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Politics, Governance, and Local Political Party Branches to Influence the Growth of the Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to study the factors behind the establishment of political party branches in Thailand. What factors stimulate the creation of political party branches? Operational characteristics of local branches Relationships between branches Member of the House of Representatives voters, and what are the characteristics of the party's central leader? It is especially focused on the Democratic Party (DP) branch because the DP has devoted more human and material resources to branch development since its inception than any other political party, Analyze the establishment and internal operations of local branches. This study used qualitative data analysis. Primary data was collected through interviews, participatory observation and study from related documents.

The results of the study found that Factors behind the establishment of political party branches in Thailand and the factors that stimulate the creation of political party branches are: To be used as a tool to determine the methods for establishing political parties and conducting political party activities in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. One of the important points of the political party law is that political parties must be established. "Political Party Branch" If you wish to submit a candidate for election to the House of Representatives The form for demarcating electoral districts in any constituency must include a political party branch or representative of the provincial political party that has the area of responsibility in that constituency. At the same time, the Political Party Law also stipulates penalties for failure to take action as specified by law. The nature of operations of local branches Relationships between branches Member of the House of Representatives voters and what are the characteristics of the party's central leader? From the study it was found that active operations of many local branches In particular, branches located in the DP's strong political base help the party confirm and repeat its votes both during and between elections. The success of many DP branches, especially those in the South and Bangkok and help reveal the important role that parliamentarians play in maintaining the continuity of local branches. The findings also reveal the different formats of the DP branch system and how they differ from those of other political parties. The DP's distinctive branch structure may be a key factor behind the party's recent victories in the south and in Bangkok.

Introduction

Much of the literature on Thai political parties suggests that local branches are of marginal importance. Despite this perception, some political parties in Thailand, including the country's oldest political party, the DP, have devoted significant resources to establishing and maintaining party branches over the past several decades. This raises the question: why do certain political parties in Thailand invest considerable efforts and resources into building party branches?

While Pasuk Phongpaichit & Chris Baker (2017), some observers of Thai politics liken the structure of the DP to that of Western political parties, with sophisticated administrative structures and active party members involved in decision-making processes, this depiction may be somewhat misleading. However, the DP does stand out from other parties, particularly in its approach to branch policies. Understanding of Duncan McCargo (2019), the factors underlying these differences is crucial for gaining insights into the dynamics of Thai political parties. This dissertation aims to delve into the factors that drive variations in branch promotion policies both across and within political parties over time. Specifically, it seeks to understand why the DP, among other parties, has prioritized the development of party branches. Additionally, the study aims to explore the broader context within which Thai parties operate, with a particular focus on the succession of party laws that have regulated their activities.

Furthermore, the research will examine the impact of state subsidies to political parties on their branch promotion strategies. By analyzing the relationships between party headquarters, local party branches, and Members of Parliament (MPs), the study aims to shed light on the dynamics of party organization and decision-making processes at the local level.

In particular, the study will investigate variations in these relationships across different geographic regions of Thailand. By examining regional differences, the research seeks to uncover how local political contexts shape the strategies and priorities of political parties in promoting their branches (Federico Ferrara, 2013). To achieve these objectives, the study will employ a qualitative research approach, drawing on interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. By exploring these factors comprehensively, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role and influence of local political party branches on the politics and governance of Thailand.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In this study, the term "local branches" refers to local organizations that are set up by political parties to act as party representatives within electoral districts around the country. Maurice Duverger (1967), for example, emphasized party branches in his characterization of mass-based socialist parties in European countries. For Duverger, branches function primarily "to organize the masses, to give them a political education, and to recruit from them the working-class elites". In this study, however, local branches do not necessarily serve those same poses. Branches in Thailand also generally have different origins, leading to their distinct

internal structures. Many of them were established by individual politicians instead of local party supporters, as was the case in the mass-based parties in the West.

