time, Sin lost to Piya Pitutecha. Piya has been PAO president since then, having won three successive elections.

The Pitutechas are a wealthy Sino-Thai capitalist family in Rayong. The former patriarch of this family, Sakhon, accumulated wealth in the 1950s–1970s by growing sugar, cassava and rubber on several thousand *rai* of illegally occupied land (1 *rai* = 1600 square km). He even served as president of the Rayong Association of Sugarcane Planters. The Eastern Seaboard project, launched by the Thai government in the 1980s to promote industrialisation in Rayong and its vicinity, boosted the Pitutechas' economic fortunes. Capitalizing on the state-funded infrastructure projects and land price hikes, the family founded eight companies with massive investments in construction (DBD/MC 1989; DBD/MC 1991; DBD/MC 1994; DBD/MC 2002), real estate (DBD/MC 2003a; DBD/MC 2015), canned fruits (DBD/MC 2003b) and combustibles (DBD/MC 2016b). Additionally, the Pitutechas have owned Rayong United, a Thai Division I football club, since 2012 (Wasan *et al.* 2014: 117, 135). By 1997, they operated the largest construction business in Rayong. During this time, the family developed close ties with Kamnan Po, Thailand's most notorious godfather, based in the neighbouring Chonburi Province. Several people who threatened the Pitutechas' economic interests were found shot dead (Chaiyon and Olarn 2008: 198–200).

These economic resources have made the Pitutechas the most famous political family in Rayong. Four Pitutechas have become MPs thus far. Prior to becoming PAO president, Piya had served as a Ranong constituency MP three times from 1995 until 2005.¹⁸ In 2001, Piya's younger brother Sathit was also elected a Rayong constituency MP on the Democrat Party ticket, while Piya was elected on the CT ticket. At that time, Sathit's father-in-law, Somkiat Nopaket, was PAO president.¹⁹ Running as a Democrat Party candidate, Sathit lost his re-election bid in 2005, but he gained new political capital in 2007, when Piya assumed the PAO presidency. Since then, Sathit has been re-elected as a Rayong constituency MP in 2007, 2011, and 2019, each time on the Democrat ticket (NACC Sathit Pitutecha 2019).

Another Pitutecha, Thara, became a Rayong constituency MP under the TRT banner in 2005. Since defecting to the Democrat Party in 2007, Thara has won re-election three consecutive times, along with Sathit (NACC Thara Pitutecha 2019). Thara and Sathit are two of the four incumbent Rayong constituency MPs as of 2022. Meanwhile, Thara's elder brother Surachai was elected to represent Rayong as a senator in 2014 (NACC Surachai Pitutecha 2014).

Phrae and Lamphun

In Phrae Province of northern Thailand, the Wongwans have established effective monopoly over the PAO presidency. They did not control the PAO presidency from the beginning, however. The first Phrae PAO president elected in 2004 was Charnchai Silapauaychai, a medical doctor unrelated to the Wongwans. Charnchai served in office until October 2007, when he was shot dead while jogging in a public park. The Supasiri family, into which one of the PAO councillors, Pongsawat, was born, was

¹⁷Sin had become a Social Action Party MP in 1979, 1983, and 1988, before he defected to Samakhi Tham in 1992. In 2001 and 2005, he was elected as a TRT constituency MP and as a TRT party-list MP, respectively.

¹⁸He was elected on the Chart Pathana Party's ticket in 1995 and 1996 and under the CT banner in 2001.

¹⁹Between 1997 and 2004 (when the first PAO elections were held), the PAO president was selected by PAO councillors from amongst themselves. Somkiat served in office until 2004. He was murdered in June 2005.

suspected of having masterminded the murder. Pongsawat had reportedly clashed with Charnchai over the use of PAO funds.²⁰

Following Charnchai's murder, a by-election was held in December 2007 to choose new PAO president. Anuwat Wongwan, a former Phrae constituency MP for TRT (2005–2006), won this by-election. Anuwat's father, Narong, a logging and tobacco tycoon and a suspected drug lord on the United States government's blacklist, had served as a Phrae constituency MP for six straight terms from 1979 to 1995 (see Nishizaki 2011a: 216 for details). Since 2007, Anuwat has won three consecutive PAO presidential elections, including in 2020. Allegedly receiving electoral support from the Phuea Thai Party in 2020, Anuwat defeated Suphawatt Supasiri, relative of Pongsawat Supasiri.²¹ Anuwat remains Phrae's PAO president at present.

Two other Wongwans, Sangwal (Narong's younger brother) and Anuson (Narong's eldest son), have been elected MPs in Phrae's neighbouring province, Lamphun (NACC Anuson Wongwan 2008).²² Elected in 2020 after receiving the Phuea Thai Party's endorsement, Anuson is the incumbent PAO president of Lamphun. Thus, two sons of the alleged drug trafficker Narong currently control the PAO presidency in two provinces. An economic base of Anuson's electoral success is his ownership (since 2011) of the Lamphun Warriors, a Thai Division II football club (Wasan *et al.* 2014: 137).

The Wongwans are related to the Mutamara family, which has produced Chatawas (formerly Weeraphol), a four-time MP for another northern province of Chiang Rai, elected in 1986, 1988, 1995 and 1996. Anuwat Wongwan's wife, Sirinnuk, hails from the Mutamara family (NACC Anuwat Wongwan 2021).

Sukhothai

Somsak Thepsuthin, one of the crucial powerbrokers in contemporary Thai politics, operates huge cattle farms (DBD/MC 1990b) and a Thai Division II football club (Wasan *et al.* 2014: 137) in Phrae's neighbouring province, Sukhothai. From 1983 to 2001, he recorded seven consecutive victories as a Sukhothai constituency MP, all on the Social Action Party ticket. No other politician had served as a Sukhothai MP longer than he did. In 2001, Somsak was elected as a TRT party-list MP and held six cabinet posts under Thaksin. During the same period (2001–2005), Somsak's wife, Anongwan, served as a Sukhothai constituency MP for TRT. Since 2004, Somsak has turned the PAO presidency of Sukhothai into his fief, expanding his already enormous political influence. He has done so by having his two relatives serve alternately as PAO president (Figure 3).

First, Somsak's brother-in-law (Anongwan's elder brother) Manu Pukprasert won two successive terms as PAO president in 2004 and 2008. Meanwhile, Anongwan was re-elected as a Sukhothai constituency MP on the TRT ticket in 2005, a year after Manu Pukprasert won the PAO presidency. During his second term as PAO president, Manu resigned in May 2011 to run for MP in the July 2011 general election. He won the election and became a Sukhothai constituency MP for the Bhumjai Thai Party. The vacant PAO presidential post was filled by Somsak's younger sister Pansiri Kulanatsiri in a by-election of June 2011. Pansiri served as PAO president until 2019, when she resigned to run for MP. In the 2019 general election, she made her successful political debut as a Palang Pracharat MP for Sukhothai. She is an incumbent MP as of 2022. Manu then succeeded her as PAO president in 2020, a position he still holds today (NACC Manu Pukprasert 2011; NACC Pansiri Kulanatsiri 2019; NACC Somsak Thepsuthin 2019).

