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# Is All Politics Local? Determinants of Local and National Election Campaigns

Colm A. Fox

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**สรุปเป็นภาษาไทย**

ทำไมการหาเสียงบางแห่งจึงเน้นตัวผู้สมัครและเรื่องในท้องถิ่น ขณะที่บางแห่งเน้นหัวหน้าพรรคและนโยบายระดับชาติ บทความนี้วิเคราะห์โปสเตอร์หาเสียงที่ระบุพิกัดได้กว่า 12,000 แผ่นจากการเลือกตั้งทั่วไปของไทยเมื่อปี พ.ศ. 2554 (ค.ศ. 2011) โดยใช้ซอฟต์แวร์วัดสัดส่วนพื้นที่ของภาพและข้อความบนโปสเตอร์แต่ละแผ่น ระบบเลือกตั้งแบบผสมของไทยทำให้เปรียบเทียบกติกาการเลือกตั้งสองแบบได้โดยตรง ผลการศึกษาพบว่าระบบบัญชีรายชื่อสัมพันธ์กับการหาเสียงแบบเน้นระดับชาติ ส่วนระบบแบ่งเขตส่งเสริมการหาเสียงแบบเน้นท้องถิ่น นอกจากนี้ พรรคใหญ่หาเสียงโดยเน้นพรรคและนโยบาย ขณะที่พรรคเล็กพึ่งพาภาพลักษณ์ของหัวหน้าพรรคมากกว่า ซึ่งต่างจากประเทศตะวันตกที่พรรคใหญ่มักชูภาพลักษณ์ของผู้นำ

# Is All Politics Local?
# Determinants of Local and National Election Campaigns

Colm A. Fox
School of Social Sciences
90 Stamford Road, Level 04
Singapore Management University
Singapore 178903
Email: colmfox@smu.edu.sg

**Abstract:** The modernization of election campaigns has encouraged a shift in focus from the local to the national level, with campaigns increasingly highlighting party leaders, labels, and platforms. Within this general trend, there remains significant variation across countries and parties. This paper tests several propositions on why campaigns adopt a local or national orientation by analyzing a unique collection of over 12,000 geocoded Thai election posters. Specialized software was used to measure the spatial proportions of visual and textual content on each poster. Using Thailand's mixed electoral system to enable a controlled comparison of electoral rules, I demonstrate that proportional rules were associated with national campaign strategies whereas majoritarian rules fostered local strategies. In addition, large parties ran party-centered, policy-focused campaigns whereas small parties relied more on their leader's image. This contrasts with Western countries, where large parties increasingly promote their leader's image and small parties emphasize narrower policy objectives.

**Keywords:** Thailand, political parties, electoral systems, election campaigns, election posters

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# Is All Politics Local?
# Determinants of Local and National Election Campaigns[1]

**Abstract**

The modernization of election campaigns has encouraged a shift in focus from the local to the national level, with campaigns increasingly highlighting party leaders, labels, and platforms. Within this general trend, there remains significant variation across countries and parties. This paper tests several propositions on why campaigns adopt a local or national orientation by analyzing a unique collection of over 12,000 geocoded Thai election posters. Specialized software was used to measure the spatial proportions of visual and textual content on each poster. Using Thailand's mixed electoral system to enable a controlled comparison of electoral rules, I demonstrate that proportional rules were associated with national campaign strategies whereas majoritarian rules fostered local strategies. In addition, large parties ran party-centered, policy-focused campaigns whereas small parties relied more on their leader's image. This contrasts with Western countries, where large parties increasingly promote their leader's image and small parties emphasize narrower policy objectives.

1 The codebook, data, and replication code are available from the author. A replication package (with all data and code) will be uploaded on a public repository upon publication.

The familiar adage “All politics is local” implies that parties’ and candidates’ success is closely tied to their ability to serve local interests and attend to local issues. When politics is local, voters and election campaigns revolve around such attributes as candidates’ character, constituent service, personal networks, and ability to deliver patronage. In contrast, when politics is national, voters and campaigns focus on national issues, party platforms, and party leaders.

Traditionally, election campaigns are multilevel, operating on both national and local levels (Zittel & Gschwend, 2008, p. 978). However, literature on the modernization of campaigns indicates that politics has become less local and more national. Among other things, this trend entails more centralized organization around a small group of leaders and consultants, heavier use of mass media, and the personalization of party leaders (Farrell & Webb, 2002; McAllister, 2007; Norris, 2002; Plasser & Plasser, 2002; Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Swanson & Mancini, 1996). Although national campaigns are more likely to produce parties with national policy programs, they can also be impersonal and decrease voter turnout because they rely largely on advertising, the mass media, and images of distant leaders rather than on local contacts (Green & Smith, 2003). In contrast, campaigns that revolve around local politics and candidates can strengthen the tie between voters and representatives and increase accountability, but they can also foster particularism and elevate the candidate’s personal appeal above the party, weakening partisan identities.