In the Western model of mass-based parties, local branches play significant roles. They, however, are marginally important in other types of political parties: the elite, catch-all and cartel parties. During the heyday of mass-based parties in the 1940s, branch-based organizations in many European countries replaced the caucus-based organizations of the cadre party (Mair 1997: 35). Local branches with membership organizations were able to dominate and direct the party leadership. Branches also recruited candidates for elections, promoted party ideology and policies, and increased party membership. This bottom-up relationship enhanced the role of local branches while it weakened the role of the party center in the elite-based party. During the 1960s in Europe, however, political parties became more remote from the everyday lives of their constituents. This remoteness was reflected in a shift of internal party power towards the leadership, a de-emphasis of class, and a reduction in the roles of party members. Mair (1997) argues that the transformation of political parties during this period was a result of In responding to these changes, parties altered their organizational structures from mass-based organizations to catch-all parties (see also Kirchheimer 1966 and Panebianco 1988).

As with other political parties in developed states, Thai parties gradually developed their internal structures over time. The Thai party branches, however, had not been intensively promoted until after the promulgation of the 1974 Party Act that encouraged the formation of local branches. The DP was the only party that strongly supported the branch system after 1974. The absence of branch promotion in other parties was perhaps due to the elite-origin of those parties in the past and the reluctance of those elites to expand the party's political base and membership throughout the nation. Political parties were established primarily to legitimize politicians to compete in elections; and they were organized around the group of political elites instead of the masses.

In Thailand, although a great number of parties has been established since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932, those parties were not "real" political parties. By "real" party, I mean political parties that are mass membership, cohesive policy platform, branch system and sophisticated administrative structure. Rather, they were a coalition of military and civilian elites (Niyom 1984: 20). They 5 were formed by the aggregation of political elites to support particular powerful figures. For example, the Seri Manangkhasila Party, Sahaphum Party and Democrat Party were formed to support Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat and Khuang Aphaiwong, respectively. Parties in the following periods also experienced a similar situation. Such parties, therefore, had weak organizations, internal conflicts and only vague ideologies or party programs (Wilson 1962: 233). Their leaders tended to be concerned more with the continuity of their power rather than the development of party organization and local branches. As a result, those leaders did not attempt to expand their political base through the establishment of branches. The absence of a strong building-base led to the decline of many parties, as soon as party leaders lost elections. This weakness also caused the prevalence of party switching among politicians and rapid party dissolution. To guide the structure and formation of parties as well as prevent their rapid demise, the state has issued Political Party Acts. Since 1955, Thailand has had six Party

Acts written in 1955, 1968, 1974, 1981, 1998, and 2007. The early Acts focus on the formation and operation of parties while the latter three Acts place more emphasis on the process of party decentralization and institutionalization. Many new provisions that aimed to promote strong parties were added in later Acts. These new provisions led to the gradual evolution of Party Acts and political parties over time. Since the promulgation of the 1955 Act, political parties have been required to register with the state and organize their internal structure according to requirements in the Acts. Accordingly, permanent headquarters were established; permanent office staff members were hired; and more branches set up. In addition, to sustain the development of parties, the Acts written in 1998 and 2007 promulgated the Political Party Development Fund (PDF). The PDF provides annual state subsidies to eligible political parties and requires those parties to report their income and expenses to the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT) annually.

The Party Acts also influenced the establishment and development of local branches, particularly during the period of 1998-2001. The 1998 Act for the first time required the establishment of local branches and provided subsidies to support those branches. In 1999, more than 1,000 branches were set up by both small and large parties. Many scholars claim that the PDF allocation was the major reason for the establishment of an overwhelming number of party branches during 1997-2001. Small parties established a great number of branches to maximize their state subsidies. Most of their branches were loosely organized. Some of them existed only on paper (Krit 2004). In similar vein, the DP also set up numerous branches compared to other major political parties, a total of 196 in 2008. Was the DP primarily interested in PDF subsidies? Was the party motivated by other factors? Whatever the initial motivations, did these party branches create linkages between parties and local constituencies? Do parties set up branches to avoid relying on electoral networks created by local elites? Do different parties have similar branch policies? And what are the relationships between branches and other party actors? The contemporary literature on Thai political parties sheds little light on such questions. This research, therefore, attempts to answer these questions.

