

The Democrats in Bangkok

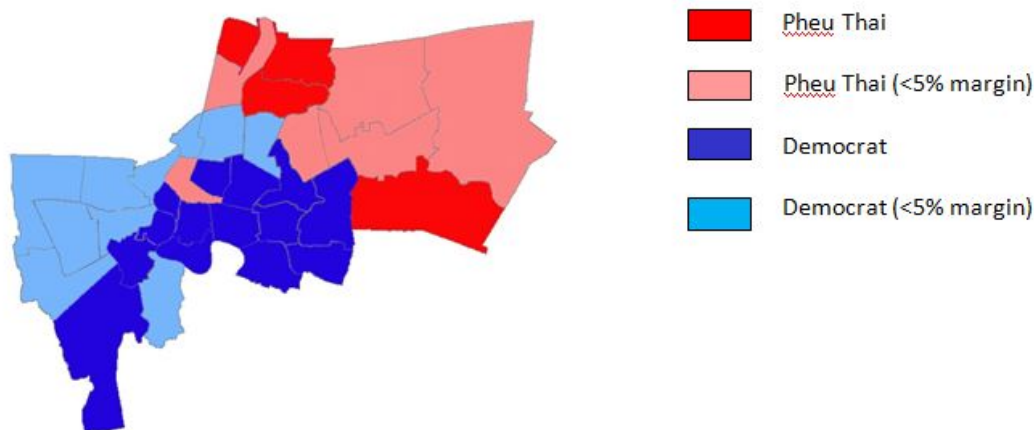


The Democrats took some observers by surprise by winning 23 out of 33 constituencies in Bangkok. Given that pollsters have placed Pheu Thai in the clear lead, coupled with rising inflation and a few policy missteps earlier this year, many predicted Bangkok too would vote for change.

From the constituency basis alone, it seems that more Bangkokians preferred a status quo to change. The Democrats were able to retain the majority of the districts they won in the 2007 elections (see [Table 1](#)) – having lost only Dusit but gained Bangkokapi and Nong Khaem in return. Meanwhile, the majority of constituencies that Pheu Thai won in this election are former Thai Rak Thai strongholds.

Yet a more careful look into electoral results reveals that out of the 23 constituencies the Democrats managed to win over in this election, 10 of them represent a tight race, whereby

Democrats candidates beat their Pheu Thai counterparts by less than 5% of the votes. Sripatum University calculates that overall the Democrats actually lost, on a numerical basis, 31% of the votes in Bangkok alone, 14% of which went to Pheu Thai, while 7% went to Chuvit's Rak Prathet Thai.^[i]



While this represents a setback for the Democrat Party's electoral base in Bangkok, it is not a stunning defeat per se. Bangkok is not "traditionally" a Bangkok stronghold as many have argued. Indeed, in the past 5 national elections, Bangkok voters have swung back and forth between the Democrats and Thai Rak Thai/Pheu Thai. This is summarised in [Table 1](#). In the 1996 election, the Democrats won outright 9 out of 13 electoral districts.^[ii] On the contrary, in the 2001 and 2005 elections, they managed to gain only 8/36 and 4/37 constituencies respectively. The Democrat Party made a major comeback in the 2007 election, sweeping 27 out of 36 seats in Bangkok.

The Democrats were still going strong in the local elections last year, sweeping 210/256 seats in the Council and 45/61 seats in the District Council.^[iii] The election took place just weeks after the bloody event in May of 2010, indicating that a number of Bangkok locals did not condemn Abhisit's handling of the crisis.

So what went wrong?

The rising inflation and the Democrats' measures to battle high living costs may contribute to their decline in popularity among some urban voters. Research from Kasikornbank released in April warned that a jump in the prices of some staple items, coupled with a sharp rise in the inflation rate to four per cent in the same month, is a major concern for the government. Abhisit's measures to deal with high food prices, such as the government's egg policy, have proved hugely unpopular.^[iv] Shortages of cooking oil earlier this year dealt a heavy blow to the government's ability to look out for the interests of regular folks.