Given the importance of this topic, it is valuable to consider what factors contribute to nationally or locally oriented campaigns. More specifically, why do some campaigns feature national policies and issues, party labels, and party leaders while others focus on local concerns? In this paper, I use an innovative methodology to test several propositions on why campaigns adopt a local or national orientation, drawing on a unique collection of more than 12,000 election

posters photographed across Thailand during its 2011 national elections. Specialized software was used to measure the spatial ratios of visual and textual content from each poster, allowing me to compare the prominence of local candidates in posters with more national elements, including the party's label, policy platform, national leader, and party slogans.

This creative empirical strategy offers several advantages. First, the use of the Thai case allows me to test the impact of electoral rules on campaigns while controlling for other mitigating factors. There is an extensive literature on the influence of electoral rules on campaigns, particularly the difference between single-member plurality (or majoritarian) systems and party-list proportional representation (PR) systems (e.g., Carey & Shugart, 1995; Karvonen, 2010; Katz, 1980; Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Roper, Holtz-Bacha, & Mazzoleni, 2004). Thailand uses a mixed electoral system, permitting me to observe strategic campaign strategies under both majoritarian rules (used to elect constituency MPs) and proportional rules (used to elect party-list MPs) while holding other variables constant.[2] This overcomes the problems associated with comparing campaigns across different countries or time periods, which can introduce other uncontrolled time- or country-specific factors.

Second, the Thai case allows me to test variation in campaign strategies across parties in an emerging democracy with weakly institutionalized parties. Most systematic studies on campaigns have focused on a small number of Western democracies where programmatic parties were forged out of historical social cleavages (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Less research has been done on emerging democracies where parties lack partisan support and instead often depend on traditional clientelistic practices. Studying party campaign behavior in an emerging democracy

2 Other authors have effectively used mixed electoral systems to study the effect of majoritarian and PR rules, such as Moser and Scheiner (2004) and Stratmann and Baur (2002).

can shed light on the similarities with and differences from party behavior in advanced democracies.

Third, this study can help to answer important questions regarding Thai politics. Since the adoption of a new constitution in 1997, a debate has arisen over the degree to which candidate-centered, locally oriented, patronage-based campaigns have been replaced by party-centered, nationally oriented, policy-based campaigns. In addition, claims that politics is more localized and personalistic in north and northeast Thailand than in Bangkok, the country's major urban center, have not been empirically tested. Understanding the impact of institutional design on Thai politics is all the more urgent, given recent constitutional reforms that represent a concerted effort to roll back the 1997 provisions.

Finally, my approach introduces an innovative method of analyzing a dataset of 12,000 election posters, which represent an important but severely understudied form of campaigning in emerging democracies. I develop new techniques to measure the prominence and substance of textual and visual information in posters. The fine-grained data generated by this method allow me to compare campaigns across electoral rules (as different posters targeted either constituency votes or party-list votes), across parties, and across regions. Ultimately, the use of a controlled comparison of real-world campaign data strengthens the validity of this study.

The study has three main findings. First, in line with institutional theory, majoritarian rules fostered local candidate-centered campaigns, whereas PR rules nationalized and centralized campaigns around party labels, policies, leaders, and slogans. Second, party size affected the form of campaigns. Large parties actively sought constituency and party-list votes through centralized, party-centered, and nationally oriented campaigns. Medium-sized parties downplayed their leader's image, focusing instead on party-list candidates and regionally

oriented policies. Meanwhile, small parties campaigned for party-list votes by conducting campaigns that prominently featured the personalized image of the party leader. Finally, aside from a more personable style of campaigning in rural areas, regional differences had less impact on campaigns.

## Local and National Campaigns

Election campaigns are critical periods for democracies. The local or national orientation of a campaign can influence the strength of parties and candidates, their responsiveness to local and national problems, and the electorate's ability to hold them accountable. On one hand, campaigns can be decentralized and local, with candidates setting up and financing their own campaign organizations, using regional media outlets to address local issues, and drawing support from personal networks. On the other hand, campaigns can be centralized and national, with party leaders, consultants, and large donors organizing and financing the campaign, using the mass media to communicate positions on national issues, and pursuing support from partisans and broad sections of the electorate.