The principal research questions of this dissertation are: what are the factors that have shaped the Democrat Party's branch policy over time and what are the patterns of the internal power structure in DP branches across the country? In other words, who has dominated branch organizations and their operations: the party headquarters, parliamentarians or local branch: office-holders? This project also raises several related questions:

1. How and why does the party decide to establish or dissolve local branches in particular locations?
2. How do DP branch structures differ from other parties' local organizations?
3. Are branches located in different constituencies organized similarly, and do they pursue the same functions?
4. What are the relationships between branches and other party units, and how have these relationships shifted over time?

Objective

This studies political party branches in Thailand in understand what factors motivates the creation of party branches and the relationships among branches, member of parliaments (MPs), constituents, and the parties central leaderships, particularly focusing to the Democrat Party (DP) branches because the DP has devoted more human and material resources to branch development since its inception than other political parties.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach to investigate the influence of local political party branches on the politics and governance of Thailand. Qualitative methods are chosen for their suitability in capturing the nuanced perspectives and dynamics of political processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

1. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a diverse range of key informants, including scholars, party notables, former party leaders, Members of Parliament (MPs), party administrative officers, other relevant politicians, and officers from the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT). These interviews will be conducted at both the national and local levels to gather insights into the operations and influence of political party branches. The open-ended format of the interviews will allow for the collection of in-depth information, particularly on aspects that may not be officially recorded.
2. Participatory Observations: Observations will be carried out to supplement the interview data and provide contextual understanding of the functioning of local political party branches. The researcher will observe party meetings, election campaigns, and other political activities at the local level to gain insights into the dynamics of party organization and mobilization.
3. Document Analysis: Necessary documents, including statistical data from government institutions and party organizations, will be collected and analyzed to complement the interview and observation data. These documents may include party regulations, election results, party membership data, and government reports on local governance.

Data Analysis

The primary source of data for this analysis will be the qualitative interviews, which will be transcribed and analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis will involve identifying recurring themes, patterns, and issues related to the influence of local political party branches on politics and governance in Thailand. The analysis will focus on understanding the strategies, structures, and dynamics of party branches, as well as their impact on electoral outcomes and governance processes.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be obtained from relevant institutional review boards prior to data collection to ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Informed consent

will be obtained from all interview participants, and measures will be taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher will adhere to ethical guidelines for conducting research in the field of politics and governance, including maintaining neutrality and avoiding bias in data collection and analysis.

Data Validation

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, member checking will be conducted, allowing participants to review and validate the accuracy of their interview transcripts. Triangulation of data sources and methods will also be employed to corroborate findings and minimize bias.

By employing these research methods, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the role and influence of local political party branches on the politics and governance of Thailand. Through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis, the study seeks to uncover the dynamics of party organization at the local level and its implications for the broader political landscape.

Research Results

This study sought to examine the organization and internal power structure of local branches of parties, focusing on the Democrat Party (DP) of Thailand. Though rarely studied in any depth, and even less often from the vantage of local constituencies, local branches play a significant role in local Thai politics, particularly in constituencies where the DP maintains a strong political base. While parliamentarians influence the effectiveness of branch operations, the DP party center dominates party policy on branch establishment and expansion. The center not only issues policies to promote the branch system throughout the nation, it also creates regulations and rules to control and direct the functions, structures and operations of those branches. This top-down policy structure distinguishes the DP from other major political parties.