As for Somsak, although the Constitutional Court gave him a five-year political ban in 2007, he has returned as a Palang Pracharat party-list MP and justice minister by defecting from the Thaksin camp in the 2019 election. He is another of the 32 former Thaksinite MPs wooed by Prayut, given his copious electoral resources and electability.

Mae Hong Son and Chiang Rai

Akaradet Wanchaithanawong, whose family operates three construction firms (DBD/MC 1968; DBD/MC 1993b; DBD/MC 1995b), has dominated the PAO presidency in another northern province, Mae Hong

²⁰Additionally, Pongsawat's elder sister Siriwan Prasartjarksatru, a three-time Democrat MP (1995–2005) seeking re-election in 2007, resented Charnchai's decision to support her rival candidates (Nishizaki 2011b: 1589, 2018: 392; Prajak 2013: 210–212).

²¹Suphawatt's father Sarot is Pongsawat's cousin.

²²Sangwal and Anuson served as Lamphun MPs from 1988 to 1991. Anuson was re-elected three times (in 1992, 1996, and 2007). He also served as a party-list MP from 2001 to 2005.

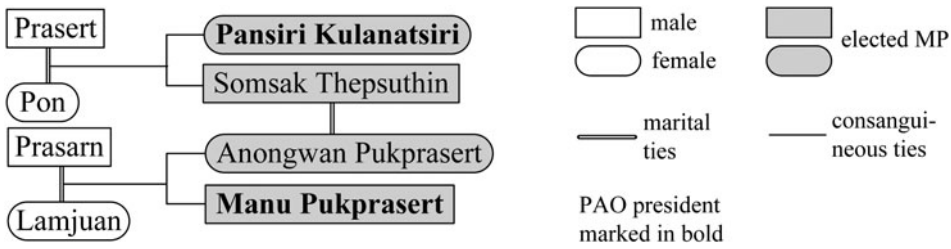


Figure 3. Politicians from the Thepsuthins and Pukpraserts.

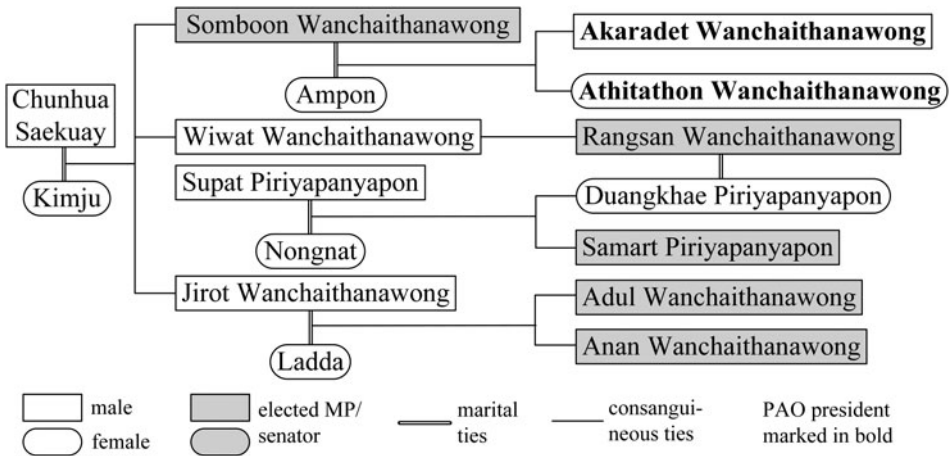


Figure 4. Politicians from the Wanchaithanawongs.

Son, since 2006, when his predecessor, Surasit Treethong, was disqualified by the Election Commission.²³ Akaradet has won three consecutive PAO presidential elections since then. In 2020, his elder sister Athitathon (formerly Athiti) Wanchaithanawong was also elected PAO president in the neighbouring Chiang Rai Province (Figure 4). Athitathon has become the fourth female PAO president of Chiang Rai,²⁴ defeating another female candidate from a political family—Wisaradee Techatheerawat, former Chiang Rai constituency MP (2008–2014).²⁵ The Wanchaithanawongs, like the Wongwans, now control the PAO presidency in two northern provinces.

The Wanchaithanawongs have produced multiple MPs in Mae Hong Son and Chiang Rai. Before Akaradet became Mae Hong Son’s PAO president in 2006, his father, Somboon, had served five terms as a Chiang Rai constituency MP. Somboon was re-elected in Chiang Rai under the TRT banner in 2005 and won another term as a party-list MP for the People’s Power Party (PPP), a reincarnation of TRT, in 2007. In addition, Somboon’s nephew (Akaradet’s cousin) Adul was elected to represent Mae Hong Son as a senator (2001–2006) and as a constituency MP for PPP (2008–2011). Adul was replaced as Mae

²³After losing his PAO presidency, Surasit was elected a Democrat party-list MP in 2007. Surasit’s uncle Boonchu Treethong had served four terms as an MP for the neighbouring Lampang Province in the 1990s, and another two terms as a TRT party-list MP in the 2000s, before he received a five-year ban in the 2007 court ruling.

²⁴Athitathon’s predecessors (Ratana Chongsuthanamanee, Salakjarid Tiyapairat, Busarint Worapathanan) all come from prominent political families. Ratana’s brother-in-law Mongkhol Chongsuthanamanee is an alleged drug trafficker blacklisted by the United States government, yet he won seven successive elections for Chiang Rai constituency MP between 1983 and 1996. Salakjarid’s husband and Busarint’s younger brother, Yongyuth Tiyapairat, was embroiled in a major vote-buying scandal in 2008, before which he had served as an MP five times (see Nishizaki 2019: 224–225).

²⁵Wisaradee’s father (Wisarn), uncle (Wisit), husband (Julapan Amornwiwat), father-in-law (Sompong Amornwiwat) and relative (Sawat, Sompong’s elder brother) have all become MPs, either in Chiang Rai or the neighbouring Chiang Mai Province. Re-elected in 2019, Wisarn, Wisit, Julapan and Sompong are currently serving as MPs.

Hong Son senator by his younger brother Anan in 2006. Another of Somboon's nephews, Rangsan, served as a Chiang Rai constituency MP twice from 2008 to 2014, before winning his re-election bid in 2019 on the Phuea Thai ticket. Rangsan remains a Chiang Rai MP as of 2022. Rangsan's brother-in-law (a younger brother of Rangsan's wife, Duangkhae) Samart Piriyapanyapon served as a Democrat constituency MP (2008–2011) for Ratchaburi Province in the central region (NACC Adul Wanchaithanawong 2008; NACC Rangsan Wanchaithanawong 2008; NACC Samart Piriyapanyapon 2008; NACC Somboon Wanchaithanawong 2008).

Chumphon

The PAO in Chumphon Province of southern Thailand, the Democrat Party's traditional stronghold, has fallen in the hands of the Julasais, successful operators of a bird's nest business, since 2012, when Suphol Julasai was elected president.

Prior to this electoral victory, Suphol had served as president of the SAO from 2010 until 2012. Suphol's younger brother Chumphol had served as an anti-Thaksin Democrat MP for Chumphon twice from 2008 until 2014, when he lost his seat in a military coup. Re-elected on the Democrat ticket in 2019, he is now one of the three MPs representing Chumphon.

