The logo of the Business Council of the University of British Columbia (BCU) is centered in the background. It features a blue laurel wreath with an eagle in the center, wings spread. Below the eagle, the words "BUSINESS COUNCIL" are written in a stylized, blue, sans-serif font.

Thai Political Crisis Background Guide

Chair: Vineeth Joseph

Email: josephvi@bc.edu

A Letter From the Chair

Dear Delegates,

My name is Vineeth Joseph and I would love to welcome you to Eaglemunc IX. To introduce myself, I am a senior in the Carroll School of Management at Boston College studying Finance and Economics. I am originally from Westchester, NY but I came to Boston to get a new experience. Eaglemunc holds a special place in my heart because I have been part of it since freshman year. I started in the finance department as a staffer and eventually became the Deputy Undersecretary-General of Finance. When I heard that there was an opportunity to chair a committee I signed up immediately because that face-to-face interaction with the delegates is something I have been looking forward to. I can't wait to hear your well-thought-out and creative ideas when tackling this committee.

As you can imagine, Thailand has a very rich, diverse, and complex history. It is almost impossible to trace the origins and the complexities of the 2005-2006 Thai Political crisis in this environment. However, we will still try to understand the power plays that existed which led to the crisis. One thing that everyone should take note of is the political nature of this crisis. It is very easy to pick sides so remaining unbiased is the hard part. I challenge you to pick the latter as we explore the interplay of various characters, organizations, and ideologies.

I hope you all enjoy this committee as much as I will. I look forward to hearing all of your ideas and seeing how this committee plays out.

Best,

Vineeth Joseph

Background Information

Prehistory - 1990's

Thailand was settled by some of the earliest humans, dating back to the arrival of Homo erectus 1.6-0.5 million years ago. Like most of the world around it, agriculture also emerged in Thailand some 6,000-7,000 years ago which helped in the development of settlements. This slow process eventually led to early forms of urbanization about 2,300-2,500 years ago. Chinese records also mention the existence of towns and cities in several parts of Thailand. An early peak in population was reached between 600 and 1400 AD, with towns and large settlements surrounded by walls and moats. The kingdoms of Sukhothai and Lan Nad emerged around this time with distinct forms of arts. Thailand was able to garner greater political and cultural heights with the emergence of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (1350-1767 AD), known for its maritime trade. Following the destruction of Ayutthaya in 1761, the Thai armed forces moved south to Thon Buri to regroup and restore their kingdom. The center of power moved across the Chao Phraya River, when Krung Thep, internationally known as Bangkok, was founded in 1782. Since then the Royal House of Chakri has reigned over the Kingdom.¹

The 19th century was a period of deep change for Thailand. Having seen the rise of European colonization in Southeast Asia, Thailand began to embark on embracing western innovations. Reforms were started by King Mongkut, who improved women's rights and modernized the military.² These westernized reforms hit its zenith with King Chulalongkorn. His actions included the abolition of slavery. He also modernized the government and streamlined

¹ "" Thailand in Brief," Thai Embassy Thailand in brief Comments, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://thaiembdc.org/about-thailand/thailand-in-brief/>.

² Panu Wongcha-um, "The Real 'King and I' - the Story of New Thai King's Famous Ancestor," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, May 3, 2019), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-king-coronation-mongkut/the-real-king-and-i-the-story-of-new-thai-kings-famous-ancestor-idUSKCN1S90UR>.

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administration by dividing the country into districts. Freedom of religion was extended to Muslims and Christians. Chulalongkorn was dedicated to the westernization of his country through acts like the use of the Western calendar and the employment of Western advisors to modernize administration, commerce, and the railway networks.³ Thailand was able to avoid colonization by Great European powers due to a combination of these reforms and power dynamics.⁴

Thailand's path to modernization was not only due to the rise in Europe-centric reforms. A fundamental shift in Thailand's attitude towards the king occurred during the 1932 coup d'état, led by members of the military, civilian servants, and aristocrats. During this event, the absolute monarchy that characterized Thailand was overthrown for a constitutional monarchy. Arising from the revolution, "Six Principles" were stressed to reflect the democratic-nature of the new government: people's power, national security, economic welfare, rights and liberties, equality, and education for all citizens. The revolution was hailed as the beginning of a democratic Thailand. This bloodless transfer of power should have ended the power struggle and ushered in an age of western-inspired democratic governance. Instead, what followed was decades of military rule, as democracy began to waver in Thailand.⁵ The instability can be seen by the statement: "Thailand has been home to more military coup d'états in modern history than any other country."⁶ Evidence analyzed by academics suggests that coups create a culture of them, which normalizes military coups as an acceptable way to solve a political crisis.