Previous research has indicated a shift in recent years toward more centralized, nationally oriented campaigns. Parties have become more professional and scientific in their approach to campaigns and have increasingly centralized their activities at the national level (Farrell & Webb, 2000; Katz & Mair, 1995; Norris, 2000; Swanson & Mancini, 1996). Often, a small group of media and policy specialists directs a campaign, relying on polls and focus groups to craft a consistent national policy platform for the party and a set of campaign messages that are then

disseminated nationally through various media outlets.[3] Studies of "centralizing personalization"[4] have also found that the importance of the party leader's image has risen in recent years and that campaigns increasingly focus on the leader's character or personality (McAllister, 2007; Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Rahat & Sheafer, 2007). However, some recent empirical findings have been more mixed (Karvonen, 2010; Kriesi, 2012). Less work has been done on "decentralizing personalization," which focuses on the rising importance of candidates' image, character, or personality in campaigns, so we have few points of comparison.[5]

Scholars have attributed the increased centralization of campaigns and the rising prominence of leaders to a decline in partisanship, advances in media (particularly television and the Internet), the rise of data-driven campaign techniques, and the use of professional consultants (Dalton, McAllister, & Wattenberg, 2000; Farrell & Webb, 2002; Lang & Lang, 2002; Swanson & Mancini, 1996). Although these factors help us to interpret change over time, they are less useful in explaining variation in campaigns across or within countries. In particular, because most of the work to date has been on advanced democracies, we know less about the factors driving locally or nationally oriented campaigns in emerging democracies. Below I discuss what we know on the impact of three key factors: electoral rules, political parties, and urban-rural distinctions.

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3 Increasingly, parties try to accommodate voter preferences in their policy appeals while remaining consistent with the party's platform (Farrell & Webb, 2000).

4 Centralizing personalization means that power flows up to a leader, whereas in the decentralizing variant, power flows down to individual politicians below the executive (Balmas, Rahat, Sheafer, & Shenhav, 2013).

5 Exceptions include Karvonen (2010) and Cross and Young (2015). For a review of literature on personalization in media coverage of elections, see van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stanyer, (2011).

## Explaining the Local and National Orientation of Campaigns

### Electoral Rules: Majoritarian versus Proportional

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in how electoral rules affect election campaigns. It has been theorized that intraparty competition is a key factor in making politics more local because it fosters candidate-centered campaigns at the constituency level (Carey & Shugart, 1995; Hicken, 2007; Katz, 1986). Intraparty competition occurs under various kinds of rules that force candidates to compete with copartisans. Open-list PR is the best known system that fosters intraparty competition and it is used in Brazil, Poland, and Indonesia.[6] Because candidates need to distinguish themselves from copartisans under this system, they are strongly motivated to promote their personal reputation, not just their party's affiliation and national policy platform. As a result, campaigns become more candidate-centric when intraparty competition increases and more party-centered and program-based when it is removed (Catalinac, 2016). Though while intraparty competition can contribute to localized election campaigns, it is not a necessary condition.

To some degree, almost all majoritarian campaigns are personalized because they highlight the candidate's individual role (Swanson & Mancini, 1996, p. 17). Under single-member plurality systems, citizens cast votes for an individual candidate, not a party; there are fewer candidates to choose from (compared to elections in multimember districts), and only one of them can win, becoming the constituency's sole representative. Because there is a clear line of local accountability and because voters have more knowledge of the candidates, candidates have incentives to promote their personal attributes and attend to local interests. Indeed, the ability to

6 Single-member plurality systems with primaries, the single nontransferable vote, the single transferable vote, and the block vote can also foster intraparty competition.

hold representatives personally accountable on local issues is a major advantage of majoritarian systems.

Compared to their counterparts in advanced democracies, constituency candidates in emerging democracies are even more likely to run localized, candidate-centric campaigns. Parties in emerging democracies are often weakly institutionalized. They usually lack deep organizational structures at the local level, have limited funds to support constituency-level campaigns, and have weak partisan support. As a result, the bulk of the responsibility to organize and finance campaigns, as well as to foster local support, falls on the candidate. Since they are relying predominantly on their own rather than on the party's resources, candidates have stronger incentives and more leeway to campaign on their local personal reputation (Carey & Shugart, 1995; Samuels, 1999).

In contrast, PR elections tend to incentivize national campaign strategies. In PR systems with multiseat districts, seats are awarded proportionally, so even parties with marginal support can pick up some seats. This opportunity encourages parties to broaden their campaigns beyond those areas where they have a reasonable chance of winning a plurality of votes. In party-list PR systems, the desire to campaign across large multiseat districts (rather than in single-member districts) fosters greater centralization in how parties organize campaigns (Bowler & Farrell, 1992; Katz, 1980; Plasser & Plasser, 2002). This higher degree of campaign centralization often gives the party leader greater control in organizing the campaign and makes the leader's image more central in it (Farrell & Webb, 2002).