Another of the incumbent Chumphon MPs is Suphol himself, who had resigned as PAO president in 2018 to run in the 2019 general election. He was elected under the banner of the intensely anti-Thaksin Action Coalition for Thailand Party. The office of PAO president in Chumphon has then been taken over by Noppapon Usit, whose wife, Sujitra, is Suphol's younger sister and Chumphol's elder sister (NACC Chumphol Julasai 2019; NACC Noppapon Usit 2020; NACC Suphol Julasai 2019).

Noppapon won the PAO office by defeating Sirisak Onlamai, a former Chumphon constituency MP elected six times under the Democrat banner between 1992 and 2006. After 2006, Sirisak's son Sarawut became a Chumphon constituency MP three times in 2007, 2011, and 2019. Having successfully groomed his son as a political heir apparent, Sirisak tried to seize the PAO presidency from the Julasais in 2020. Thus, two political families in Chumphon vied for the PAO post in 2020. Having won this contest, the Julasai family remains in virtual control of the PAO presidency.

Petchaburi

Chaiya Angkinan has maintained a stranglehold on the PAO presidency in another southern province, Petchaburi, winning four straight elections since 2004. His family, one of the oldest bureaucratic families in Petchaburi, traces its origin to a (Hokkien) Chinese immigrant named Angki, who became a tax collector in Bangkok in the nineteenth century. Angki's grandson Narot, who held a *khun* title as prosecutor in Satul of Monthon Phuket,²⁶ was conferred the Angkinan family name by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) in 1915 (Provincial Archives of Petchaburi 2009; Thep 2013: 272, 285).

Since the absolute monarchy was abolished in 1932, six Angkinans have been elected to Parliament as representatives of Petchaburi over three generations. Thongpoon Angkinan, elder half-brother of Chaiya's grandfather Part (Figure 5), was elected in 1938. Part followed suit in 1957. In the 1970s–1990s, Thongpoon's son Pimuk and Part's two sons, Piya (Chaiya's father) and Yuth, became Petchaburi MPs multiple times.²⁷ In 1983 and 1988, Pimuk, Piya and Yuth monopolised all three parliamentary seats contested in Petchaburi. In 2011, Yuth's son Yutthapol, who had served as deputy mayor of the Petchaburi Muang municipality (2006–2008), was elected as a Chart Thai Patthana party-list MP (NACC Yutthapol Angkinan 2011). The Angkinans' operation of two firms—one in ice production (DBD/MC, 1996) and the other in construction (DBD/MC 2009)—has facilitated their expansion into electoral politics. They have developed a reputation as a family of violent godfathers, tarnishing Petchaburi's image as a crime-ridden province with “the highest concentration of guns for hire” in Thailand (Pasuk and Sungsidh 1996: 76).

The Angkinans are kin to four other prominent families. First are the Aksonnans (Figure 5), whose family name King Vajiravudh bestowed on Uab, former assistant governor of Rayong Province, in 1916 (Thep 2013: 411, 412). One of Uab's descendants, Anthee, served as a Petchaburi constituency MP

²⁶*Khun* was a low bureaucratic title conferred during the era of absolute monarchy before 1932. *Monthon* was an administrative unit created above provinces in the late nineteenth century.

²⁷Pimook was elected four times (1976, 1983, 1986, and 1988), Piya six times (1975, 1979, 1983, 1988, March 1992, and 1996) and Yuth seven times (1983, 1986, 1988, March and September 1992, 1995 and 1996).

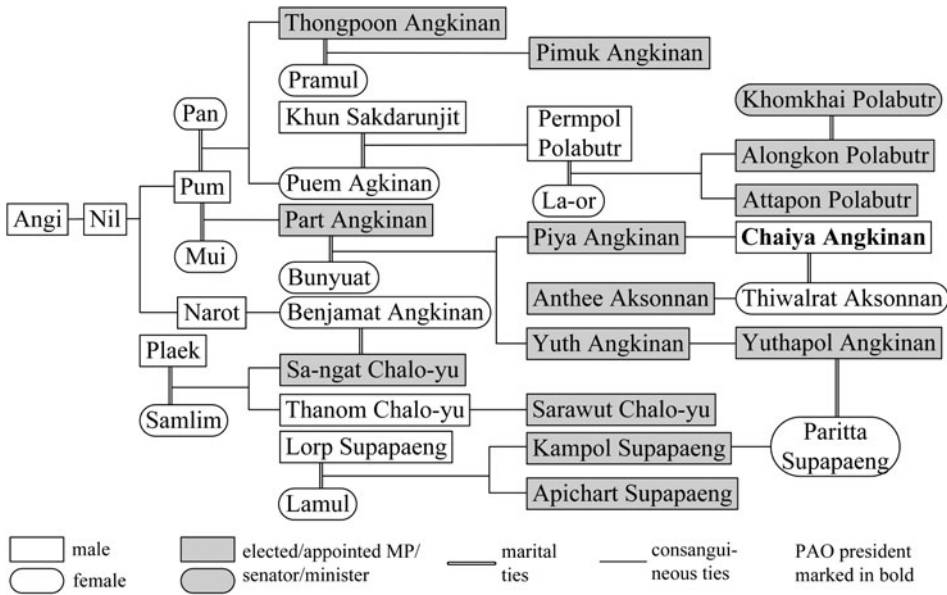


Figure 5. Politicians from the Angkinans and their kinship group.

(1986–1988). Anthee’s second daughter, Thiwalrat, has married Chaiya Angkinan, Petchaburi’s PAO president since 2004 (Natchanuk 2011: 219, 227).

Second, the Angkinans have forged marital ties with a famous military family outside Petchaburi. Benjamat Angkinan, daughter of Narot (recipient of the Angkinan family name), married the Suphanburi-born Admiral Sa-ngat Chalo-yu, leader of the 1976 and 1977 coups (Figure 5). Sa-ngat’s nephew, General Sarawut Chalo-yu,²⁸ is one of the 250 incumbent senators appointed by Prayut (CREM Prayoon Angkinan 1996: 28; CREM Sa-ngat Chalo-yu 1981: n.p.; NACC Sarawut Chalo-yu 2019).

The Polabutr, a third family related to the Angkinans, received their family name from King Vajiravudh in 1917 (Thep 2013: 506, 509). Since the 1990s, two Polabutr—Alongkon and his younger brother Attapon—have served alternately as Democrat constituency MPs for Petchaburi and as Democrat party-list MPs.²⁹ Alongkon’s wife, Khomkhai, served as a constituency MP for another province, Chanthaburi, three times from 1995 to 2005. Alongkon and Attapon trace their lineage to the Angkinan family founder: Their paternal grandmother, Pueam, was a younger sister of Thongpoon, the first Angkinan to become an MP (Natchanuk 2011: 362) (Figure 5).

Lastly, the Supapaengs have produced two MPs. Kampol Supapaeng, whose youngest daughter, Paritta, has married former party-list MP Yuthapol Angkinan (Figure 5), represented Petchaburi twice as a constituency MP under the Democrat banner (2008–2014). Kampol’s younger brother Apichart also won four successive elections in the 2000s as Petchaburi MP on the Democrat ticket (NACC Kampol Supapaeng 2008).

These families have not been unified politically, sometimes competing against each other for elected offices in Petchaburi.³⁰ These rivalries have somewhat weakened the Angkinans politically, judging from their failure to produce any MP in the 2000s despite their solid control over the PAO. Thus, the

²⁸Sarawut’s father, Thanom, was Sa-ngat’s younger brother.