Many scholars of Thai politics have argued that party local branches play a marginal role in party organizations and electoral politics. It is often claimed that branches are not effective instruments penetrating remote constituencies and mobilizing votes for the party. Rather, they were formed to advance the personal advantages of individual politicians. Moreover, these scholars also simply assert that party leaders established branches to show publicly that their party was intensive. In fact, however, those branches were set up as party intermediaries. organized. did not function effectively to be merely a symbol and

Although scholars of Thai politics and many politicians claim that local branches are trivial, the study of party branches is under-theorized, and most empirical research in this area is not systematically organized. There is very little in- depth research on the establishment and operation of local branches or on the relationships between those branches and their party center. Most scholarly assumptions regarding local branches are derived from unintentional findings while conducting research on other related topics. Local branches were frequently identified as an independent variable or factors to examine the internal structure of political parties and the effectiveness of party organizations, as seen in the works of King (1996) and

McCargo (1993). The absence of in-depth studies on branch organizations, therefore, sparked my research interest.

How do we account for the formation and expansion of branches, particularly in the DP, and those branches' internal power structures and operations? Earlier chapters presented an analysis on the formation and operation of local branches across the country through the lens of party transformation, the catch-all model and the logical principles of political parties derived from the Thai political Context. The concept of party transformation suggests that the shift in power among the three major actors the party in central office, the party in public office and the Power structure led to the transformation from elite-based, to mass-based, to catch- Party on the ground results in a change in party internal structure. This shift of all and to cartel parties. This change of party internal power also affects the role of local branches in the party organization.

The concept of the cartel-all party model applied in this study clearly has shown how power relations within the party organization influence the party's branch policy and the role of those branches in supporting the party. The catch-all model was applied to this study because the internal structures and functions of catch-all parties described by Western scholars are more similar to Thai parties than are the alternative models. Moreover, the important variable state subvention drawing from the catch-all literature also reveals the impact of subventions on the rapid establishment of branches in Thailand. Other factors deriving from the Thai political context were also applied in the analyses. These factors the Political Party Acts, the existence of MPs in districts and branch functions shed some light on our understanding of the development of party branch policy and the operation of those branches located in different geographic regions.

I primarily focused on the DP because this party has devoted a great number of resources to branch establishment and operation, particularly since the 1990s. The party has continually supported the expansion of branch numbers since its inception, and, in 2007, the party controlled almost 200 branches across the nation. The findings of this research reveal factors contributing to the success and failure of the DP branch policy as well as the structures and functions of those DP branches located in different regions.

This research is divided into two parts: the first part attempted to discover actors that influenced and shaped branch promotion policies of the DP; the second section emphasized the internal operations of DP branches and highlighted dominant figures in branch organizations located in different areas. In other words, the second section attempted to investigate whether the OP branches created a tightly knit relationship with the party or parliamentarians in addition to explaining how branches work, this research also compared and contrasted the formation and operation of DP branches to the branches and MP offices of the TNP, PPP and TNDP, respectively). And suggests future research needed to further understanding of the branch system and party system in Thailand.

This study used extensive field research to explore the internal relationships among the three major party actors in the party organizations and their impact on the formation of the party branch policy as well as the internal operations of those branches located across the

country. Extensive interviews were conducted with notable politicians, party elites, branch office-holders, officers of the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT) at the center and local levels and scholars of Thai politics. Questions focused on the establishment, role, operation and function of local branches and the role of the interviewees in the creation of branch policies as well as branch operations. In addition, the author also studied the organization and Operation of local branch activities, internal meetings and elections. These observations also showed the role and relationships among the three major actors jurying the meetings. To support the findings of the field research, the author drew documents on branches. s provided by governmental institutions, political parties and local Combining these methods, this study offers insights into the organization and development of local branches in Thailand and suggests that while the DP party center formed policy on branch promotion, the constituency parliamentarians dominated the internal structure and operation of local branches. The power domination of parliamentarians is lessened, however, when a strong party affiliation exists among branch members in constituencies. Local branch members tend to support both the parliamentarians and the party headquarters during and between elections. The departure of parliamentarians does not threaten the stability and continuity of those branches. Branch members continue to support the party and new candidates in elections.

