The Market for Votes in Thailand

Allen D. Hicken
Assistant Professor
University of Michigan
ahicken@umich.edu

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Introduction

Vote buying has been a regular and much lamented feature of national elections in Thailand throughout its (semi) democratic history. In fact, to some vote buying is the defining feature of Thai elections. It is nearly impossible to find an analysis of Thailand’s political system, either in the popular press or academic literature, that doesn’t make some mention of vote buying. Several studies of vote buying in Thailand have focused on the mechanics of the exchange, which by now are fairly well understood (see for example Murashima 1987; Sombat 1993; Arghiros 1993, 1995; Callahan and McCargo 1996; Callahan 2000). Other studies have taken vote buying as an independent variable and used it to explain certain political or policy outcomes. King (1996) argues that the importance of vote buying as a campaign strategy has increased the influence of big business in Thai politics while Ockey (1991, 2000) demonstrates that vote buying can be linked to the growth of organized crime. Efforts have also been made to explain why a market for votes exists in the first place (Arghiros 1995; Callahan and McCargo 1996; Callahan 2000). Explanations tend to focus on a variety of structural and/or socio-economic factors such as pervasive patron-client relationships, low levels of development, bureaucratic neglect/corruption in rural Thailand. These explanations are especially valuable because they look beyond vote buying as an isolated phenomenon to be outlawed and eradicated. Instead, they treat vote buying as a reflection of an underlying socio-economic, cultural and political environment.

Continuing in the latter tradition this paper considers the role political-institutional factors play in creating a market for votes in Thailand. Thailand’s unusual electoral system has been a suspected culprit behind vote buying (King and LoGerfo
1996; Callahan 2000, 17) but there is little in the way of systematic analyses of the electoral system. This paper seeks to fill this gap and proceeds as follows. First, I explain why Thai candidates have an incentive to employ personal (as opposed to party-centered) campaign strategies. I will argue that the pre-1997 electoral system in Thailand undermined the value of party label to both candidates and voters, and drove candidates to pursue personal strategies and cultivate personal support networks.

Second, the paper will examine why vote buying was a method of choice for many candidates as they sought to cultivate personal support networks. To begin with, I show that Thailand’s electoral system helped create a supply of surplus votes for which candidates could compete. I also note that other methods of pursuing personal strategies had drawbacks and/or limitations attached to them. Finally, I argue that certain features of the Thai political system (multiple parties, and short-lived multiparty coalition cabinets) made it difficult for candidates and voters to rely solely on promises of pork or patronage once a candidate was in office. Instead, voters discounted promises of future benefits, thus making the immediacy of vote buying more attractive.

To conclude, I discuss how Thailand’s new constitution (adopted in 1997) may alter the incentives and capabilities of voters and candidates to trade votes for money. I argue that while some features of the new electoral system and greater (potential) monitoring and enforcement of anti-voting buying rules suggest reduced incentives for vote buying, in the broader picture is less clear. The new electoral system is not likely to eliminate the incentives for candidate-centered campaigning and the future role of election monitoring body, the ECT, is in some doubt. Finally, many of the underlying structural factors that feed vote buying remain unaddressed.
Electoral Incentives to Pursue Personal Strategies

There is no single root cause of vote buying. Socioeconomic factors such as income levels, education and urbanization can shape the market for votes, as can societal patterns and norms (e.g. the pervasiveness of patron-client links). Vote buying is also located in a larger political order. For example, in Thailand vote buying is fueled by the chronic neglect of rural areas in the form of poor and unpredictable provision of services and bureaucratic corruption (Nelson 1998a; Sombat 1993, 1997; Anek 1997; Ammar n.d.). Another important feature of that political order is the nature of Thailand’s electoral and party systems.


For most of its democratic history Thailand has used a multi-seat, multiple vote plurality (MSMV) electoral system. This type of majoritarian electoral system is rarely used. What are the implications of MSMV when it comes to vote buying? I first review the different features of the MSMV system used in Thailand, focusing in the 1978-1997 time period. I then discuss how this electoral system shapes the incentives of candidates (and voters) to favor certain campaign strategies over others.