²⁹Alongkon won five terms as a constituency MP between 1992 and 2011. Attapon, who had served as a party-list MP (2008–2011), replaced Alongkon as a constituency MP (2011–2014). Alongkon replaced Attapon as a party-list MP (2011–2014).

³⁰These struggles first came to a head in 1979, when Piya Angkinan successfully ran for MP against Anthee Aksonnan. In 2001, Piya and his sister-in-law (Yuth Angkinan’s wife) Buppa, both running under the TRT banner, lost to Apichart Supapaeng and Alongkon Polabutr, respectively. In 2005, Piya, running on the TRT ticket again, suffered another loss to Apichart Supapaeng. In 2007, running as PPP candidates, Piya and Thiwalrat (wife of PAO president Chaiya Angkinan) lost to Alongkon Polabutr, Apichart Supapaeng and Kampol Supapaeng. In the Muang municipal elections of 2008 and 2012, Yuth Angkinan defeated Adipol Polabutr, elder brother of Alongkon and Attapon.

Petchaburi case is illuminating in two respects. On one hand, it shows that as in many other provinces, a well-known political family that had produced multiple MPs has taken control of the PAO presidency since 2004. On the other hand, it shows that a family controlling the PAO presidency does not always win a parliamentary seat.³¹

Patrimonial Culture and Historical Sequence: Thailand in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective

The empirical findings presented in this paper highlight the irony of making the PAO presidency an elected office. Contrary to what the protagonists of this institutional initiative intended, decentralisation of power from Bangkok has led to centralisation of power in the hands of the already powerful provincial elites.

This phenomenon is not a historical aberration; instead, it should be viewed as one typical manifestation or product of Thailand's enduring patrimonial culture, in which there is a blurred division between public and private, and public office continues to be regarded as shareable, inheritable and transferrable familial property, such as a house (Weber 1978: 1028–1029, 1041).³² Embedded in this pre-existing political culture, electoral institutions in Thailand have been dominated by influential elites and their kin from the outset. Since the 1932 coup replaced the absolute monarchy with constitutional democracy, Parliament—an institutional symbol of Thailand's democratic state—has been controlled by a steadily growing number of political families. From 1988 to 2014, more than 52 per cent of the parliamentary seats contested went to political families (Nishizaki 2018: 381). In particular, the elected Senate and the party-list system, both implemented under the 1997 constitution, have been penetrated by political families (Nishizaki 2022: 147–150). The PAO presidency, made an elected office by the 1997 Constitution, is another office dominated by political families. Electoral institutions are shaped by a broader political culture in which they are embedded. Consequently, well-intentioned policies do not always produce the desired results.

This argument is theoretically supported by the historical institutionalist literature, of which the Nobel laureate Douglass North is a major proponent. North argues that the cross-national variation in the character of legal and electoral institutions can be attributed in part to the variation in political culture—the sum of historically transmitted values, knowledge, codes of conduct and norms of behaviour, which he subsumes under the concept of 'informal constraints' (North 1990: 36–37). Plainly, North views a political culture as constituting a broad context that shapes or constrains the nature of formal institutions. This is essentially what Putnam (1993) and Banfield (1958) argue about southern Italy in their classic books: Southern Italy has been trapped in a longstanding patrimonial political culture, in which stocks of 'social capital' are low, and 'amoral familism' is the norm. Putnam supports his argument by drawing on North's theory.

A crucial element of the historical institutionalist argument is "the sequence by which modern [electoral] institutions are introduced and, in particular, the stage at which the democratic franchise is first opened" (Fukuyama 2015: 201). As Francis Fukuyama (2015: 203) argues, such institutions were transplanted into a *pre-existing* patrimonial culture in most late-developing countries. In this sequence, oligarchic family rule—the antithesis of democratic pluralism—tends to emerge as 'a default mode' of governance, given human beings' natural proclivities for favouring their relatives over strangers (Fukuyama 2015: 199, 208; see also Fukuyama 2011: 450, 453).

Thailand is no exception to this pattern. Thanks to the century-long absolute monarchy, patrimonialism had become deeply entrenched decades *before* electoral institutions were introduced from the top down in 1932 (Jacobs 1971: 27). In particular, King Chulalongkorn, eulogised in Thailand's official royalist historiography as a far-sighted 'modernising' king, epitomised and perpetuated this culture. He appointed his numerous male relatives and nobles tied to him by marriage or concubinage, often despite their lack of experience and expertise, to the proliferating bureaucratic positions spawned by his administrative reforms. As he extended his sovereign reach by delegating some of his authority to these people, a patrimonial culture spread nationwide, permeating the lowest level of the bureaucracy in both Bangkok and outer provinces.

³¹A good avenue of future research would be to explain this kind of variation in the electoral strength of PAO presidents or their families: Why have some political families been more successful than others in retaining the PAO presidency and parliamentary seats?

³²This concluding section draws in part on Nishizaki (2022: 215–221).

This culture has endured to date, having undergone little fundamental change, despite all the twists and turns in Thailand's political history. The 1932 coup, dubbed a 'revolution' in Thai, amounted to little more than a change in formal rules of the political game. It only supplanted the absolute monarchy with a *form* of Western representative democracy hoisted from above onto the politically apathetic and illiterate populace. Thus, the new rules of parliamentary governance introduced in 1932 were 'an alien set of rules' incongruent with the pre-existing patrimonial culture (North 1990: 103). Introduced into this institutional context, Parliament was captured by the elites who treated their seats as an extension of their personal or familial property. These elites followed the examples set by the kings and their bureaucratic minions before 1932. Their patterns of behaviour in turn influenced how successive generations of elites viewed their political office.

The long spell of authoritarian rule in the 1950s–1970s exacerbated the patrimonial culture by vividly demonstrating the close relationship among family ties, unregulated political power and extravagant wealth. The corruption of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachon (prime minister, 1963–1973), Colonel Narong (Thanom's son) and Field Marshal Prapas Charusathien (Narong's father-in-law) is almost proverbial. The 1973 student-led uprising against Thanom's military regime, also called a 'revolution' in Thai, only resurrected electoral politics without breaking the shell of patrimonial political culture, within which family rule had been incubated.

In this historical context, the decentralisation strategy was enforced in 1997 with fanfare. As symbolised by the elected PAO, political and economic power has been diffused from Bangkok to the provinces. In Thailand's patrimonial culture inherited from the past, this decentralised power has been appropriated by deeply entrenched local elites and their kin in many provinces. In some provinces, such as Nakhon Ratchasima and Chainat, these elites have been challenged and replaced by other political families. Such changes only mean that the PAO presidency has passed from one elite family to another. In the grander scheme of things, the nature of oligarchic rule has changed little. Paul Hutchcroft (2001: 27, 31) theorises that in a country where 'strong and autonomous local patrimonial powers'—akin to family-based elites in provincial Thailand—already wield much influence, decentralisation efforts are likely to fail because these elites' "informal networks of power...will undercut the formal...structures of authority." No government, Hutchcroft warned prophetically in 2001, should make a hasty attempt at decentralisation without paying careful attention to pre-existing political conditions. The already influential elites and their family members in provincial Thailand have carved up the power devolved to the PAOs. They constitute one small yet integral part of Thailand's oligarchic patrimonial polity, along with numerous dynastic politicians in the national Parliament (Nishizaki 2022).