³ "King Chulalongkorn Day," Royal Thai Embassy, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.thaiembassy.sg/friends-of-thailand/p/king-chulalongkorn-day>.

⁴ "Thailand Profile - Timeline," BBC News (BBC, March 7, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-15641745>.

⁵ Eugene Mark, "Time to Truly Understand Thailand's 1932 Revolution," *The Diplomat* (for *The Diplomat*, June 29, 2017), <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/time-to-truly-understand-thailands-1932-revolution/>.

⁶ Tom Mrtomchitty, "Why Does Thailand Have so Many Coups?," *CNBC* (CNBC, August 20, 2019), <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/08/20/why-does-thailand-have-so-many-coups.html>.

As time went on, this normalized coup culture is exactly what happened. During WWII, Thailand sided with the Japanese government and invaded its neighbors. During the chaos of war, Thailand came under the dictatorial rule under Plaek Phibunsongkhram, known as Phibun in the west. As the war ended, Thailand was forced to give up the land it had taken over and pay war reparation. At the same time, Phibun was removed from power and a civilian government was reinstated. Yet, due to his staunch anti-communist views, Phibun had retained his constituency of supporters in the officer corps, and the aristocrats, especially as neighboring countries fell to communism. Then in 1947, Phibun along with the military overthrew the civilian government. The coup leaders appointed an interim government headed by Khuang and promised a new constitution. General elections held in January 1948 confirmed support for the junta, particularly the Phibun faction. In April 1948, Phibun forcibly removed the sitting prime minister from office and took over as prime minister. During the following three years there were many attempts to overthrow Phibun's government, especially from the military itself but it proved to be unsuccessful.⁷ Phibun's reign is perhaps best known for providing the country with its name "Thailand", formerly known as Siam, with its current name in a bid to promote the Thai ethnicity as central to the country's identity. He is also known for the creation of the national dish: Pad Thai.

This dictatorship did not last and soon Thailand saw more coups during the '50s and '60s which saw the emergence of more military strongmen taking the helm of Thailand. The 1970s saw a marked shift in how the populace began to view the rise of these military strongmen as resentment against their rule began to rise. This culminated in the 1976 Thalmassat Massacre, where protesting students were massacred. It began after Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, a

⁷ John Pike, "November 1947 Coup," November 1947 Coup, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/thailand/coup-1947.htm>.

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former dictator, returned to Thailand after being ousted on October 14, 1973, by a peoples' movement. Students requested either he is prosecuted or expelled, but nothing was done by the civilian government led by Seni Pramoj. Some students dramatized the hanging of two factory workers who had protested the return of Thanom. An ominous sign came the next day when one right-wing newspaper published a photo of the play which showcased one of the hanged people resembling the crowned prince. This allowed the crime of *lèse-majesté. To be committed*. During a time when anti-communist sentiment was high, any perceived threat to the monarchy was seen as grave. Riding on huge anti-communist fervor, state-sponsored rural militia, and even the military's Housewives Association, mobilized. What followed was the beating, sexual assault, and lynching of hundreds of students. Moreover, a period of democracy that started in 1973 ended with another military coup.⁸

Rise of Thaksin Shinawatra

In this era of political instability, Thailand would seem like a lost cause. Then emerged Thaksin Shinawatra, a telecommunications billionaire, who looked to revitalize Thailand's stagnant economy. He was elected prime minister through an election process and was the first prime minister in Thailand's history to lead an elected government through a full first term.⁹

Thaksin started as a police officer, eventually moving to the United States to study criminal justice. After returning to Thailand he started a telecommunications company and soon became a billionaire. In 1998, Thaksin started the Thai Rak Thai Party, which quickly rose to popularity throughout the country. Riding on this wave, Thaksin became prime minister, easily

⁸ Suchada Chakpisuth, "Unforgettable, Unrememberable: The Thammasat Massacre in Thailand," Los Angeles Review of Books, July 15, 2018, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/unforgettable-unrememberable-the-thammasat-massacre-in-thailand/>."

