

Understanding Thailand's 2026 Election

Political Contestation, Party Landscapes and Elite Power Structures

27 February 2026, Friday

13:30-15:00 (Japan Time)

HYBRID In person & Online

For Zoom participants, please join from the following link
<https://kyoto-u-edu.zoom.us/j/82439478269?pwd=R049pkDYKfPWObRpzG6pfpatlXjDpj.1>

Mid-sized Meeting Room (No.332)
3rd Floor, Inamori Center, Kyoto University



Zoom/Detail

ABSTRACT

The 2026 general election marks a critical juncture in Thailand's political contestation, revealing both significant transformation and enduring continuity in the country's power structure. This seminar examines the election and subsequent government formation by situating them within Thailand's changing party landscape, persistent elite dominance, and evolving modes of political mobilization. It also focuses on emerging trends in voter behavior, campaign strategies, policy platforms, and generational political preferences. More broadly, it shows how electoral competition interacts with institutional constraints and unelected elites in shaping post-election politics, situating the 2026 election within Thailand's historical and comparative context.

The analysis proceeds along several interrelated dimensions. First, it explores the reconfiguration of Thailand's party system, focusing on reform-oriented parties seeking popular mandates alongside pro-establishment parties aiming to preserve the existing order. It then examines the mobilization of nationalist sentiment during the campaign, particularly through renewed tensions along the Thailand-Cambodia border. Although limited in military intensity, these disputes were discursively amplified to frame security threats, legitimize elite authority, and constrain reformist agendas.

The seminar further analyzes the continuing influence of unelected actors—especially judicial institutions, and the military-bureaucratic nexus—in shaping electoral processes and coalition formation. Military reform is analyzed as a central and highly contested campaign issue, revealing the structural constraints on civilian control and the enduring entrenchment of military power within Thailand's political system. In addition, the presentation assesses the growing importance of policy-oriented campaigning and social media as arenas for both programmatic debate and generational political expression. Finally, it evaluates the constitutional amendment referendum held concurrently with the general election. Taken together, this seminar offers an integrated analysis of the 2026 election and the political trajectory emerging in its aftermath.

PRESENTER

Prajak Kongkirati

Associate Professor, Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University
Guest Scholar, CSEAS Kyoto University, The Japan Foundation JFSEAP Visiting Fellow

Dr. Prajak Kongkirati is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University. He has previously served as Associate Dean for Research and Academic Services, Head of the Government Department, and Chair of the Southeast Asian Studies Center at the East Asian Institute, Thammasat University. He received the 2026 National Outstanding Researcher Award in Political Science from the National Research Council of Thailand. From June – November 2025, he is a Visiting Fellow at Osaka Metropolitan University. He is currently undertaking a six-month fellowship as the Japan Foundation 2025 JFSEAP Visiting Fellow at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), Kyoto University. He serves on the editorial boards of *Asian Democracy Review*, *Thammasat Review of Economic and Social Policy*, and *New Mandala* (the Australian National University). He serves on the executive committees of several research foundations in Thailand, including the Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbook Project, the Foundation for Democracy and Development Studies, and the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI). Dr. Prajak's research and publications focus on Thai politics, political conflict and violence, party and electoral dynamics, and democratization. His recent works include *Thailand: Contestation, Polarization, and Democratic Regression* (Cambridge University Press, 2024); "Power without the Polls: Thai-Style Authoritarian Fragility amid the Defeat of Military-Backed Parties" (*Contemporary Southeast Asia* 45, no. 3, 2023: 406–13); "From Illiberal Democracy to Military Authoritarianism: Intra-Elite Struggle and Mass-Based Conflict in Deeply Polarized Thailand," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (2019), and *When We Vote: Dynamics of Electoral Politics and Democracy in Southeast Asia* (Matichon, 2019), a book recognized with an award from the National Research Council of Thailand.



Discussant: Pavin Chachavalpongpun (CSEAS)

No
Reservation
required

Colloquium 2025