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1 This section draws on Hicken 2002.
2 Relying on patron-client relationships to explain vote buying in Thailand is not as straightforward as some have assumed. First, it is not clear that the “patron-client relationship” is an accurate description of the relationship between vote buyers (candidates) and vote sellers (voters) (see Nelson 1998b for an interesting discussion on this point). Second, even if one grants that patron-client relationships lie at the heart of vote buying networks (hua khanaen networks), that still does not explain why patron-client links are primarily used to buy votes, as opposed to some other election-related purpose (e.g. intimidating voters or mobilizing supporters using non-monetary means). In other words, why does vote buying dominate the exchange between voters and candidates rather than some other form of exchange (e.g. votes in exchange for pork, patronage or policy).
3 Most majoritarian systems use single-seat districts where voters have only one vote. Other countries which have used electoral systems similar to Thailand’s include Mauritius, 19th Century Great Britain, the Philippines (Senate elections) and some local elections in the United States.
Under the 1978 and 1992 constitutions Thailand was broken down into 142-156 electoral districts (depending on the election year), which together were responsible for filling 360-393 seats in the House of Representatives. Electoral districts were broken down into 1, 2 and 3 seat districts. Most Thai districts had a district magnitude of three (M=3) or two (M=2), while a few were single seat districts (M=1). Seats were allocated by province (changwat) with each province receiving the number of seats commensurate with its population (one seat for every 150,000 people). See Table 1 for a summary of these data for the last six elections prior to the new 1997 constitution.

If a province had a large enough population for more than three seats, the province was divided into more than one district and the seats were distributed so as to avoid single seat districts. For example, if the population of a province warranted four seats the province would be divided into two districts, each with 2 seats. Seven seats would be divided into three districts of 3, 2 and 2 seats. Single seat districts occurred only in provinces with a population under 225,000. Voters were allowed to vote for as many candidates as there were seats in a district and seats were awarded to the top 1, 2 or 3 vote-getters on the basis of the plurality rule (MSMV system). Voters could not group their votes on one candidate (cumulation forbidden) but panachage was allowed—voter could split their votes between candidates from different parties. Finally, voters were not required to cast all of their votes—they could partially abstain (plumping). Parties were required to field a full team of candidates for any district they wished to contest (e.g.

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4 Thailand has a bicameral legislature consisting of an elected House and (until the 1997 constitutional reforms) an appointed Senate.
5 In the Thai literature the term "constituency" is used in place of "district".
6 Each additional 75,000 people above 150,000 were counted as an additional 150,000. A province with 200,000 people would receive one seat while a 225,000-person province would receive 2 seats.
7 See Cox (1997, 42-43) for a general discussion of cumulation, panachage and plumbing.
three candidates in a three seat district) and to run a minimum number of candidates
nation-wide (1/4 to 1/2 of the total House membership, depending on the elections year).

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Electoral System Data</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Districts</td>
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<td>Total Seats</td>
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<td>3-Seat Districts</td>
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<td>2-Seat Districts</td>
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<td>1-Seat Districts</td>
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Minimum Required # of Candidates

| 162 | 173 | 178 | 90  | 90  | 98  | 98  |


**MSMV and Party versus Personal Strategies**

Thailand's MSMV system undermined the party cohesion and the value of party labels by encouraging factionalized parties and candidate-centered campaigning. One determinant of party cohesion is the degree to which the electoral system allows for intra-party competition (see Shugart and Carey 1992; Katz 1986; Reed 1994; and Lijphart 1994). Thailand's MSMV system did not generate the degree of intra-party competition that occurs in systems where there are fewer seats than co-partisan candidates in a given district, such as in SNTV or STV systems. In Thailand the number of candidates from the same party and the number of votes voters could cast was, out of legal necessity, equal to the district's magnitude. In theory, then, all the candidates from the given party could win seats in a given district. And in fact, in some districts co-partisans did
campaign as a team, encouraging voters to vote for the party's entire slate of candidates (Party Interviews 1999). If all of the candidates campaign as a team they can take advantage of some economies of scale (e.g. by holding combined campaign rallies or using the same network of local vote canvassers (*hua khanaen*). In addition, if each candidate has a different core constituency then campaigning as a team can boost each candidate’s vote total as each constituency is invited to vote for their candidate's co-partisans.

The problem with the team strategy is that there are strong incentives for candidates defect. On election day candidates are elected not based on how many votes their party team gets, but based on how many votes they garner individually. As a result, candidates must do all they can to bolster their own personal support network—even at the expense of other co-partisans. So, in place of (or in addition to) campaigning as a team, which tends to mask differences between co-partisans, candidates have an incentive to take actions to differentiate themselves from their team members. This could include campaigning alone or cultivating a personal network of donors and *hua khanaen*, distinct from those used by other team members. Obviously, while each candidate cultivates a personal support network, s/he would prefer that his/her co-partisans focus on campaigning as a team. This would allow the candidate to enjoy the benefits from both team and personal campaigning. Since each candidate faces these same incentives campaigning as a party team often breaks down (Sombat 1993, 1997, 1999; Party Interviews 1999).9