⁹ "Profile: Thaksin Shinawatra," BBC News (BBC, June 24, 2011), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13891650>.

defeating the old guards. Thaksin enjoyed massive popularity throughout the country. His initiatives of cheap medical care, debt relief, and contempt for the “Bangkok elite” won him support from poorer voters. Big business liked him for creating a new boom in the Southeast Asian country through his self-stylized Thaksinomics.¹⁰

Thaksin also enjoyed support for his response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami which wrecked southern Thailand.

Thaksin’s Economic Policies

Thaksin’s economic policies are known as Thaksinomics. Many see this as a pragmatic response to the counter productiveness of the open market model during the Asian Crisis in 1997. This open market model, a key element of the Washington Consensus, looks for the withdrawal of government from economic activity. Thaksinomics looks to combine the elements of mass manufacturing with FDI and the use of indigenous skills and resources.

The first stage of his economic policies looked to reviving rural demand and providing housing demand for low-wage workers. This was done by providing a three-year relief for farmers’ debt payments, providing small loans to street vendors, increasing pension payments, and loans for rural village development. The key element of this program was the *One Tambon Project*, which is a nationwide investment initiative to modernize the means of production for each specialized product of each tambon (sub-district). This initiative proved to yield success, as sales of village enterprises under the One Tambon Project reached \$558 million in 2002 with an average profit margin of 26%.

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The second stage involved the reclassification of assets so that owners can use them to gain access to capital. Whether it is by selling them or using them as collateral for loans. By an estimate, this helped create \$10-\$15 billion of underground economic activities into the real economy.¹¹

These initiatives energized localized manufacturing and increased domestic consumption. Moreover, initiatives by Thaksin to provide subsidized universal healthcare helped consumer confidence and contributed to the spending spree. Through public debt rose, the boost in growth and tax revenue compensated for it. From 2001-2006, Thailand's economy expanded by 6% per year, while dependency on FDI and exports decreased. Moreover, the income gap decreased.¹²

Thaksin's Domestic Policies

One of the most controversial aspects of Thaksin's premiership has been his war on drugs which started in February 2003, looking to stop drug trafficking and prevent drug use. Although the objective might seem noble, the outcome was arbitrary killings with almost 2800 extrajudicial killings in the first three months of the campaign. HIV prevention treatment efforts, which were part of Thaksin's subsidized universal healthcare, became compromised out of fear of arrest. These killings raised concerns from the human rights watch due to the arbitrary nature of the killings; a 2007 report discovered that more than half of those killed had no connection to drugs.¹³

¹¹ Robert Looney, "Thaksinomics: A New Asian Paradigm," *Calhoun* 29 (2004): pp. 65-84.

¹² Wehrfritz, George. "The Economics of Thailand's Thaksin is Catching On." *Newsweek*. 8/22/2008. Accessed 6/16/2020. <https://www.newsweek.com/economics-thailands-thaksin-catching-88109>

¹³ "Thailand's 'War on Drugs'," Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, March 12, 2008), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/03/12/thailands-war-drugs>.

A hallmark of Thaksin's domestic policy has been the UHC (universal healthcare coverage). This has been the most successful out of Thaksin's other policies as it provided healthcare to over 48 million people out of the 66 million. It is mainly funded on a capitation basis.¹⁴

Another controversial action by Thaksin was the establishment in 2003 of a copy of the underground lottery. Although the underground lottery is hugely illegal, it was popular in Thailand and Thaksin looked to steer some of the money into the government.

Through a combination of these populist measures, Thaksin enjoyed support from the rural majority and the urban poor.

Sondhi Linthongkul

Like Thaksin, Sondhi started his enterprise as the multi-millionaire owner of the Magner Media Group.¹⁵ During his early political career, Sondhi and Thaksin were both allies, as they were both prominent members of Bangkok's business community. After Thaksin became prime minister, Sondhi went as far as to call the new leader the greatest Prime Minister. During Thaksin's administration, several of Shondhi's associates were in the administration, including Sondhi's banker Viroj Nualkhair. After Viroj was dismissed due to the creation of problematic loans (including some loans to relieve Sondhi's debt), Viroj was fired. This including the failure but Thaksin to provide favors to Sondhi added fuel to their faltering relationship and Sondhi's eventual Anti-Thaksin stance.¹⁶

¹⁴ "Thailand's Universal Healthcare Coverage on Life Support," HAIAP (HAIAP, November 26, 2017), <http://www.haiasiapacific.org/thailands-universal-healthcare-coverage-on-life-support/>.