Research Findings: Variables and Local Branch Operation

While many small and large parties rapidly established branches only after the 1998 Political Party Act, the DP has gradually developed its branch system since its inception in the 1940s. Many small parties established a great number of branches beginning in 1998 in order to maximize state subsidies from the Political Party Development Fund (PDF). The creation of the PDF was the first time in Thailand that the state formally provided subsidies for developing party seats and had few members. Consequently, to maximize and maintain their PDF Organizations and their branches. Many small parties did not win parliamentary.

Local Party Branches in Thailand and Their Implications

The findings of this study shed light not only on the studies of political parties in general, but also on the local party organizations in particular. As mentioned earlier, many scholars in Thai politics tended to ignore the role of local branches in their studies of Thai political parties. However, this research suggests that in some areas local branches play a significant role in supporting political parties during and between elections. Hence, to understand the structure and development of political parties in contemporary Thai politics, it is necessary for scholars to pay more focus on the internal structure of local branches as well as their relationships with other party units, including the party center and MPs.

McCargo (1997) argues that the literature on political parties can be divided into two categories: the real and authentic parties as described in Chapter 1. Scholars in Thai politics tended to analyze Thai parties based on either the idealized Western model of political parties or the internal dynamics of Thai parties. In other words, the former approach attempts to indicate the areas where the Thai parties fail to measure up the Western ideal model, while the latter literature studies Thai parties by focusing on the way Thai parties actually function such as the role of party factions, patronage system and vote-buying.

Each of the abovementioned approaches present different weaknesses. The former approach largely ignores the role of factors, for example factions, that actually shape Thai parties and politics overall. On the other hand, the latter literature pays lesser attention to ideology and internal organization of political parties. Rather, this approach examines the role of individual politicians and their faction in influencing party organizations. It undermines the roles of other party units the party executive committee and members within the party. This weakness leads to the failure of this approach to examine the development of party internal structures over time of the roles of party internal units in mobilizing votes for the party, factors particularly important in the case of the DP. To fill the gap between the two approaches, this study offers an analysis that combines McCargo's two categories of literature on Thai parties. It examines the internal structure of party organization and the power relations among three major party units within the Thai political context. In other words, this study does not attempt to compare and contrast the structure and operation of local branches in Thailand to those of Western democracies. Rather, it provides in-depth analysis on the actual operation and function of local party branches in Thai political arena. The Endings of this research, therefore, not only contribute to the study of Thai political parties, but also to the literature on party transformation, political parties and catch-call "people's" party model. While the emergence of the catch-all parties in Western democracies was partly a product of electoral competition between the cadre and mass-based parties during the early 1960s, the existence of the catch-all party as appears in the current DP structure was a result of the party expansion policy. In the 1960s, political parties in older democracies became essentially remote from the everyday life of people. This remoteness was a result of social changes such as the emergence of the welfare state, the extension of suffrage and the existence of religion freedom (Mair 1997: 38-41). Moreover, struggles of the working class for political rights had been solved. As a result, voters no longer felt that it was necessary to form any specific ties to particular parties. The existence of these new social phenomena weakened programmatic and organizational identity of mass parties. The mass-based parties no longer forged or integrated votes by inculcating particular ideologies to a specific social class. Rather they turned more fully to the electoral market, attempting to exchange effectiveness in depth for a wider base of voter support in society. Specific policy platforms for particular social class were no longer sufficient to compete in elections. The mass party focused more on broad policy formation which could benefit citizens in society at large. Like the mass-based party, the cadre party also expanded their political base to a wider society. To compete in elections, the party advertised policy platforms E utilizing the mass media. The media enabled party leaders to appeal directly to voters in every social class. The competition among different types of parties and their effort to penetrate a wider society led to the emergence of the catch-all party focusing more on their immediate electoral success rather than serving interests of particular social classes.