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8 SNTV stands for single non-transferable vote. STV stands for single transferable vote.
9 Note, that the incentive to defect is strongest under two scenarios: first, if the level of support for a candidate and his/her co-partisan is close (co-partisans are political rivals); second, there are also strong candidates from different parties (the district is not “safe” for one party). If either of these scenarios holds
Even where candidates campaign as a team the rhetoric is not about party label or party policy. According to Kanok “…the policies of political parties or candidates do not have any importance whatsoever to the outcome of elections.” (1993, 206—translation)\textsuperscript{10} As individual candidates they could not credibly claim credit national policies, nor could they gain much electoral advantage by claiming to be a member of a party that delivered national policies since they had copartisans to compete with as well. Instead, candidates tend to stress the individual qualifications of team members, rather than the merits of the team’s party. The dominant strategy for candidates, teams and parties is to sell personal performance, not party policy or performance (Chaowana 1999). Suchit underscores this point nicely:

Parties’ policies and performance were not a determinant of voting behavior, particularly in the provinces. Thus, in their election campaigns…politicians concentrated on their individual policies, achievements, and patrons, and rarely emphasized the party’s performance. They had to set up their own election campaigns and campaign organizations, financing and recruiting their own campaign staff…[Their] electoral success depended on their own efforts rather than [the efforts of] the party (Suchit 1990, 261).

This reliance on candidate-centered campaigning in Thailand is not a surprise. Whenever voters are given a choice between candidates from the same party, as in the Thai case, the value of party label to both voters and candidates is undermined (Reed then campaigning as a team, and thus blurring the distinction between team members, may actually do more harm than good (Sombat 1993, 1997, 1999; Kanok 1998; Nelson 1998b; Anusorn 1999).\textsuperscript{10} Kanok (1993, 198-206) argues that the use of hua khanaen, vote buying, volunteers, and notable leaders or personalities are more important elements of campaign strategies than policy promotion.
1994; Carey and Shugart 1995). This is because neither candidates nor voters are able to rely on party labels to help differentiate between candidates from the same party. In order to set themselves apart candidates must pursue a strategy of developing a personal reputation rather than relying on the reputation of the party. The former strategy I call a personal strategy and the latter I label a party strategy. The incentive to pursue a personal strategy is even greater where voters have multiple voters--an invitation for voters to split their vote--or where votes are not pooled among co-partisans. Both of these were characteristic of the MSMV system in Thailand.

Evidence from Thai elections supports the claim here that party labels are weak and that personal strategies dominate party-centered strategies in most cases. It is also the consensus of virtually every scholar of Thai politics as well as Thai politicians and party leaders that party labels are relatively weak. That’s not to say that candidates give no consideration to which party they join—candidates would strongly prefer to be in a party that has a chance at winning cabinet seats. However, regardless of their party label candidates tend to rely on personal vote getting strategies, including vote-buying, when campaigning for votes rather than campaigning on the reputation or policy position of the party. Interviews with party officials reveal that intra-party competition is quite common, although the level of intra-party competition varies by region, district and party (Party Interviews 1999). In some cases candidates have actually campaigned with candidates from rival parties in a bid to bolster their electoral chances (Sombat 1993, 1999).

11 Carey and Shugart (1995) refer to a personal vote strategy and speak of personal versus party reputations. Reed (1994) also uses the term “personal vote” as well as the terms candidate and party strategy.

12 King 1996 and Albritton 1996. are the lone dissenters that I am aware of. They argue that the weakness of Thai political parties has been exaggerated and that party labels do matter to voters and candidates.
One of the strongest indications of the dominance of personal strategies is the large discrepancy in the vote shares of co-partisans. If candidates are using party strategies, and voters are voting on the basis of party label, then the difference between the totals of co-partisans in the same district (the vote differential) should be small. The greater the differential, the greater the importance of the personal vote and a personal strategy. In addition, parties that have a stronger party label should have smaller vote differentials than parties with weak party labels. Table 2 presents the average vote differential for two parties, the Democrat Party and the largest party other than the Democrats in the last three elections before the 1997 constitutional reforms. These parties are Chart Thai in September 1992 and 1995 and New Aspiration Party (NAP) in 1996. In the 1995 and September 1992 elections the Democrats and Chart Thai were the two largest parties in terms of seat share, and in the 1996 election the Democrats and NAP were the largest. The Democrat Party is said to have the strongest label of any Thai party while both Chart Thai and the NAP are the epitome of a factionalized, personalized party (King 1996; Murray 1996; King and LoGerfo 1996). One would thus expect the vote differential to be smaller between Democrat co-partisans than between co-partisans from Chart Thai or NAP. Table 2 presents the differentials between the first and second, first and third, and second and third-place co-partisans. A ratio of 4.1:1 means that the first candidate received 4.1 times as many votes as the second candidate.
Table 2
Vote Differentials

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<th>Average Ratio between 1 and 2</th>
<th>Average Ratio between 1 and 3</th>
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Sources: Ministry of Interior elections reports (1992a, 1995, 1996.)