¹⁵ Kasian Tejapira, "Kasian Tejapira, Toppling Thaksin, NLR 39, May–June 2006," *New Left Review*, 2006, <https://newleftreview.org/issues/1139/articles/kasian-tejapira-toppling-thaksin>.

¹⁶ Nannapat Purod, "Thai 'Yellow Shirt' Founder Jailed for Fraud Released Early," AP NEWS (Associated Press, September 4, 2019), <https://apnews.com/eb2e3a2f8c214a889c2188a07f8d6073>.

Controversies Leading to Crisis

The first incident that occurred to start the crisis was the Luang Ta Maha Bua incident. It involved a controversial, but popular Buddhist monk named Luang Ta Maha Bua. In September 2005 the monk criticized Thaksin for trampling over the monarchy and religion. Instead of attacking the monk for the criticism, Thaksin sued the *Manager* newspaper, which published the sermon and is owned by Sondhi. Thaksin quickly received retribution for trying to suppress freedom of speech.¹⁷

A second controversy involved the sale of Thaksin's and his relative's decision to sell their stake in Shin Corporation. He intended to sell his shares to avoid a conflict of interest, but it also ended up netting him \$1.85 billion. This was used by critics to accuse him of using his position to make a profit. The Thailand Securities and Exchange Commission investigated the transaction and acquitted everyone except Thaksin's son. Controversy quickly arose because Shine Corporation was being sold to Temasek Holdings, which is based in Singapore. Detractors blasted Thaksin for selling an asset of national importance. There were increasing calls for the prime minister to resign.¹⁸

The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD)

The crisis began to unfold when Sondhi started the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) in September 2005 to oust Thaksin. This new party, also called the yellows-shirts, is a coalition of conservative, urban, monarchist, military, and Buddhist elements of Thai society. It tended to protest Thaksin's corruption and land reforms. Many outlets, including the Bangkok Post,

¹⁷ "FACTBOX-Politics and Religion Mix for Asia's Activist Monks," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, September 11, 2007), <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBKK194330>.

¹⁸ "Thaksin Helps Himself," *The Economist* (The Economist Newspaper, January 26, 2006), <https://www.economist.com/asia/2006/01/26/thaksin-helps-himself>.

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characterized it as representing the elite elements of Thailand and referring to it as the “Blue Blood Jet Set.”¹⁹ PAD opposed the reforms by Thaksin, arguing the effects were not due to Thaksinomics but instead due to free-trade deals. Sondhi called Thaksin a corrupt populist. It was also led by Chamlong Srimuang, a former general with close ties to the king’s inner circle; the yellow-shirts accused Mr. Thaksin of corruption and abuse of power. On 14 January 2006, hundreds of protestors headed by Sondhi stormed the government house and occupied it for 20 minutes. The following month, a protest surrounded the Royal Plaza which foreign media and police estimated to be around 40,000 – 50,000.²⁰ The following month saw a pro-Thaksin protest with 150,00 – 200,000 people attending. During this time he called for snap elections.²¹

Escalation of the Crisis

By-election day on April 2, 2006, Thaksin won the snap election but the opposition boycotted it, and the courts eventually nullified the results. After an audience with the king, Thaksin announced that he would not accept the post of Prime Minister on 4 April 2006 but he would continue to be the Caretaker Prime Minister until his successor is elected. Though this was welcome news to the Democrat Party and PAD, they continued to bring down Thaksin’s administration. On 19 May 2006, Thaksin returned to work but tensions remained high.

During this time conspiracy theories, such as the Finland Plot, began to circulate among the Democrat Party and PAD. These conspiracy theories attest that Thaksin and his allies look to overthrow the king and take control of the country.²² Moreover, on August 24, 2006, a car

¹⁹“Thailand,” RFI, September 17, 2017, http://www1.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/105/article_1615.asp.