In the DP, however, the party slowly transformed itself from the cadre or elite-based party to more like a catch-all "people's" party in order to expand its political base across the nation. Although the DP was founded by a group of political elites who supported Khuang Aphaiwong, the party attempted to expand its support in remote constituencies in following periods. Party leaders allowed local DP supporters to set up 10 branches during its beginning years. These remote linkages led the party to gradually forge its local base across regions. In today's politics, the party continues to support its branch system and at the same time strengthen its role, structure and function through the creation of party regulations and

resource allocation. The DP branch strategies, therefore, distinguish the party from other major political parties.

The findings from this study also illustrate the distinctive role of state subsidies in influencing party structure in Thailand. While state subsidies in Western catch-all parties allowed parties to be independent from support and resources from local branches, the DP as well as other small parties in Thailand depended upon a large number of local branches as a means to maximize their share in the state subvention or the PDF. Hence, unlike Western democracies, many branches in Thailand were used as political tool to increase state subsidies instead of promoting strong party organizations. Many parties set up local branches without creating policies to sustain their development. As a result, numerous branches, particularly those belonging to small parties, existed only on paper.

In 2007, although the DP had approximately 200 branches, not all branches were active to support the party during and between elections. Only DP branches located in the South and in Bangkok tended to function more effectively as DP intermediaries. The success of these branches was primarily due to the existence of active DP supporters in the districts, even though resource allocations from the party and MPs were still essential. As many interviews with the DP leaders suggested, with sufficient resources allocated by the party, MPs and occasionally by branch office-bearers, active DP supporters routinely organize local activities, recruit more new members, educate local voters on party policies and current political issues and cooperate with other public and private sections as well as among DP branches at the district level. These activities allowed branches to reproduce and reaffirm votes for the party in their constituencies. Hence, the absence of either strong support or resource allocation would diminish branches' capacity to cultivate votes at remote constituencies. At the branch level, the financial constraint limited a capacity of branch members to establish an ongoing and multi-level resource of party support.

Although the party center and a number of branch members occasionally allocated resources to branches, those subsidies were not sufficient to serve a range of branch purposes. To sustain branch development in the long term, extra resource contribution from MPs is essential for branches' administrative and organizational costs. The MPs or party candidates were willing to provide more resources for branch development because the more effective were local branches, the greater chance of those local branches to mobilize votes for MPs in elections.

Moreover, the strong support among branch members in the South and in Bangkok led to an active role of local branches during and between elections. These branch members routinely organized political activities in their constituencies. These activities gradually created a close relationship between branches and local voters and ultimately led to a strong party affiliation among branch members. The emergence of party affiliation among branch members distinguishes DP branches in the South and in Bangkok from branches across parties and regions. In other geographic areas, the absence of strong support at the branch level encouraged MPs and party candidates to set up their own campaign team instead of relying on branches' assistance during elections. This team was active in organizing local activities and campaigns only during election periods. In other words, the team staff conducted activities

primarily for immediate electoral success of individual MPs or party candidates. The MPs and their team might continue to organize local activities if they won the election. However, most of their local activities, such as several public services, aimed to forge votes for individual politicians for the next elections

instead of stimulating the sense of party affiliation among local voters. This phenomenon is particularly evident in party Central and Northern branches where the DP won parliamentary seats.

In a break from the DP, other major political parties such as the TRT and INP did not emphasize the development of their branch system as a means to endure organizational structure and penetrate local constituencies. Rather they tended to rest upon other factors, for example the MPs' existent local linkages, party leader personality and the mass media, to boost political support in elections. The reluctance of these major parties to set up local branches was due to the many regulations required by Party Acts, an absence of strong party support in some areas and branches' demand for more resources. These conditions lessened parties' interests in expanding their branches and led them to use other strategies to mobilize votes in constituencies.