As expected, the vote differentials of co-partisans are large with first place candidates getting as many as twenty-five times more votes than their co-partisans. The results displayed in the Table 2 also support the hypothesis that Democrat co-partisans, on average, are separated by smaller margins than candidates from either Chart Thai or the NAP. Two other points about the table are worth noting. First, while the differentials for Democrat co-partisans are smaller, they are still quite large--at best the top Democrat in a district received more than 4 times the number of votes as his/her co-partisan. Second, there is evidence of parties running a single strong candidate in a district along with two also-rans added just to meet the electoral requirement. The vote totals between the second and third place co-partisans are significantly closer than between the first place co-partisan and either 2 or 3. Indeed, parties were very open about the fact that they hired and ran “ghost candidates” in order to fill electoral requirements. Muon Chon head Chalerm Yubamrung admitted that in the 1986 election most of his candidates were not “real” but were used to make up the required number of candidates. The party was able to run a majority of “real” candidates in 1988 but still ran 65 “real” candidates to 35”unreal” (BP 1988).
Another indirect measure of the extent to which candidates rely on and voters respond to personal rather than party strategies is the prevalence of split district returns. How often do voters in multi-seat districts elect candidates from more than one party? Where candidates and voters place great value on party label split returns should be less frequent than where party labels are weak and personal strategies are the norm. Indeed, the only way a multi-seat district can return candidates from more than one party is if voters disregard party labels and split their votes for candidates from different parties. For example, consider a single-seat district (M=1) where the NAP candidate wins the most votes and so wins the seat. Now add two seats to that district and give the voters in that district two additional votes. If they truly cast their votes according to party label, then they'll cast their additional votes for the two additional NAP candidates, and the NAP will win all three seats. If on the other hand party labels are not the primary cue for voters when casting their votes, then they may well cast their additional votes for candidates from other parties.

As can be seen in the following table, split returns occurred in over 50% of the districts nationwide in each of the six elections. This supports the idea of weak party labels and the importance of personal strategies. However, no clear trend, either increasing or decreasing, is evident over time. Split returns did drop nationally in the 1996 election but the constitutional changes make it impossible to tell whether this represented a trend or an anomaly.\(^{13}\) Comparing across regions one sees that even with

\(^{13}\) It is possible to explain the big drops in split ticket voting for Bangkok without arguing that party labels are becoming more important. Briefly, the rise in split ticket voting in Bangkok in 1995 is an anomaly driven by the entrance of a new political party, Palang Dharma, which was able to win a seat in several of Bangkok's districts that were formally held by the Democrat party. In 1996 the Democrats recaptured many of these seats so the percentage drops. For an excellent analysis of the Palang Dharma party see King 1996.
the 1996 drop in split returns, six of the nine regions still had split returns in over 50% of their districts. The most striking result of the regional comparison is the relatively low incidence of split returns in the South, the traditional stronghold of the Democrat Party. The exception is the 1988 election when a faction within the Democrat Party broke away and formed a new party.14

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Region</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeastern</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Region</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern Region</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
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The quantitative evidence just presented supports the argument that party labels carry little value and that personal strategies are generally more important than party strategies to candidates. Voters frequently split their votes and vote differentials are high for even the party with the strongest party label.15 In short, Thailand's candidate-centered MSMV electoral system provided strong incentives for candidates to pursue personal strategies--meaning candidates must develop a personal reputation and construct a

14 Manut's (1987) study of the 1986 election also found that voters nationwide preferred to elect individuals rather than parties. According to the study only 27 percent of the votes cast could be considered party votes. The same study found that party voting was more common in Bangkok.