²⁰ “High Tension in Thailand Main Page,” 2Bangkokcom, February 11, 2006, <http://2bangkok.com/highfeb112006news.shtml>.

²¹ “Thaksin’s Rally at Sanam Luang,” 2Bangkokcom, March 3, 2006, <https://2bangkok.com/06-mar3rally.html>.

²² “‘Finland Plot’ Columnist Convicted of Libeling Thaksin,” Khaosod English (Khaosod , October 21, 2015), <https://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2015/10/21/1445421775/>.

containing explosives was discovered near Thaksin's residence. The car was driven by a personal chauffeur of Pallop Pinmanee.²³

The political crisis escalated on September 19, 2006, when Thai army units loyal to General Sonthi Boonyaratglin staged a coup while Thaksin was in a meeting at the UN. On October 1, former army commander-in-chief Surayud Chulanont was sworn in as interim prime minister. Thaksin eventually fled Thailand to Dubai, while Thailand again fell to military rule.²⁴

Topic 1: Thaksin's War on Drugs

Thailand had long suffered from drug use, especially methamphetamines. Between 1993 and 2001, the use of methamphetamines increased by 1,000%. By 2002, 2.4% of Thais aged 12-65, including 4.5 percent of males were using methamphetamines.

Thaksin's most infamous act has been his war on drugs which started in January 2003. In a matter of three months since the start, about 2,873 people died from this campaign²⁵. This includes 9-year-old Chakraphan Srisaard and his father, who was caught selling methamphetamines to an undercover policeman²⁶. Human Rights Watch argued that a major outcome of the policy was arbitrary killings, with an official investigation concluding that half of those killed had no connection to drugs. Apart from this, thousands were coerced into treatment for a drug addiction they might or might not have.

Outside observers saw various human rights violations. For example, in 2005 the Human Rights Watch raised concerns about a large number of killings and recommended an

²³ "Failed Car Bomber's Jail Upheld," <https://www.bangkokpost.com> (Bangkok Post, May 16, 2017), <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1250142/failed-car-bombers-jail-upheld>.

²⁴ "TIMELINE: Thailand's Political Crisis," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, December 2, 2008), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-protest-timeline/timeline-thailands-political-crisis-idUSTRE4B140D20081202>.

²⁵ KRAISAK CHOONHAVAN, "Thaksin's 'War on Drugs' a Crime against Humanity," (Bangkok Post)

²⁶ Alex Cooper and Lee Ying Shan, "Thaksin's Lethal War on Drugs," (Southeast Asia Globe, July 1, 2020) <https://southeastasiaglobe.com/justice-denied/>.

investigation take place. The Thai government confronted these allegations with promises to follow through on appropriate investigations, but to date, none of the perpetrators have been brought to justice. An investigative report by the UK's Sunday Times found an official letter sent by the ministry to provincial governors explaining three ways to remove during leaders from a blacklist: "Arrest, extrajudicial killing or loss of life [death for various reasons]. Drug dealers are traitors to the nation. We have to get rid of them. Don't give them mercy." Eventually, the UN Commission on Human Rights asked the Thai government to explain 23 cases of mass killings and disappearances of rights defenders. Subsequent administrations created the Independent Committee on the Casualties of the 2003 War on Drugs, which concluded that 1300 people had no drug-related records and 2873 killings should be considered crimes against humanity.²⁷ Yet, this did not stop wide-spread support for Thaksin's campaign, with 74 percent of Thais supporting Thaksin's campaign.²⁸

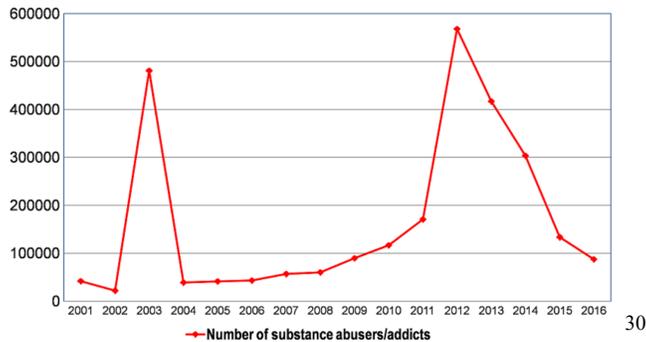
When considering the implications of the campaign, Thaksin should get credit for curtailing Opium production, as 90% of opium was destroyed before it could be harvested. Yet, overall the war on drugs was unsuccessful in ending the reign of major Thai drug lords and did not end cross-border trafficking. Moreover, drug consumption, especially the consumption of methamphetamine returned to high levels. The production also seems to have increased as The UN Office on Drugs and Crime data shows an alarming growth in the number of meth labs in Thailand.²⁹