According to the 1998- and 2007-Party Acts, local branches were required to register with the ECT. To avoid the physical facilities requirements of the Party Act, these major parties did not develop their branch system. They established local branches in 1998 only to fulfill the requirement of the Party Act that required political parties to set up at least one branch in each of the four geographic regions within 180 days after a party's formation. Although these parties set up more than four branches, it did not mean that they wanted to develop their branch system. Those branches did not support the party in elections and did not receive any subsidies from the party center. Many of them were formed by MPs as a means to show the party leaders their strong attachment to the organization. Like the DP, the existence of strong local support is vital for active functions of branches. Branch members would support local activities and continue to mobilize votes for the party. The absence of strong support in particular constituencies discouraged those parties from setting up their formal branches. Rather, these major parties tended to establish a coordination center as a means to facilitate the parties and their candidates during election periods. These centers were not required to register with the ECT and frequently disappeared after elections. In addition, the need to subsidize local branches also weakened the parties' policies of promoting a large number of formal branches. With the exception of the DP, other major parties did not want to regularly provide resources for branches. As a result, the party center set up local branches only in districts where the parties won the elections. The party MPs were a major actor who subsidized those branches' expenses.

Some may argue that although other major parties did not develop its branch system, the party successfully won majority seats in the parliament. The strong branch system, therefore, did not lead to the victory of parties in elections. In the case of the TRT, for example, the party utilized the mass media and advertised its party leader, Thaksin Shinawatra, as a means to mobilize votes across the country. Although these tactics allowed the party to win the 2001 and 2005 elections, they did not lead to the formation of a strong party affiliation

among local voters, a process that takes time to take root. The electoral success of the TRT, therefore, 250 process depended largely or sufficient financial resources and the political fortune of the party leaders. As long as the party maintained a large amount of resources and the party leaders were still in power, the party could survive in the political arena. On the other hand, the party would decline if the party leader ended his or her political career.

In contrast to the TRT, the branch system allows the DP to establish a strong political base and reproduce its political support in particular areas. Although those branches did not support the DP to win election in some regions, they reproduced and reaffirmed votes for the party, particularly in districts where the party maintains a strong political base. The existence of local branches in districts allows branch members to participate in branch activities and create a closer relationship with the party and other branch members within provinces. The frequent communication among branch members, branch office-bearers and the party headquarters created strong party affiliation among DP members. The emergence of strong party affiliations made it difficult for other political parties to penetrate the DP political bases in the South and in Bangkok.

Discussion

The discussion of this research on the influence of local political party branches in Thailand reveals several noteworthy findings and implications.

Firstly, contrary to the perception that local branches play a marginal role in party organizations and electoral politics, this study underscores their significant influence, particularly in constituencies where the Democrat Party (DP) maintains a strong political base. Despite King, T. (1996: 199-213) mentions the prevailing assumption that branches serve primarily as symbols of party presence or as vehicles for individual politicians' personal advantage, the research reveals that local branches are integral intermediaries within party structures. The DP's top-down policy approach towards branch establishment and expansion distinguishes it from other major political parties, indicating a deliberate strategy to foster and control local party presence. The study highlights the DP's distinctive approach to local branch management, characterized by a top-down policy orientation aimed at both fostering and controlling the local party presence. Unlike other major political parties, which may adopt less centralized strategies regarding branch establishment and expansion, the DP's deliberate strategy reflects its concerted efforts to exert influence and maintain organizational coherence at the grassroots level. This top-down approach suggests a strategic imperative for the DP to assert control over local party structures, potentially enhancing its electoral performance and grassroots mobilization efforts. Moreover, the research sheds light on the multifaceted dynamics underlying the operation of local branches within the DP. By emphasizing the significance of local branches as more than mere appendages to the central party apparatus, the study underscores the intricate interplay between central directives and local dynamics within party organizations. This nuanced understanding challenges simplistic interpretations of party branch dynamics and highlights the complexity of organizational relations within political parties.