15 The pursuit of personal strategies has predictable effects on the Thai party system (Hicken 2002). Where electoral systems privilege personal over party strategies party cohesion is undermined (Katz 1986; Reed 1994). The lack of party cohesion in Thailand is manifest by highly factionalized parties and massive party
localized personal support network. In Thailand these networks consisted of financial supporters (faction leaders, private business interests, etc.) together with local voters. This of course, is not unique to Thailand. Chhibber found that the candidate-centered electoral system used in India\textsuperscript{16} "ensured that support had to be mobilized locally, which requires building [district]-specific coalitions." (Chhibber 1998, 15)

**Vote Buying and other Personal Strategies**

The fact that candidates must adopt personal strategies does not necessarily imply that vote buying will be the preferred vehicle for pursuing that strategy. Indeed, a variety of means and methods can be employed by candidates in an effort to create personal support networks. Along with vote buying these can include targeting particularistic goods and services to a candidate’s constituents (e.g. a road built, a license granted, etc.), the use of patron-client relationships to engender loyalty/support, as well as outright violence and intimidation (of both voters and other candidates). All of these methods, in fact, are a part of Thai elections.\textsuperscript{17} Yet vote buying stands out as the method of choice for most candidates, most of time. One reason is certainly the traditionally lax enforcement of anti-vote buying laws, but there are other reasons why vote buying is attractive to Thai candidates. This section considers some of those reasons. I will first review the drawbacks to some of the alternatives to vote buying and then discuss the features of the MSMV electoral system that made vote buying so attractive as a personal strategy.

\textsuperscript{16} Single seat, simple plurality.

One way for candidates to cultivate personal support networks is by taking on the role of a traditional patron in a patron-client relationship with potential voters. In fact, many *chao pho*\(^\text{18}\) cum politicians have tried to set themselves up as traditional patrons--relying on personal patronage to create loyalty and support from their clients/constituents. However, there are natural limits to the use of personal patronage as a campaign strategy. Of the more than 2300 candidates that competed in the 1996 election, for example, only a small fraction would have had the means and influence necessary to act as a traditional patron. Cultivating client loyalty via the use of personal patronage takes consistent generosity over time and most candidates lack the resources necessary for such a sustained investment. Even among those with the means to become traditional patrons scholars have noted a decline in the use of personal patronage in favor of a greater reliance on vote buying (McVey 2000b; Arghiros 2000).

Violence and intimidation, while not uncommon in the run up to Thai elections, is not a realistic primary strategy for most candidates. Violence and intimidation on a scale large enough to achieve electoral success is costly. Many candidates lack the sufficient resources (money, men and connections) to use violence as their primary electoral strategy. In addition the use of violence and intimidation generally carry greater risks than other personal strategies such as vote buying. Violence against political rivals runs the risk of reprisal and, if caught, the penalty for violence and intimidation is greater than the penalty for vote buying. In short, the cost and risk of violence place some limits on its use and make other strategies, such as vote buying, relatively more attractive.

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\(^{18}\) *Chao pho* are provincial 'godfathers' that have come to dominate much of the economic and political life in rural Thailand. Ockey (1991) Robertson (1996) and McVey (2000a) provide the most thorough treatment on the subject.
Another possible method for cultivating a personal support network is to (promise to) direct pork and other particularistic forms of government largesse to a candidate’s constituents.\(^1\) Indeed, this is a form of personal strategy that virtually all candidates for political office employ. Thai elections can be seen as battles over control of the government pork barrel. Once in power it is expected that MPs will use their position to reward their political constituents and supporters (Christensen et. al 1993; Ammar 1997; Likhit n.d.). The flow of pork from elected representatives to their constituents is certainly not unique to Thailand. Pork provision is a feature of nearly every democracy, but especially those with candidate-centered electoral systems (e.g. the U.S. and SNTV Japan). In many of these democracies the use of particularism is the personal strategy of choice, while the direct purchase of votes is rare. The question for Thailand, is why, given the prevalence of pork barrel politics, does vote buying remain a major part of most personal strategies? What are the limits to pork as a personal strategy?

One reason vote buying persists alongside pork distribution has to do with uncertainty. In order to effectively use pork as a personal strategy, it is not enough to be a member of parliament. The real goal is to be a member of a party within the governing coalition (and, even better, to be a senior minister within the coalition). Parties outside of the coalition lack the access to government resources to reward supporters that parties in coalition have.\(^2\) In the words of former Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa “those in the

\(^1\) I use Cox and McCubbins' definition of pork (2001). They divide pork into public goods that are directed or allocated on the basis of political rather than economic calculations (morsels), and rents that are extracted from the government.

\(^2\) Until 1998 each MP had access to a MP development fund that could be used to finance projects in the MP’s constituency. Each MP, including opposition MPs received the same amount of funds (about 20 million baht per MP in 1997) (Hicken 2002).
opposition are certain to be starved.” (quoted in Banyat 1992) However, Thailand’s multi-party system makes coalition membership an uncertain prospect for any party. Between 1983 and 1996 an average of more than 15 parties competed in each election. Of those parties, 12 succeeded in winning at least one seat in the House of Representatives on average.\(^1\) Most of those parties present in the legislature were not part of the government coalition—the average size of the coalition cabinet was just over 5 parties. In other words, only about one in three parties that fielded candidates in an election could expect to win a cabinet seat.