Thailand has noteworthy similarities with the Philippines. Long before the Americans introduced democratic institutions in the Philippines in 1907, a patrimonial culture had taken deep root, as decried by William Taft, governor-general of the Philippines (Karnow 1990: 198, 230, 231). Consequently, electoral institutions in the Philippines were dominated and even hijacked by provincial landowning elites (called *caciques*) and their relatives from the beginning (Hutchcroft 2000; McCoy 1993). Benedict Anderson (1988) famously called this polity 'cacique democracy.'

The Philippines' patrimonial political culture survived into the postcolonial period. It reached new heights after President Ferdinand Marcos, initially elected in 1965, emerged as an autocrat in 1972 (Hutchcroft 1991). The 1986 People Power Revolution that toppled Marcos did not change this culture. It did little more than restore 'cacique democracy' that had flourished before the Marcos era. In the post-Marcos period, the proportion of dynastic representatives steadily increased from 62 per cent in the eighth Congress (1987–1992) to 72 per cent in the thirteenth Congress (2003–2006) (Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre 2013: 363). As recently as 2013, 74 per cent of the House members came from political families scattered over 81 provinces. The extent of dynastic control is even higher at the local level, with 85 per cent of provincial governors and 84 per cent of mayors belonging to political families (Tadem and Tadem 2016: 329).

Indonesia provides an equally intriguing comparison. The country initiated efforts to decentralise political power after President Suharto's decades-long authoritarian rule was toppled in 1998, around the same time that Thailand's decentralisation scheme got under way. Indonesia's broad institutional context resembles the one in Thailand (and the Philippines). The patrimonial nature of the state perpetuated during Suharto's rule (Crouch 1979) has endured into the nominally or procedurally democratic post-Suharto period. As this 'patrimonial democratic' state (Webber 2006) has delegated power to various provinces of the vast Indonesian archipelago, "those who [had] inhabited the lower layers of the system of

patronage on which the New Order [a system maintained by Suharto] was premised have [become] the greatest beneficiaries of the opening of the political space” (Hadiz 2011: 90). Hadiz’s argument, based on the cases of North Sumatra and East Java, captures the political dynamics in many other parts of Indonesia (Aspinall and Fealy 2003; Choi 2004, 2007, 2009). The already entrenched local elites, as well as new emerging elites not linked to Suharto, have now wrested a considerable amount of political and economic power from the previously centralised state.

Most of these elites, like their counterparts in Thailand, come from political families. Michael Buehler (2007, 2013) describes two such families: the Limpos and Atuts in South Sulawesi and Banten, respectively. The latter family secured top posts in four of the eight districts in Banten within a decade after direct local elections were introduced in 2005. Banten has also seen the rise of another political family, the Sochibs (Hamid 2014). In Pekalongan of Java, the Djunaidis are rising to political prominence. In 2015, Arslan, a third-generation member of this family, was elected mayor of Pekalongan (Savirani 2016). Another study shows that, of the 34 female candidates who ran for local political posts (i.e., mayor and regent) in Java between 2010 and 2015, 23 were related by birth or marriage to powerful men who had previously held those and other posts. There was a scramble for power among these local elites. Of the 23 dynastic female candidates, 11 were elected. Most of the winning candidates replaced their husbands or fathers as mayor or regent (Dewi 2015: 187–192). Local political office has been passed down from one family member to another as if it were an heirloom. Dewi (2015: 193) concludes that these patterns of dynastic political succession attest to “a concentration of local political power in the hands of a small group of the political elite, which hinders democratisation in local politics.” Another study shows that the local elites have gained even more power: Of all 120 women elected to national Parliament in 2019, 53 (44 per cent)—a considerable increase from 34 per cent in 2014—came from political families; many of these women are the wives, daughters, sisters and other relatives of former governors, deputy governors and mayors (Wardani and Subekti 2021, 33–34).

Enforced in a deeply ingrained patrimonial culture, Thailand’s elected PAO presidency initiative has produced similar outcomes. The liberal pundits who devised the 1997 Constitution had good intentions, but they were oblivious to the historical institutionalists’ message about the effects of political culture on electoral institutions. Revising a constitution and changing electoral laws alone have proved fruitless and counterproductive, because the “informal constraints that are culturally derived will not change immediately in reaction to changes in the formal rules” (North 1990: 45). Old habits die hard. Quite arguably, it is a foregone conclusion that the elected PAO presidency, a cornerstone of Thailand’s decentralisation initiative, has produced results that are at odds with what was intended.

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Appendix. List of elected PAO presidents, 2004–2021