The national orientation of campaigns is further enhanced when PR party-lists are closed instead of open. With closed-list PR, voters select a party rather than a candidate and there is no intraparty competition. In this way, the party becomes more salient to voters, and parties thus

have incentives to promote a party reputation, often through policy (Shugart & Wattenburg, 2003, p. 590). The size of the electoral district also matters. When compared to multiple regional districts, a single national district offers stronger incentives for parties to centralize and project a truly national orientation.

The combination of closed lists and a large electoral district also affects the campaign activities of individual party-list candidates, strongly encouraging them to campaign on the party's reputation. As the size of the district increases (either geographically or in terms of magnitude), candidates' incentive to promote a personal reputation declines. This is because the party-list candidate's individual campaign effort will have less impact on his or her probability of securing a seat (Carey & Shugart, 1995; Shugart, Valdini, & Suominen, 2005). Overall, under closed-list PR the fate of party-list candidates is tied to the electoral success of their party. This offers strong incentives for these candidates to work together on a unified party-centered campaign.

From this discussion, we can generally expect more local, candidate-centered campaigns when the electoral rules foster intraparty competition. However, even under majoritarian rules that lack intraparty competition, campaigns can be quite localized, particularly in emerging democracies with weakly institutionalized parties. In contrast, closed-list PR systems foster more centralization and nationalization of campaigns, particularly when the whole nation is the electoral constituency.

**Political Party Size**

An extensive literature on the development of parties in Western nations since the 19th century indicates a move from elite toward mass socialist, nationalist, and religious parties. Since

the 1960s, however, the social base of mass parties have been undermined by a decline in trade unions, and a rise in secularization. In addition, there is less need for a deep organizational party structure due to the introduction of television, which has made it much easier for party leaders to communicate directly with voters. These socioeconomic and technological changes have given rise to catch-all parties (Kirchheimer, 1966), and more recently to smaller niche parties or movements.[7] Large catch-all and small niche parties differ in how they appeal to voters, largely due to the size and composition of their support base.

Catch-all parties have a shallow organization, a lack of explicit ideology, a centrist orientation, and prominent leadership. For these parties, the goal is to win elections and govern, so they need to appeal to a larger, more diverse set of voters with a wide range of interests.[8] As a result, they favor broad policies and often take vague issue positions that can shift depending on public sentiment. The relative lack of an explicit ideology prompts voters to focus on the personal attributes of their candidates and leaders, resulting in a greater degree of personalization in their election campaigns (Gunther & Diamond, 2003).

In contrast to the mainstream catch-all parties, smaller niche parties like the Greens, Communists, and extreme right-wing nationalist parties have strong, clearly articulated policy objectives (D'Alimonte, 1999; Kitschelt, 1994). Potential voters for these small parties tend to be quite homogeneous and strongly policy-oriented, so small parties can be unambiguous and firm in their positions (Wagner, 2011). In fact, compromising on policy can be detrimental for these small parties, because it can cause internal divisions and cost them the support of activists who play vital roles in campaigning for the party (Adams, Clark, Ezrow, & Glasgow, 2006). The

7 See Gunther and Diamond (2003) for a typology of political parties.
8 Kirchheimer (1966) developed the catch-all party concept based on the evolution of centralized Western European socialist parties. Panebianco (1988) developed the broader concept of an "electoral-professional party."

impact of party size has been shown to have an effect on campaign appeals in empirical studies in the West. For example, Dumitrescu (2010) found that small parties focus their campaigns on informing voters about the party's core issue(s), whereas larger parties more heavily emphasize the image of their candidates or leaders.

Due to substantial differences in historical and socioeconomic factors, however, we cannot simply assume that party size will have the same effect in emerging democracies. In contrast to Western nations, these countries often have deeper ethnic cleavages, suffer from higher rates of poverty and illiteracy, and have yet to develop postmaterialistic values. Their political parties are also relatively new and did not experience the mass party era, which fostered partisanship. Instead, parties in these nations have generally grown out of traditional bonds and clientelistic networks, resulting in a prevalence of personalistic, ethnic, and catch-all parties throughout the developing world.