In interpreting these findings, it is essential to consider the broader implications for party politics and governance in Thailand. The DP's emphasis on centralized control over local branches raises questions about the balance between party cohesion and local autonomy within the broader political landscape. Moreover, it underscores the strategic imperatives driving party behavior and the implications for democratic governance and political competition in Thailand. Hofmann, & Martill (2021) mention the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the organizational dynamics of local political party branches and their implications for party politics and governance. By challenging prevailing assumptions and highlighting the strategic imperatives shaping party behavior, this study enriches scholarly discourse on Thai political parties and underscores the need for further research into the role of local branches in party organizations. Moreover, while previous scholarship on Thai political parties tended to overlook local branches, this study emphasizes their importance and highlights the need for deeper exploration of their organizational dynamics and relationships with party centers. The research demonstrates that local branches are not merely passive entities but are influenced by various internal and external factors, including state subsidies, party laws, and the presence of MPs in constituencies. This nuanced understanding challenges simplistic interpretations of party branch dynamics and calls for a more systematic analysis of their roles and functions. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the internal power structures and operations of DP branches, revealing the dominance of constituency parliamentarians in shaping branch policies and operations. Despite McCargo, D. (1993) presented the central party's influence on branch promotion policies, the research shows that MPs wield significant control over local branches, particularly in areas where party affiliation is strong among branch members. This finding underscores the complex interplay between central party directives and local dynamics within party organizations.

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the organizational dynamics of local political party branches in Thailand and their implications for party politics and governance. By highlighting the significance of local branches and calling for further research on their internal structures and relationships with party centers, this study enriches scholarly discourse consist of the study of Sawasdee (2006), that Thai political parties and paves the way for future investigations into this understudied aspect of party organization. The study calls attention to the need for further research into the internal structures and functioning of local branches, as well as their relationships with party centers. This call for additional investigation reflects a recognition of the complexity and nuance inherent in the operation of local party branches and suggests avenues for future scholarly inquiry into this understudied aspect of party organization. In enriching scholarly discourse on Thai political parties, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping party politics and governance in Thailand. By emphasizing the importance of local branches and advocating for greater attention to be paid to their roles and functions, the study opens up new avenues for research that can deepen our understanding of the intricacies of party organization in the Thai political landscape.

Conclusion

In short, the findings of this study contribute to the study of Thai party organizations, the nature of local branch operations, particularly in developing countries such as Thailand,

and add to the literature on party local organizations and catch-all model. The findings of this study underscore the significance of local political party branches in Thailand and their potential impact on party politics and governance. By calling for further research and investigation, the study lays the groundwork for continued exploration of this vital aspect of political organization in Thailand. While scholars in Thai politics ignore the structure and operation of local branches in their studies on Thai parties, this study shows that local branches play a crucial role in party organizations. Unlike other parties that relied on the short-cut tactics to forgo votes for immediate electoral success, DP branches and their operations perpetuated political support for the party over time. This party affiliation allows the DP to establish its party rootedness in remote constituencies. This party rootedness would ultimately lead to more party institutionalization and more stable democracies in Thai politics in the future.

Limitations of this Study and Future Research

This research examines political party branches and focuses on the Democrat Party. It analyzes the establishment and internal operations of local branches. Although this research compares and contrasts DP branches with other local party units of the TNP, PPP and TNDP, it does not systematically address the internal structure and function of MP offices belonging to DP parliamentarians. While the DP center set up branches, the DP parliamentarians also set up their own personal offices in the same constituency. Why did these parliamentarians set up their own office instead of sharing the office with branches? How do these DP MP offices function? And how do these offices differ from local branches?

In this research, the author looked at only one MP office, established in Bangkok. Limitations of time and financial resources as well as the absence of close relationships between the researcher and individual MPs limited further research on this issue. It is important to note here that a close relationship between the researcher and individual parliamentarians is necessary in order to gain access to in-depth data about their personal offices. During the 2008 field research, Thai politics was not stable. Many parliamentarians were charged by the Constitutional Tribunal with electoral fraud related to vote buying and other issues. As a result, to protect themselves from police investigation, many parliamentarians and their office staff refused to give interviews. Analysis of the differences in structure and function between DP branches and DP parliamentarians' offices requires further study.

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