Even when a party is fortunate to become part of the coalition cabinet, its seat at the table is anything but secure. Thailand’s multiparty governments are notoriously short-lived.\(^2\) Historically, Thai cabinets have lasted less than 13 months, on average. Cabinets since 1978 have lasted slightly longer than the historical average—just over 18 months.\(^3\) (Minor reshuffling of cabinet portfolios among existing coalition members occurs even more frequently). Certain pork barrel initiatives, such as infrastructure projects, can take time to bring online. Others must pass through various bureaucratic hurdles before they can be carried out. Given the level of cabinet instability, there is a very real chance that politicians will lose their access to resources before they can fully distribute and claim

\(^{21}\) The average effective number of legislative parties is 6 over the same period. The effective number of parties (ENP) is defined as 1 divided by the sum of the weighted values for each party. The weighted values are calculated by squaring each party’s seat share (\(s_j\)): \(\text{ENP} = 1/(\sum s_j^2)\). (Laakso and Taagepera 1979).

\(^{22}\) As are constitutions. Constitutions have a average life expectancy of 4 years, 3 months (Hicken 2002).

\(^{23}\) Cabinet duration figures are the author’s calculations based on data from Chaowana (1998).
credit for constituency pork. Even if a party or individual is able to survive a major cabinet reshuffle, a change in portfolio will mean starting from scratch.

The story that emerges is one of uncertainty. Candidates cannot be certain that their party will be part of the government—most will not be. Even if their party joins the cabinet, the time horizon for carrying out pork barrel projects is likely to be short due to cabinet instability. This uncertainty makes it difficult for candidates and voters to rely solely on promises to distribute pork once a candidate is in office. Given the level of uncertainty, voters discount promises of future benefits, thus making the immediacy of vote buying attractive to both voters and candidates. In short, candidates have an incentive to continue to buy votes as part of a personal strategy.

Although uncertainty undermines the attractiveness of pork as the sole means of cultivating voter support, pork is still very important to candidates. Generally, pork is a complement to, rather than a substitute for vote buying. Politicians exchange for financial support from powerful interests that they then use to buy votes (as well as fund other campaign activities). Recent research on Brazil supports the idea that the real aim of pork barrel politics may be money not votes (Samuels 2002). Samuels statistically demonstrates that pork barrel expenditures are not directly linked to electoral support, but rather to a candidate’s ability to raise money. Unfortunately, the lack of good data on pork barrel expenditures makes a similar analysis for Thailand impossible, but case studies and anecdotal evidence suggests that the same is true in Thailand (Ockey 1991; 24 There is variation on this point. Some candidates have developed reputations for consistently being able to win a seat at the table (often through the strategic use of party switching) and then using their position to bring home the pork. For example, the province of Suphan Buri is sometimes referred to as “Banharn Buri” after former Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa. This is due to the large number of pork barrel projects (many bearing his name) that he has brought to his constituency over the years.)
Hicken 2002). In short, pork distribution is a means by which politicians raise money to fund their vote buying.

To summarize, one reason vote buying is an appealing campaign strategy is due to the cost or uncertainty of other options. But, in addition, the peculiar features of the (pre-1997) Thai electoral system, combined with traditionally lax enforcement of vote buying prohibitions, render vote buying a feasible and alluring option for candidates. As discussed earlier, Thailand’s MSMV system gave most voters 2 or 3 votes. Theoretically, voters might have assigned equal value to each vote. In reality it seems voters often treated votes 2 and 3 as surplus votes (Sombat 1993, 1997; Callahan 2000; Party Interviews 1999, 2000). The following stylized account, while not universally applicable, is typical. In each district voters needed one MP to whom they could turn if they ran into trouble with the bureaucracy (e.g. needed to get a family member out of jail or obtain a permit or license). Usually this MP was the candidate with the strongest local ties and who was best known to individual voters--in short, a person the voters could trust to be responsive to their needs. Even without vote buying this was the candidate the voters would most likely prefer. However, voters needed only one MP to perform these services. Thus the second and third MPs were not really ‘needed’ from the perspective of the voters. It was the second and third votes, then, that were typically for sale. Who voters cast their second and third votes for depended, in large part, on which candidate was willing to pay the most for those votes. Candidates, aware of the supply of surplus votes, designed campaign strategies to make the most of this supply. Voters were encouraged to vote for their most preferred candidate “first” and then to give their second (or third) vote to the candidate giving the money (Sombat 1997; Party Interviews 1999, 2000).
In the final analysis vote buying stands out as one of the most effective ways for candidates to pursue personal strategies in pre-1997 Thailand. The electoral system ensured a ready supply of surplus votes available for purchase. The lack of enforcement, whether out of fear, negligence or collusion, meant the risk of being penalized for vote buying was negligible (Callahan 2000). Finally, other methods of pursuing a personal strategy were often more risky, costly or uncertain than vote buying or (in the case of pork) worked best in tandem with vote buying.

