

A VOTE FOR CHANGE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE RESULT OF THE THAI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

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For Thai voters, the May 14 parliamentary election offered a stark choice between the royalist, military-backed government and the pro-democratic, reformist opposition. They [overwhelmingly supported the latter](#). When the preliminary results were announced, the progressive Move Forward Party emerged as the single largest bloc with 152 seats. The Pheu Thai Party, another pro-democratic outfit led by Paetongtarn Shinawatra, daughter of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, came second with 141 seats. All the pro-government parties did poorly. Both the Move Forward and the Pheu Thai have promised to stand up to the military, which captured power in 2014 through a coup, and address the country's economic issues. The Move Forward, a political upstart led by 42-year-old Pita Limjaroenrat, is now leading coalition talks and has staked a claim to form the next government. During the campaign, Mr. Pita was critical of the establishment and offered a new beginning to Thai voters. The party's manifesto promised to stop military conscription, end the "cycle of coups", tackle business monopolies and scrap the military-drafted Constitution. It also vowed to amend the controversial lèse majesté law, which shields the monarchy from public criticism. The Move Forward's promises helped the fledgling party easily connect with a public which was increasingly angered by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's authoritarianism and the drying up of economic opportunities.

But an electoral victory does not necessarily mean that the Move Forward has an easy way towards forming a government. The Opposition coalition has a majority (309) in the 500-member elected House, but in Thailand's 750-member bicameral Parliament (250 members of the Senate are appointed by the military), Mr. Pita would need the support of 376 legislators to form the government. His criticism of the military and the promise to amend the royal defamation law have made the generals wary of his rise. If the Senate votes as a bloc against the Opposition coalition, he would not be able to form the government. It remains to be seen what will happen between now and July 13, when the Election Commission will officially ratify the results. In the 2019 election, the Future Forward Party, the predecessor of the Move Forward, emerged the third largest party, surprising the generals. It was subsequently dissolved and its leaders banned from politics. Mr. Pita is already facing cases for allegedly violating electoral laws. But any move to stop the winners of the election from forming the government would be disastrous for a country that is on the brink. Thailand witnessed widespread pro-democracy protests in 2020, which were crushed by the regime. Some 14 million people voted for Move Forward and if the military defies their mandate, it would only widen the cracks in society. Instead, the generals should see the elections as an opportunity to cede power and allow the winners to form the next

government.

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