

Populism: The case of Thailand

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Agenda

- What is populism?
- Populism in Thailand
- Why did populism rise in Thailand?
- How to deal with the populism

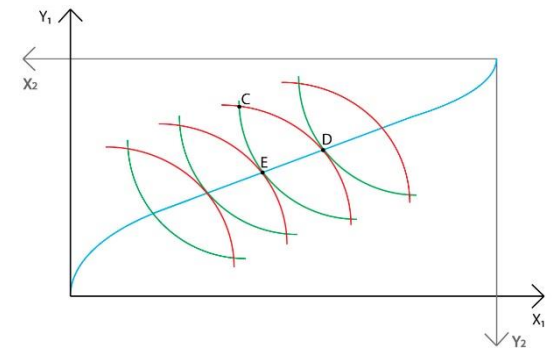


What is populism?

- In general, populism is defined as “political ideas and activities that are intended to get the support of ordinary people (the majority) by giving them what they want”¹.
- It seems to be a good concept, except...
 1. what if people don't know what is good for them? (minimum wage policy)
 2. what if people don't care much about the future generation? (rice-pledging program)
 3. what if people don't care much about the minority group? (Rohingya in Myanmar)
 4. what if people don't care much about other countries? (Trump, and Brexit)

Populism in Thailand

- In the case of Thailand, populism first emerged when Thai Rak Thai Party, a new political party with a populist platform, won the legislative election in 2001.
- At first, populism had shown its good side. For example, universal health coverage reform and One Tambon One Product (OTOP) program truly support the needs of the people.
- Populist policy became bad when it had reached a trade-off point: improvement in the welfare of the majority comes at the cost of others' welfare (minority, future generation or people from other countries).



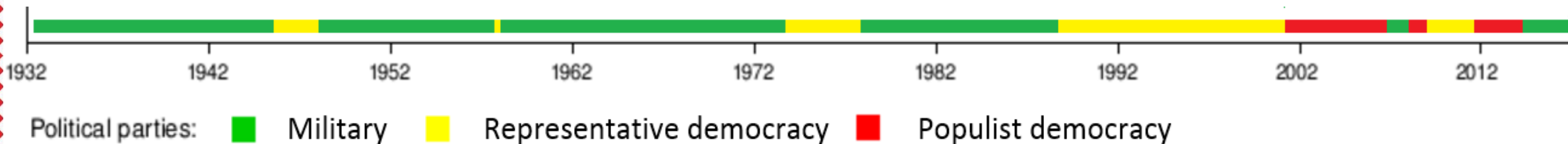
Populism in Thailand (2)

- For Thailand, the problem of populism had reached its bottom in late 2013.
- Rice-pledging program - a government programme in which farmers sell rice to the government at a particular price, with the right to reclaim the rice if the market price goes higher.
- But with populism in mind, the pledging price is 15,000 baht per ton which is 50% higher than the market price.
- The program costs 519 billion baht in four years¹. (around 1% of GDP per year)



Why did populism rise in Thailand?

- Limited choices: Between the end period of the revolution to overthrow absolute monarchy in 1932 and the rise of the populism in 2001, Thai politics were dominated by a military and bureaucratic elite, with the support of businessmen and entrepreneurs.
 1. Representative democracy (yellow): Promote business.
 2. Military government (green): Protect national security, traditional value, crowned republic, and centralized paternalism.
- Essentially, both choices try to protect social hierarchy (elite). There is a huge policy gap to address the needs of other groups (non-elite).



Reference: 1 Ministry of Finance.

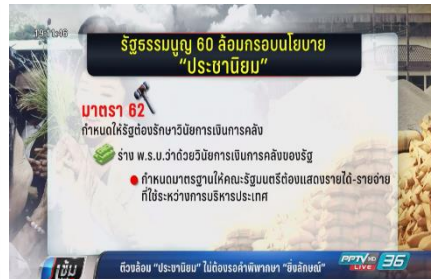
How to deal with the populism

- To keep it under control by preventing bad policies:
 - populism can be good or bad
 - create competition in politics: good for the society
- How to:
 1. Improve the parliamentary check and balance system: filibuster to delay US senate confirmations of judges, Reconciliation rules (the Byrd rule) topples Trump's tax plan.
 2. Get more information from the political neutrality: Congressional Budget Office of the US who provides budget and economic information to US Congress.



How to deal with the populism (2)

3. Support direct democracy: People can directly demand for a change of the constitution by signing a form (Switzerland).
4. Improve laws that control budget discipline: The Budgetary and Fiscal Discipline Act, the Monetary and Fiscal Discipline Act.
5. Improve the general check and balance system:
 - Anti-corruption agency, Ombudsmen
 - Media
 - People's participation



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