²⁷ CHOONHAVAN, "Thaksin's 'War on Drugs' a Crime against Humanity,"

²⁸ Cooper and Shan, "Thaksin's Lethal War on Drugs,"

²⁹ Marvin Bionat, "Gains from Thailand's Bloody War on Drugs Proved Fleeting," (INQUIRER.net, July 9, 2016), <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/140782/gains-from-thailands-bloody-war-on-drugs-proved-fleeting>.

In light of this renewed and international interest in such a horrific time, delegates must decide whether there is anything internal they can do to address the situation before international powers decide to intervene.



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1. As seen above from the text and the diagram, substance abuse has become a huge problem but Thaksin's response has been controversial and its results have been mixed. What is another approach to tackle this crisis?
2. How would you prevent extrajudicial killings?
3. How can law enforcement be held accountable?

Topic 2: Freedom of the Press

Though Thaksin rose to prominence on a platform of increasing democratic values, his valor to uphold the freedom of the press has been questioned by both international and domestic organizations. The Committee to Protect Journalists found blatant instances of attacks on journalists. Local reporters routinely receive requests from government officials to edit stories in newspapers. Moreover, self-censorship had increased as Thaksin and his allies threatened to withdraw advertising in retaliation to negative articles. As a result, local journalists said, self-

³⁰Darika Saingam, "Substance Abuse Policy in Thailand: Current Challenges and Future Strategies," (*SSRN Electronic Journal*, February 2, 2018), pp. 2, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3108746>.

editorship has increased dramatically during the last four years. This kind of meddling was seen again during the Asian bird flu epidemic, which saw newspapers like the *Bangkok Post* criticize Thaksin. This soon changed into praise of Thaksin's response due to pressure from the government.³¹

A case that rattled Thailand involved Shin Corp. suing Supinya Klangnarong, the Thai Post, and three editors after Supinya made negative comments about Thaksin's favoritism towards Shin Corp. Although Thaksin had transferred his assets in the company, Thaksin's family still owned Shin Corp. Supinya argued that Shin Corp. benefited directly from Thaksin's premiership.³²

Thailand's regressing freedom of speech can be seen from Reporters without Borders' reports. In its world press freedom ranking of 2005, in which Thailand fell from 59th place in 2004 to 107th place. Moreover, the organization found that enough grounds were present to conduct a thorough investigation of press freedom in Thailand. It cited examples including the criminal and civil defamation actions brought against journalists and press freedom activists by the government and Thaksin's family and business. Moreover, there has been a rise in prison sentences for journalists. Finally, it found that there were no impartial and exhaustive investigations are conducted into the murders of Santi Lammaneenil, the editor of the local Pattaya Post daily newspaper and a correspondent for Channel 7 television and the national dailies Khao Sod and Khom Chad Luek, and Pongkiat Saetang, the editor of the local Had Yai Post fortnightly newspaper.

³¹ John Emerson, "Attacks on the Press 2004: Thailand," (Committee to Protect Journalists, March 14, 2005), <https://cpj.org/2005/03/attacks-on-the-press-2004-thailand/>.

³² Emerson, "Attacks on the Press 2004: Thailand,"

Two key incidents changed the public's perception of Thaksin's policies, especially his track record on freedom of the press. One of these involved Luang Ta Maha Bua, an influential Buddhist monk and an outspoken critic of Thaksin. On 27 September 2005, The Manager Daily published one of Luang's sermons in which he bashed Thaksin. Instead of suing the monk, Thaksin sued the newspaper because "The newspaper did not criticize the prime minister fairly as a public official, but rather it took him to task personally, using harsh words, which was damaging to him," according to Thaksin's lawyer. Critics quickly attacked Thaksin for attacking the press, with Sondhi, who owned the Manager Daily, calling Thaksin out for singling the newspaper out.³³

Delegates must determine whether to install policies to protect the freedom of the press, to punish for or protect Thaksin from his transgressions, or whether the restriction of freedom of the press might be necessary for maintaining order.