The 1997 Constitutional Reforms

In 1997 Thailand adopted a new constitution. Among the goals of the drafters was an overhaul of the Thai electoral process and a reduction of vote buying (Prudhisan 1998). By one measure they succeeded—the 2001 House elections did indeed see a reduction in the over-all amount of vote buying (Croissant and Dosch, n.d.). Yet vote buying by no means disappeared and candidates and parties exhibited impressive flexibility by adapting their vote buying to the new electoral environment (ibid). It is impossible to predict future trends based on just one election and I will not attempt to do so here. Instead I will briefly discuss how the electoral reforms affect candidates incentives to cultivate personal votes via vote buying.

Perhaps the change that has the most direct bearing on vote buying is the creation of the Electoral Commission of Thailand (ECT) to organize and oversee elections. Before 1997 elections administration was the job of the Ministry of Interior, which at times was far from neutral in its behavior (Callahan 2000). The ECT was designed to be an independent body, free from political and bureaucratic pressure. Not only was it charged
with carrying out election organization and administration, it also was empowered to
investigate violations of electoral rules and to disqualify offending candidates
(Constitution 1997; Organic Law 1998).\textsuperscript{25} In both the 2000 Senate elections and the 2001
House elections the ECT acted forcefully to disqualify candidates and hold new rounds of
elections in districts where electoral fraud was particularly widespread.\textsuperscript{26} Despite these
successes the ECT was criticized by those who felt the ECT was over zealous, and by
those who felt the ECT’s emphasis on countering vote buying had come at the expense of
other aspects of election administration (e.g. vote counting) (Croissant and Dosch, n.d.).
Whether the ECT will continue to be as active and independent (and thus an obstacle to
vote buying) in future elections remains to be seen. Some members of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Electoral
Commission, chosen in October 2001, have close ties with powerful political figures and
there is a possibility of attempts to curtail the ECT’s authority when the Constitution
comes up for amendment in 2002 (Somroutai, 2002)

The 1997 constitution also overhauled Thailand’s electoral system. Gone is the
MSMV system. Following a growing trend (see Shugart and Wattenberg 2001) the
constitution drafters established a mixed-member or two-tiered system in Thailand. 400
seats are elected from single seat districts on a plurality basis. 100 additional seats are
elected from a single nationwide district via proportional representation. Each party is
required to submit a list of candidates for voters to consider and voters cast 2 votes: one

\textsuperscript{25} Actually, the ECT’s authority to disqualify was ambiguous and there was considerable debate on the
point. A backlash against the ECT’s disqualification of candidates for the 2000 Senate elections eventually
culminated in a decision by the Constitutional Court that the ECT did not have the power to disqualify
candidates (Nelson 2000). The ECT eventually found a way around this by relying on its ability to
disenfranchise those guilty of electoral violations (Organic Law on Elections Section 85/1). According to
the Section 109 (3) and Section 106 those who are disenfranchised cannot stand for election. (See Nelson
2002, 15 for more detail).

\textsuperscript{26} For details on the ECT’s activities during the 2000 and 2001 elections see the ECT website
(http://www.ect.go.th) and Nelson (2002).
vote for a district representative and one for a party list. Candidates must choose between either running in a district or running on the party list.27 The constitution also provides for an elected Senate, the first in Thailand’s history.

The overall effect of electoral reforms on vote buying is ambiguous. Some of these reforms could potentially reduce candidates’ incentives and ability to buy votes, while others push in the opposite direction. First, the move from MSMV to single seat constituencies eliminates the ready supply of surplus votes available to candidates before 1997. Reducing the supply of votes also drives up the price of a voter’s remaining vote, thus increasing the cost of vote buying (Party Interviews 2000). This may account for why, despite the reported decline in the number of votes being bought and sold in 2001 relative to previous elections, the estimated amount of cash spent on vote buying was actually higher than in previous elections (Kamol 2002). In short, candidates bought fewer votes, but the votes they did buy were more expensive.

The drafters also hoped that including a national party list tier would encourage voters and candidates to place party before person. This in fact began to occur in the 2001 election. For the first time in recent memory political parties, led by Thai Rak Thai, moved away from relying solely on personal strategies in favor of coordinated party-centered strategies.28 Parties developed the beginnings of serious policy platforms and actually campaigned on those policies (Nelson 2002). However, this shift from personal strategies to nascent party-centered strategies was largely confined to the campaign for party list seats. Campaigns for the 400 constituency seats generally remained candidate-centered strategies.