| | Province | Name | Thai spelling | Number of terms served as PAO chief | Murder -ed | Number of MPs in the kinship group | PAO chief from monopolistic family* | PAO chief from semi-monopolistic family* | PAO chief who had previously served as MP | PAO chief who later became MP | PAO chief whose kin has become MP | Incumbent PAO chief whose kin is MP as of 2021 | Incumbent PAO chief whose kin was MP in the past | Female PAO chief | Female PAO chief from political family |
|----|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|------------------|--|
| 1 | Amnat Charoen | Chaiyapon Thongprasert | ชัยพร ทองประเสริฐ | 2 | | 6 | | | / | | / | | | | |
| 2 | | Sakchai Tangtrakulwong | ศักดิ์ชัย ตั้งตระกูลวงศ์ | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | Wanpen Tangsakul | วันเพ็ญ ตั้งสกุล | 1 | | | | | | | | | | / | |
| 4 | Ang Thong | Surachet Nimkul | สุรเชษ นิมกุล | 4 | | | / | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Ayutthaya | Somsong Pancharoenworakul | สมทรง พันธุ์เจริญวรกุล | 4 | | 4 | / | | | | / | / | | / | / |
| 6 | Bueng Karn | Nipon Khonkhayan | นิพนธ์ คนขยัน | 1 | | 1 | | | / | | | | | | |
| 7 | | Wenfa Thongsri | เว่นฟ้า ทองศรี | 1 | | 5 | | | | | / | / | | / | / |
| 8 | Buriram | Chavalit Chidchob | ชาวลิต ชิดชอบ | 1 | | 5 | / | | | | / | | | | |
| 9 | | Karuna Chidchob | กรุณา ชิดชอบ | 2 | | 5 | / | | / | | / | | | / | / |
| 10 | | Pusit Lekudakon | ภูษิต เล็กอุดากกร | 1 | | 6 | / | | | | / | / | | | |
| 11 | Chachoengsao | Kiti Paopiamsap | กิตติ เป็ปี่ยมทรัพย์ | 4 | | 1 | / | | | | / | / | | | |
| 12 | Chainat | Jirada Songpracha | จิรดา สงฆ์ประชา | 1 | | 3 | | | | | / | | | / | |
| 13 | | Anuson Nakhasai | อนุสรณ์ นาคาศัย | 3 | | 3 | | / | | | / | / | | | |
| 14 | Chaiyaphum | Anan Limpakhatathawon | อนันต์ ลิมปคุปดถาวร | 1 | | 1 | | | | / | | | | | |
| 15 | | Suriyon Pumiraprapin | สุรียณ ภูมिरัตนประพิน | 1 | | 1 | | | / | | | | | | |
| 16 | | Montri Chaeekhrua | มนตรี ชชาติเครือ | 1 | | 2 | | | | | / | | | | |
| 17 | | Aram(achawat) Loweera | อร่าม(อาชวาท) โล่ห์วีระ | 1 | | 2 | | | / | | / | | / | | |
| 18 | Chanthaburi | Thanapon Kitjakan | ธนภณ กิจกาญจน์ | 4 | | 1 | / | | | | / | | / | | |
| 19 | Chiang Rai | Ratana Chongsuthanamane | รัตนา จงสุทธานามณี | 2 | | 4 | | | / | | / | | | / | / |
| 20 | | Sakjarid Tiypairat | สลักจตุตถ์ ดิยะไพรัช | 1 | | 5 | | | / | | / | | | / | / |
| 21 | | Busarint Worapathanan | บุศรีณธัญ วรรณานันน์ | 1 | | 5 | | | / | | / | | | / | / |
| 22 | | Athitathon Wanchaithanawong | อติถาวร วันไชยชนวงศ์ | 1 | | 5 | | | | | / | / | | / | / |
| 23 | Chiang Mai | Thawatwong na Chiang Mai | ธวัชวงศ์ ณ เชียงใหม่ | 1 | | 4 | | | / | | / | | | | |
| 24 | | Bunlert Buranupakon | บุญเลิศ บูรณุปกรณ์ | 2 | | 3 | | | | | / | | | | |
| 25 | | Pichai Lertpongadison | พิชัย เลิศพงษ์อดิสร | 1 | | 1 | | | | | / | | / | | |
| 26 | Chonburi | Pinyo Tanwiset | ปิญ โย ตันวิเศษ | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | Province | Name | Thai spelling | Number of terms served as PAO chief | Murder -ed | Number of MPs in the kinship group | PAO chief from monopo- listic family* | PAO chief from semi- mono- listic family* | PAO chief who had previously served as MP | PAO chief who later became MP | PAO chief whose kin has become MP | Incumbent PAO chief whose kin is MP as of 2021 | Incumbent PAO chief whose kin was MP in the past | Female PAO chief from political family |
|----|--------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 27 | | Withaya Khumplem | วิฑายา กุณปเฌิม | 3 | | 4 | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 28 | Chumpol | Amnuay Buakhiaw | อานวอ บัวชีอว | 2 | | 1 | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 29 | | Supol Julasai | สุพล จุลใส | 1 | | 2 | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 30 | | Noppapon Usit | นพพร อุสิทธิ์ | 1 | | 2 | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 31 | Kachanaburi | Rangasan Rasamecerkset | รังสรรค รักษักกัสมรฐ์ | 3 | | 1 | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 32 | | Surapong Pyachot | สุรพงษ์ ปิยะโชติ | 1 | | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 33 | Kalasin | Yongyut Lotrakul | ยงยุทธ หล่อตระกูล | 2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 34 | | Chamoi Woramit | ชฌมอย วรณัตริ | 1 | | 2 | | | | | | | | |
| 35 | | Chanuwat Woramit | ชฌนุวัฒน วรณัตริ | 1 | | 2 | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 36 | Kampeng Pet | Julapan Thapthim | จุลพาน์ ทับทิม | 2 | | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 37 | | Sunthon Ratanakon | สุนทร รัตนการ | 2 | | 1 | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 38 | Khon Kaen | Pongsak Tangwanitchakapong | พงษ์ศักดิ์ ตังวานิชคพงษ์ | 4 | | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 39 | Krabi | Sonsak Kitithorakul | สมศักดิ์ กิติธรรกุล | 4 | | 2 | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 40 | Lampang | Sunee Sommee | สุนี สมมี | 3 | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 41 | | Tuangrat Lohsunthon | ดวงรัตน์ โล่ห์สุนทร | 1 | | 4 | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 42 | Lampun | Samarn Chomputhep | สมาน ชมอุทพ | 1 | | 1 | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| 43 | | Songchat Wongsawat | ทรงชัย วงศ์สวัสดิ์ | 1 | | 10 | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 44 | | Nirandon Dampaboon | นิรันดร์ ด่านไพบุลย์ | 1 | | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 45 | | Anuson Wongwan | อนุสรณ์ วงศ์วรรณ | 1 | | 4 | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 46 | Loei | Thanawat Thinsuwan | ธนาวุฒิ ทิมสุวรรณ | 4 | | 4 | | | | | | | | |
| 47 | Lopburi | Suban Jirapanwanit | สุบรรณ จิระพันธุ์วานิช | 2 | ✓ | 2 | | | | | | | | |
| 48 | | Orapin Jirapanwanit | อรพิน จิระพันธุ์วานิช | 3 | | 2 | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 49 | Mae Hong Son | Surasit Treethong | สุรสิทธิ์ ศรีทอง | 1 | | 2 | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 50 | | Akaradet Wanchaithanawong | อัศวเดช วันไชยธนวงษ์ | 4 | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 51 | Mahasarakham | Yingyot Udoppin | ยั้งยศ อุตรพิมพ์ | 4 | | 5 | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 52 | | Khomkhai Udoppin | กมลยศ อุตรพิมพ์ | 3 | | 1 | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| | | | | 2 | | 1 | | | | | | | | ✓ |

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|----|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 53 | Mukdahan | Adul Chaisunan | อดุล ไชยสุนันท์ | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 54 | | Wiriya Thongra | วิริยะ ทองธา | 1 | | 1 | | | / | | | | | |
| 55 | | Malairak Thongpa | มัลลรักษ์ ทองภา | 2 | | 1 | | | / | | | | | |
| 56 | | Jit Sriyoha Mukdathanapong | จิตศรีโหะ มุกดาธนพงศ์ | 1 | | 3 | | / | / | | | / | | |
| 57 | Nakhon Nayok | Noraset lam-artharm | นรเศรษฐ์ เลี่ยมอาจหาญ | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 58 | | Sanya Bunlong | สัญญา บุญหลง | 2 | | 2 | | / | / | | | | | |
| 59 | | Jakrapan Jintanapakanon | จักรพันธ์ จินตนาพานานนท์ | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 60 | Nakhon Panom | Manapon Charoensri | มนพร เจริญศรี | 1 | | 2 | | | / | | | / | | / |
| 61 | | Somchorp Nitipot | สมชอภ นิตพิจน์ | 2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 62 | | Supapane Posu | สุพจน์ โพธิ์สุ | 1 | | 1 | | | | | / | | / | / |
| 63 | Nakhon Pathom | Payao Niyakaew | ไพเยาว์ นิยะแก้ว | 3 | | | | / | | | | | | |
| 64 | | Jirawat Sasomsap | จิรวัดน์ สะสมทรัพย์ | 1 | | 6 | | | / | | | | | |
| 65 | Nakhon Ratchasima | Withoon Chartpathinapong | วิฑูร ชชาติภูมิพงษ์ | 1 | | 1 | | | / | | | | | |
| 66 | | Samreng Yaengkrathok | สำริง เบงกะระโท | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 67 | | Ranongrak Suvanchawee | रणองรักษ์ สุวรรณเฉลี | 1 | | 4 | | / | / | | / | | / | / |
| 68 | | Yonda Wangsupakikosol | ยอดา หวังสุภกิจ โกลด | 1 | | 4 | | | | | / | | / | / |
| 69 | Nakhon Sawan | Amnat Sirichai | อำนาจ ศิริชัย | 2 | / | | | | | | | | | |
| 70 | | Manop Sripueng | มานพ ศรีพึง | 2 | | 1 | | | / | | | | | |
| 71 | | Somsak Jantthaping | สมศักดิ์ จันทะพิงก์ | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 72 | Nakhon Sithammarat | Withoon Detdecho | วิฑูรย์ เดตเดโช | 2 | | 1 | | | / | | / | | | |
| 73 | | Pichai Bunyakiat | พิชัย บุญเกียรติ | 2 | | 2 | | / | / | | / | | | |
| 74 | | Manot Senapong | มานโธเซนพงษ์ | 1 | | 2 | | | / | | / | | | |
| 75 | | Kanokpon Detdecho | กนกพร เดตเดโช | 1 | | 1 | | | / | | / | | | / |
| 76 | Nan | Narin Lao-araya | นรินทร์ เหล้าอารยะ | 3 | | | | / | | | | | | |
| 77 | | Noparat Thawong | นพรัตน์ ทาวงศ์ | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 78 | Narathiwat | Kuseng Yawohasan | กุซัง ยาหวะหะซัน | 4 | | 4 | | / | / | | / | | / | |