Questions to Consider

1. What is more important, maintaining order or ensuring basic rights?
2. How would you protect freedom of the press while also maintaining unbiased reporting?
3. How could the response to Luang Ta Maha Bua have improved?

Topic 3: Shin Corporation & Allegations of Corruption

The public's view on Thaksin's corruption saw a drastic change after news of the sale of Shin Corporation emerged. On 23 January 2006, the Thai Telecommunication Act (2006) was

³³"Luang Ta Maha Bua," World Heritage Encyclopedia
(http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/Luang_Ta_Maha_Bua#Criticism_of_Thaksin_Shinawatra, n.d.),

passed, which raised foreign ownership of domestic telecommunication companies to 49 percent. On the same day, the Shinawatra family sold its remaining 49.6 percent stake in Shin Corporation to Temasek Holdings, with a tax exemption. This was granted on grounds that the transfer, at a par value of 10 baht, took place through the stock market. Although the tax exemption was legal, controversy quickly arose because Shine Corporation was being sold to Temasek Holdings, which is based in Singapore. Moreover, although Thaksin stated his intention was to avoid conflict of interest, the \$1.88 his family earned raised some eyebrows. The Thailand Securities and Exchange Commission investigated the transaction and acquitted everyone except Thaksin's son.³⁴

Thaksin responded to detractors and critics by calling them "jealous." This is not the first time Thaksin had faced allegations of corruption. In 2001, when the National Counter Corruption Council charged him with concealment of assets during a previous term in government by designating family members and retainers to hold his shares. But though the evidence against him was strong, the Constitutional Court acquitted him in a verdict that was controversial at the time, even if it was popular with Thaksin's supporters. Moreover, anti-Thaksin activists argued that liberalizing the telecommunication industry would increase profits for private companies, including Shin Corp. Activists cited the 62% increase in profits for Shin Corporation. It must be noted that other telecommunication companies in Thailand also saw large increases in profits

Another point that critics point to Thaksin's corruption has been his involvement with TOT, The Thai state-owned telecommunications company. Thaksin's critics assailed him in 2002 for blasting rivals to Shin Corp. for refusing to pay the discriminatory access charges to TOT. The state enterprise backed Thaksin and threatened to cut off rivals like DTAC and True

³⁴ "Thaksin helps himself."

Move. Although many saw this as TOT assisting Thaksin gain personally, the Administrative Court also ruled in favor of TOT. Even though Thaksin benefited from the action, TOT also had an interest from cutting DTAC and TrueMove for refusing to pay access charges. While Thaksin did indeed benefit, it's also clear that TOT was also looking out for its own interests.

Thaksin's foray into Myanmar has also been a source of controversy. When Thaksin approved a four-billion-baht soft loan to Myanmar, 600 million was used to buy services from his family's satellite firm. Critics called this misuse of power for personal gain, especially as Thaksin directly benefited from the deal. Those who supported Thaksin defended the act because many Thai companies benefited from the program. Moreover, the practice of offering cheap loans for foreign governments to assist domestic companies is a common practice (For example, the Belt and Road Initiative). Moreover, bureaucrats argued that the loan was made as part of government policy to encourage foreign investment in other countries, and has benefited 15 Thai companies in addition to Thaksin's satellite firm.³⁵

Stricken by controversial dealings, Thaksin faces allegations of corruption. This has led to growing pressure to resign in the shadow of these potentially corrupt dealings. Will the delegates take on the same disapproval?

Questions to Consider

1. Can these dealings be considered corrupt?
2. How can a formal investigation be conducted into these allegations?

Topic 4: Protests, Plotting, and Parliament

³⁵ Our Correspondent, "Thailand's Thaksin Freeze Out," Asia Sentinel (Asia Sentinel, June 14, 2007), <https://www.asiasentinel.com/p/thailands-thaksin-freeze-out>.