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27 The two tiers are not linked in any way—i.e. votes from one tier don’t transfer to the other tier.
28 This does not mean they abandoned more traditional campaign strategies. For example, Nelson (2002, 7) observes that the number of members the recruited to the TRT (11 million—most of whom received some...
centered affairs (ibid). Indeed, this is not surprising given the electoral system. Single-seat districts still generate strong incentives to cultivate personal support networks, (although somewhat less than MSMV) (Carey and Shugart 1995). Over time party-centered campaigning and party-centered voting may gradually spill over into constituency elections. Already there are some signs that this is beginning to happen. However, in the short to medium term it is likely that personal strategies will continue to dominate constituency elections.

Another reason that personal strategies such as vote buying will persist in constituency elections is a change in the number of votes needed to win a seat. The combined effect of adding more seats to the legislature and switching from MSMV to single-seat districts has been a dramatic reduction in the number of votes candidates need to win election. In the 1996 election the average winning candidate garnered over 93,000 votes. In 2001 candidates won seats with an average of just under 33,000 votes—a 65 percent reduction in the number of votes needed to gain a seat. The use of personal strategies tends to be positively correlated with the size of a districts voting population and the number of votes required to win an election (Cox 1987, 57). Fewer voters means a fixed amount of money, patronage or influence will buy a larger portion of the total votes, ceteris paribus (ibid.).

Another feature of the new constitution that suggested the continued importance of personal strategies in Thai election is the electoral procedure for the Senate. Senators are elected from districts with 1 to 18 seats. Each voter casts a single vote and seats are

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29 Note, this greater purchasing power may be partially offset if, as argued earlier, the price of votes has risen due to a decreased supply.
awarded via the plurality rule. This electoral system, known as the single non-transferable vote (SNTV), is the epitome of a candidate-centered electoral system (see Carey and Shugart 1995; Grofman et. al. 1999). Candidates in any SNTV system must typically create personal support networks in order to win. However, Thailand’s version of SNTV goes beyond most other examples. Senate candidates are constitutionally prohibited from belonging to a political party. They are also not allowed to campaign for office. The aim of the constitution drafters was to create a legislative body that would remain above the petty political squabbling that characterizes the House (Suchit 1999). The reality has been very different. Candidates cannot rely on party label to distinguish themselves from other candidates, nor can they campaign on policy differences—no campaigning is allowed. Instead, they must create personal support networks similar to those used in by House candidates.30 (Many of the successful candidates were family members of prominent politicians and so were able rely on existing support networks (Nelson 2002)). The reliance on personal strategies, specifically vote buying, was so common that it took five months and several rounds of disqualifications followed by new elections to fully seat the Senate (ibid.).

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Conclusion

Vote buying does not exist in isolation. It is best understood as a reflection of a polity’s underlying socioeconomic, cultural and political environments. The purpose of this paper was to analyze certain features of the political environment, chiefly the electoral system, and its relationship to vote buying in Thailand. I argued Thailand’s MSMV electoral system provided candidates with strong incentives to favor personal strategies over party-centered strategies. Vote buying was particularly attractive to candidates relative to other types of personal strategies, which tended to be more costly or more uncertain than vote buying.

The 1997 Constitution and the accompanying electoral reforms have a mixed effect on the incentives and capabilities of voters and candidates to trade votes for money. The move to single member districts has decreased the supply of votes and the adoption of a party list makes party-centered strategies more appealing. However, incentives to pursue personal strategies still exist in the form of single-seat districts, a candidate-centered electoral system for the Senate, and a reduced number of votes needed to win a seat.

The most visible factor in the decline of vote buying during the 2001 elections is more stringent enforcement of campaign rules by the ECT. However, even if the ECT remains an active and independent agency, it cannot be the sole solution to the problem of vote buying. Enhanced detection and punishment of vote buying, if not accompanied by serious attention to the underlying environment, are problematic. Without deeper structural changes to the political, socioeconomic and cultural factors at the root of vote buying, greater enforcement will merely be a catalyst for greater creativity as candidates
and parties work to find ways around the law.31 While the constitutional reforms have brought about some changes in the underlying political environment, many issues remain unaddressed. Until efforts are made to tackle factors such as the socioeconomic gulf between Bangkok and rural Thailand, or the extreme centralization of political/bureaucratic authority, vote buying is likely to continue in one form or another.

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31 There were numerous examples of such creativity in the 2001 election (see Croissant and Dosch, n.d.; Nelson 2002).
References