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|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 79 Nong Bua Lampu | Sorachat Suwanprom | สรชชาติ สุวรรณพรหม | 1 | | 1 | | / | / | | | | | |
| 80 | Sorawat Santinamtrak | ศรวาท สันติเนตรักษ์ | 2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 81 | Wuthipong Sirsathit | วุฒิพงษ์ ศิริสถิตย์ | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 82 Nong Khai | Yuthana Sritabat | ยุทธนา ศรีตะบุตร | 4 | | 3 | / | | | / | | | / | |
| 83 Nonthaburi | Thongchai Yenprasert | ธงชัย เย็นประเสริฐ | 4 | | | / | | | | | | | |
| 84 Pan-nga | Anan Bunrak | อนันต์ บุญรักษ์ | 1 | / | | | | | | | | | |
| 85 | Bamrung Piyanamwanit | บำรุง ปิยนามวานิช | 2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 86 | Chakat Pathanakitwibul | ฉกาจ พัฒนกิจวิบูลย์ | 2 | | 1 | | / | | | | | | |
| 87 | Tharathip Thongjerm | ธราธิป ทองจิม | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 88 Pathum Thani | Charm Puangpet | ชาญ พวงเพ็ชร์ | 3 | | | | / | | | | | | |
| 89 | Khamronwit Thupkrajang | กัณหอนวิทย์ ฐูประจาง | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 90 Pattani | Set Ahyufri | เศรษฐ์ อัยยูฟรี | 4 | | | | / | | | | | | |
| 91 Patthalung | Sanan Suphanchanaburi | सानนท์ สุพรรณจนะบุรี | 2 | | 1 | | | / | | | | | |
| 92 | Wisut Thammapet | วิสุทธ์ ธรรมเพชร | 2 | | 2 | | | | / | | | / | |
| 93 Pechabun | Akharadet Thongjairot | อักรเดช ทองใจสด | 4 | | 1 | / | | | / | | | | |
| 94 Petchaburi | Chaya Angkinan | ชัยยะ อังกินันท์ | 4 | | 10 | / | | | / | | | | |
| 95 Phayao | Pairat Tanbanjong | ไพรัตน์ ต้นบรวง | 2 | | 5 | | | | / | | | | |
| 96 | Worawit Buranasiri | รววิทย์ บุรณศิริ | 2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 97 | Akhara Prompaio | อัศราพรหมเต่า | 1 | | 1 | | | | / | | | | |
| 98 Phrae | Charnchai Silapa-uaychai | ชาญชัย ศิลปอวยชัย | 1 | / | | | | | | | | | |
| 99 | Anuwat Wongwan | อนุวัฑ วงศ์วรรณ | 4 | | 5 | / | | | / | | | / | |
| 100 Phuket | Anchalee Wanit Thepabut | อังชุลี วงษ์เทพบุตร | 1 | | 4 | | | / | / | | | / | |
| 101 | Paiboon Uptsaisang | ไพบุณย์ อุบัติศังข์ | 2 | | 1 | | | / | / | | | | |
| 102 | Rewat Areeerorp | เรวัต อธีรอรบ | 1 | | 1 | | | / | / | | | | |
| 103 Pchit | Chartchai Jiamsripong | ชาติชาย เจียมศรีพงษ์ | 3 | | | | / | | | | | | |
| 104 | Kritsada Patraprasit | กฤษดา กั๊กประสิทธิ์ | 1 | | 4 | | | | / | | | / | |

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|----------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 105 | Psanulok | Thawatchai Kamapan | ชวัลชัย กัมมะพันธุ์ | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 106 | | Surin Thipunya | สุรินทร์ ฐิตปัญญา | 1 | 1 | | | / | | | | | |
| 107 | | Monchai Watthanat | มนชัย วิวัฒน์ธนาฒย์ | 2 | 1 | | | / | | | | | |
| 108 | Prachinburi | Bang-on Wilawan | บังอร วิลาลัย | 3 | 3 | / | | / | | / | | / | |
| 109 | | Sunthon Wilawan | สุนทร วิลาลัย | 1 | 3 | / | | / | | / | | | |
| 110 | Prachuab Khiri Khan | Songkiat Lim-arunrak | ทรงเกียรติ ลิ้มอรุณรักษ์ | 3 | | | | | | | | | |
| 111 | | Sorawut Lin-arunrak | ศราวุธ ลิ้มอรุณรักษ์ | 1 | | / | | | | / | | | |
| 112 | Ranong | Bodin Chatmakeerat | บดินทร์ จักรมหาสิทธิ์ | 1 | 1 | | | | | / | | | |
| 113 | | Napa Natheethong | นภาพนทีทอง | 1 | 1 | | | / | | | | | |
| 114 | | Khongkrit Chatmakeerat | ทองกุล จักรมหาสิทธิ์ | 1 | 1 | | | | / | | | | |
| 115 | | Thanakon Borsuthinanee | ธนากร บุรีสุทธิญาณี | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 116 | Ratchaburi | Somsak Rattanamong | สมศักดิ์ รัตนมั่ง | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 117 | | Wanchai Theerasatayakul | วันชัย วีระศักดิ์กุล | 3 | 1 | / | | / | | | | | |
| 118 | | Wiwat Nitkanchana | วิวัฒน์ นิตกาญจนา | 1 | 2 | | | / | | / | | | |
| 119 | Rayong | Panajueapet Krisanarat | พาเจือเพชร ฤกษ์ธนะราช | 1 | 1 | | | | / | | | | |
| 120 | | Sin Kumpa | สิน กุมพะ | 1 | 1 | | | / | | | | | |
| 121 | | Piya Pitteecha | ปิยะ ปิตุเตชะ | 4 | 5 | / | | / | | / | | | |
| 122 | Roiet | Ratchanee Pholsue | รัชนี พลซื่อ | 1 | 3 | | | | / | / | | / | / |
| 123 | | Mangkon Yontrakul | มังกร ยนต์ระกูล | 2 | 4 | | | / | | / | | | |
| 124 | | Ekkapap Pholsue | เอกภาพ พลซื่อ | 1 | 3 | | | / | | / | | | |
| 125 | Sakaew | Songyot Thienthong | ทรงยศ เข็มทอง | 3 | 8 | / | | / | | / | | / | / |
| 126 | | Khwanruan Thienthong | ขวัญเรือน เข็มทอง | 1 | 8 | / | | / | | / | | / | / |
| 127 | Sakhon Nakhon | Weerasak Prompakdee | วีระศักดิ์ พรหมภักดี | 1 | 1 | | | | | / | | | |
| 128 | | Chayamongkhon Chairob | ชัยมงคล ไชยรบ | 2 | | | | | | | | | |
| 129 | | Chupong Khamjuang | ชูพงษ์ คำจวง | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 130 | Samut Prakan | Amnuay Ratsamithat | อำนาจ รัตmithat | 2 | 2 | | | | | / | | | |

