

Modern Thai Politics

Presented by James Wise

Thailand's 2023 election results energised some Thais and traumatised others. Voters and analysts alike were astonished that a youthful party aiming to transform the country won the most seats, though not a majority. The Move Forward party wanted to de-militarise society and politics, de-centralise government administration, de-monopolise the economy, and curb the ideological, political, and financial power of the monarchy.

For decades, Thai politics had revolved around two big questions: Do you support the charismatic Thaksin Shinawatra and his populist Pheu Thai party? Do you support military supervision of politics?

Thaksin and the military - once enemies - now had a common foe. Relying on military-appointed senators, they formed a coalition government that pushed Move Forward into the parliamentary opposition.

Move Forward's challenge is to broaden support for its progressive agenda before the next election. That's a scary prospect for Thaksin and the military because, according to the current constitution, next time they won't be able to rely on unelected senators to rescue them.

In his recently updated book, James Wise describes the historical context of these momentous events and trends and shares insights into the social and cultural undercurrents that shape Thai politics. Informed by the latest research, his book is an accessible introduction for the general reader, while also offering much to those who want to know more about Thailand's political dynamics.



About the Instructor:

James Wise was Australia's Ambassador to Thailand from 2010 to 2014 and Deputy Head of Mission at the Australian Embassy in Thailand from 1995 to 1998. He now lives in Doi Saket. James was an Australian diplomat for over 30 years. In addition to two postings to Thailand, he was High Commissioner to Malaysia (2003-07) and had earlier postings to the Soviet Union (1987-91) and Papua New Guinea (1983-85). James graduated from the University of Tasmania with a first-class honours degree in history.

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