With Sondhi Limthongku disillusioned by Thaksin, he started the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), also called the yellow shirts. On 14 January 2006, hundreds of protestors headed by Sondhi stormed into the Government House at midnight and occupied it. On 4 February 2006, an anti-Thaksin rally at the Royal Plaza drew a very large crowd of about 40,000 – 50,000.³⁶

These anti-Thaksin demonstrations led to pro-Thaksin (also called red shirts) demonstrations by the rural poor who benefited from Thaksin's policies. On 3 March 2006, a pro-Thaksin rally had up to 200,000 people in attendance. In this rally, Thaksin promised that "If my party received fewer votes than the number of people abstaining combined with votes for smaller parties, I will not accept the premiership...I beg the three opposition parties, Democrat, Chat Thai, and Mahachon, to join the contest. If they really insist on a boycott, they can campaign for voters to mark "abstention" to reject me". Anti-Thaksin refuted the high turnout by referring to the protesters as uneducated people who were paid to attend.

As the April 2006 elections emerged, Thaksin began a round of campaigning. During some of these events, he encountered protesters demanding Thaksin's resignation and the restoration of power to the king. Starting 13 March 2006, anti-Thaksin protesters erected permanent tents around the government house. Approximately 3,000 were protesting at Government House³⁷

This infuriated Thaksin's supporters who responded by gathering in Bangkok. Starting 15 March 2006, Thaksin supporters, which include farmers and taxi drivers, have moved en-masse to Bangkok from the North and North-east in a caravan of Ee Taen (slow-moving diesel-engine

³⁶ "High Tension in Thailand Main Page," (2Bangkokcom, February 11, 2006), <http://2bangkok.com/highfeb112006news.shtml>.

³⁷ Narunart Prapanya, "Thousands Protest against Thai PM," CNN (Cable News Network, March 5, 2006), <http://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/asiapcf/03/05/thailand.protests/>.

powered farming vehicles). The presence of both the red shirts and the yellow shirts caused further strife in a deeply divided city.³⁸

The week before the 2006 election, an anti-Thaksin rally moved to Bangkok's shopping districts, causing businesses to close and up to 1.2 billion baht in losses. The huge protests led trains to be shut down and major traffic jams throughout Bangkok, especially in major Bangkok arteries. . Local press and independent observers provided a huge range for these protests from 3,000-50,000. These protests quickly changed national opinion polls for the yellow shirts. The anti-Thaksin protesters were harshly criticized, with 50,000 complaints being made about the traffic jam. A majority also disagreed with the protests being moved into the city center. An opinion poll showed that 26% of Bangkok people supported the resignation of Thaksin, compared to 48% three weeks previously.³⁹

Following the April election, Thaksin's party (TRT) won 61% of the votes and subsequently 640 seats in the House of Representatives.⁴⁰ Disapproving of the outcome, PAD declared that it would ignore the results of the election. The elections were finally declared invalid by Thailand's Constitutional Court, which found that the positioning of the voting booths violated voter privacy. On 30 May 2006, the Cabinet decided to hold new elections on 15 October 2006. Although Thaksin tried to strike a unionistic tone with the divided country. Thaksin went further to create an independent committee to review the elections and pledging to resign if foul play was discovered. After an audience with the king, Thaksin announced on 4 April 2006 that he would not accept the post of Prime Minister after the Parliament reconvenes.

³⁸ "Pro-Thaksin Demonstrators at Chatuchak Park – Part 1," (2Bangkokcom, March 18, 2006), <http://2bangkok.com/06-mar182006-mar18.html>.

³⁹ Chang Noi, "The Persistent Myth of the 'Good' Coup," *The Nation*, https://web.archive.org/web/20160303200526/http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2006/10/02/opinion/opinion_30015127.php.

⁴⁰ Adam Carr, "Kingdom of Thailand Legislative Elections of 2 April 2006," (Psephos) <http://psephos.adam-carr.net/countries/t/thailand/thailand2006.txt>.

However, he would continue to be Caretaker Prime Minister until his successor is elected by the Parliament.⁴¹

Questions to Consider

1. What could be done to ease tensions between the yellow-shirts and red-shirts?
2. What could Thaksin have done to ease concerns of a rigged election?
3. What is a proper response to the court's ruling?

⁴¹ Sam Savage, "Thailand Struggles with Constitutional Impasse," (Redorbit, April 7, 2006), https://www.redorbit.com/news/international/461871/thailand_struggles_with_constitutional_impasse/.

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