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|----------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 131 | Sompon Asavahem | สมพร อัสวาหม | 1 | 5 | / | / | / | / | / | | | |
| 132 | Chonsawat Asavahem | จอนมสวัสดิ์ อัสวาหม | 2 | 5 | / | / | / | / | / | | | |
| 133 | Nanthida Kaewbuasai | นันท์ธิดา แก้วบัวสาย | 1 | 5 | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 134 | Samut Sakhon | สมุทร สักขะ | 2 | 3 | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 135 | Monthol Kraiwattanuson | มณฑล ไกรวัตนุสสรณ์ | 1 | 3 | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 136 | Udom Kraiwattanuson | อุดม ไกรวัตนุสสรณ์ | 1 | 3 | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 137 | Samut Songkhram | อัมวอ สมิชธานี อวชัย | 1 | 1 | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 138 | Yothin Tanprasert | โยธิน ตันประเสริฐ | 1 | 1 | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 139 | Pisit Sueasaming | พิสิฐ เสือสมิง | 2 | | | | | | | | | |
| 140 | Sukanda Panasuttha | สุกานดา ปานะสุทธะ | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 141 | Saraburi | เฉลิม วงษ์ไพฑูริ | 3 | | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 142 | Chalerm Wongprai | ชัยุธา บุญหลง | 1 | 2 | | | | | | | / | / |
| 143 | Satul | วิฑูร์ หลั่งใจ | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | / | / |
| 144 | Thanin Jaisamut | ธานีพร ใจสมุทร | 1 | 2 | | | | | | | / | / |
| 145 | Samrit Liangprasit | สัมฤทธิ์ เสี่ยงประสิทธิ์ | 3 | 1 | | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 146 | Singburi | สรภัญชเียนถาวร | 3 | 4 | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 147 | Supawat Thianthawon | ศุภวัฒน์ เทียนถาวร | 1 | 4 | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 148 | Sisaket | วิจิต ไทรธรรมากุล | 4 | 4 | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 149 | Songkla | นพพล บุญชูงาม | 2 | 1 | | | | | | | / | / |
| 150 | Uthit Chuachay | อุทธิศ ชูชูว | 2 | | | | | | | | / | / |
| 151 | Nipon Bunyamane | นิพนธ์ บุญชูงาม | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | / | / |
| 152 | Pajien Makuwan | ไพเจน มากสุวรรณ | 1 | | | | | | | | / | / |
| 153 | Sukhothai | มนู พุดประเสริฐ | 3 | 4 | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 154 | Pansiri Kulnatsiri | พรรณศิริ กุลนศิริ | 1 | 4 | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 155 | Suphamburi | บุญชู จันทร์สุวรรณ | 4 | | / | / | / | / | / | | / | / |
| 156 | Surat Thani | ธานี เทือกสุบรรณ | 2 | 3 | | | | | | | / | / |

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|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|------------------|--|
| | Montri Petchakhum | มนตรี เพชรขุ้ม | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Pongsak Jakaew | พงษ์ศักดิ์ จำแก้ว | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 159 Surin | Thongchai Mungcharoenpon | ธงชัย มุ่งเจริญพร | 1 | | 5 | | | | | / | | | | |
| 160 | Natthapol Jaratrapipong | ณัฐพล จรัสพิพงษ์ | 1 | | 1 | | | | / | | | | | |
| 161 | Kittipat Rungthanakiat | กิตติภัทร รุ่งธนเกียรติ | 1 | | 2 | | | / | | / | | | | |
| 162 | Ponchai Mungcharoenpon | พรชัย มุ่งเจริญพร | 1 | | 5 | | | | | / | / | | | |
| 163 Tak | Chingchai Koprapakit | ชิงชัย ก่อประกากิจ | 2 | | 1 | | | | / | | | | | |
| 164 | Nathawut Thaweekeueakulkit | ณัฐวุฒิ ทวีเกื้อกูลกิจ | 2 | | 1 | | | | | / | / | | | |
| 165 Trang | Kit Leekpai | กิจ หลีกภัย | 3 | | 1 | | / | | | / | | | | |
| 166 | Bunleng Losathaponpipit | บุนเส็ง โลสธาปนพิพิธ | 1 | | 3 | | | | | / | / | | | |
| 167 Trat | Wichien Sapcharoen | วิเชียร ทรัพย์เจริญ | 4 | | 1 | / | | | | / | | | | |
| 168 Ubon Ratchathani | Ponchai Kowsurat | พรชัย ไควสุรัตน์ | 3 | | 4 | | / | | | / | | | | |
| 169 | Karn Kantinan | กานต์ กัณปิตินันท์ | 1 | | 5 | | | / | | / | / | | | |
| 170 Udon Thani | Chalermpol Sanitwongchai | เฉลิมพล สนิทวงศ์ชัย | 1 | | 3 | | | / | | / | | | | |
| 171 | Harnchai Theekathananon | ชาญชัย ทิฆมณานนท์ | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 172 | Wichien Khaokham | วิเชียร ขาวขำ | 2 | | 2 | | | / | | / | / | | | |
| 173 Utaradit | Chaisiri Suparakjinda | ชัยศิริ สุภรณ์จินดา | 3 | | | | / | | | | | | | |
| 174 | Peerasak Pojiti | พีระศักดิ์ พอจิต | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 175 Uthai Thani | Prasert Mongkholsiri | ประเสริฐ มงคลศิริ | 1 | | 2 | | | / | | / | | | | |
| 176 | Padet Nuiparee | เผด็จ นุ้ยปรี | 3 | | 1 | | / | | | / | | / | | |
| 177 Yala | Asis Benhawan | อาซิส เบ็ญหาวัน | 1 | | 1 | | | | | / | | | | |
| 178 | Mukta Matha | มุขตาร์ มะทา | 3 | | 3 | | / | / | | / | / | | | |
| 179 Yasothon | Sathirapon Naksuk | สธิรพร นาคสุข | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 180 | Sarit Pradapsri | สฤนต์ ประดับศรี | 1 | | 1 | | | / | | | | | | |
| 181 | Wichien Somwong | วิเชียร สมวงศ์ | 1 | | 1 | | | | | / | / | | | |
| Total | | | | 5 | | 39 | 16 | 48 | 17 | 107 | 34 | 18 | 25 | 21 |

*A 'monopolistic family' refers to a family that has controlled the PAO presidency for four terms, and a 'semi-monopolistic family' refers to one controlling the office for three terms.