As in the West, the large parties are often catch-all (and multiethnic) in nature, promoting broad national policies and prominent leaders, but they also draw on patron–client networks. Regional parties are also common in emerging democracies. Somewhat smaller than the national parties, they are rooted in regional patron–client networks and regional ethnic identity groups. Their campaigns often focus on promises by local politicians to represent the interests of regional groups, mainly by increasing access to resources from the center. Finally, small parties rarely reflect the issue-oriented niche parties of the West. Instead, small parties largely serve as vehicles for local notables to get elected, and as a result, their campaigns tend to revolve around their personality.

### Urban–Rural Distinctions

The third and final factor considered in this study is region. Scholars have noted that more nationally and policy-oriented forms of politics tend to correspond with urbanization, whereas personalistic, candidate-centered political styles are more common in rural areas (Cheeseman & Paget, 2014; Cross & Young, 2015). This urban–rural distinction may reflect differences in forms of communication and social relations. In urban areas with transient populations, communication may be more impersonal than in rural areas, where local events and networks of families who have lived in the area for generations provide more opportunities for personalized communication and campaigning (Eder, Jenny, & Müller, 2015). If a rural–urban divide affects voter interests and styles of campaign-related communications and social relations, we can expect rural campaigns to be more candidate-centric and personalistic, with candidates exhibiting a down-to-earth, casual style. In contrast, we can expect urban campaigns to place more emphasis on national policies and parties, with candidates presenting themselves in a more formal, professional style.

## Campaigns in Thailand

Historically, politics in Thailand has been local. Constituency candidates and regional factions have dominated politics, and political parties have been small, weak, and nonideological (Chambers & Croissant, 2010; Hicken, 2009; Kuhona, 2015; McCargo, 1997; Ockey, 2004). Parties were banned in the country's first election in 1933, and not until the 1970s did party membership became mandatory for MPs. Thai parties formed around a single personality, small groups of party founders and financiers, or regional factions headed by provincial bosses. National mass parties, with elaborate organizational structures and connections to important

social groups, did not develop. As a result, Thailand has had a fragmented set of small, unstable parties. If a party was not dismantled by one of Thailand's many military coups, it frequently fell apart due to internal conflicts or the demise of the founding leader.

The weakness of parties and the relative strength of local candidates and factions were reflected in Thai campaigns. First, parties relied heavily on factions and candidates to mobilize their local, personal electoral networks (Ockey, 2003). Accordingly, campaigns were candidate-centric. Candidates' personal characteristics (looks, charm, education) and achievements (constituent service and political patronage) were of prime importance for electoral success (Callahan & McCargo, 1996, pp. 388–389; Siripan, 2006, pp. 124–129). Second, party labels held little value in determining vote choice, as demonstrated by the fact that candidates regularly switched parties before elections with minimal effect on their electability (Hicken, 2013, p. 200). Third, parties did not campaign based on ideology[9] or national policy platforms (Hicken, 2006, p. 389; Ockey, 2003, pp. 670–671). Parties had a good reason for their lack of substantive underpinnings; it helped them to hold factions together and positioned them to be able to join any type of coalition government.

Thailand's fragmented system of weak parties, with strong candidates and regional factions, was widely viewed as a major problem among academics, civil society activists, and the media. The system resulted in short-lived parties and unstable coalition governments. The Asian financial crisis gave reformers an opportunity to push through extensive changes as part of the adoption of Thailand's 1997 constitution, despite reservations by the major parties and factions. The reforms aimed to reduce the power of provincial politicians and factions and their corrupt practices, and to promote fewer, stronger, nationally oriented political parties with meaningful

9 Ockey (1994, p. 256) noted that left-oriented parties were active during brief periods in the 1950s and 1970s but were violently suppressed in coups.

labels. To strengthen parties, the new constitution replaced a block-vote system (with one to three seats per constituency) with 400 single-seat constituencies, added a second tier of 100 seats using proportional representation from closed national party lists, barred politicians from switching parties during the election period, and provided public funding for parties based on membership lists.[10]

Since the passing of the 1997 constitution, Thailand's political landscape has changed dramatically. New parties founded or supported by a wealthy business tycoon, Thaksin Shinawatra, won the 2001, 2005, 2007, and 2011 elections, based largely on strong support from the vote-rich rural north and northeast. It became increasingly difficult for other parties to survive. Only the Democrats, with strongholds in the south and among the middle class in Bangkok, could compete with Thaksin. The long-running domination of politics by Thaksin's parties also resulted in rising political tensions, the formation of popular protest movements (both in support of and against Thaksin), street demonstrations, and violence.

It has been well documented that the 1997 constitution resulted in fewer political parties,[11] but how have electoral campaigns changed? Some research has continued to focus on the local, personalistic nature of Thai campaigns and politics, emphasizing the enduring importance of regional factions, candidates, and personal networks (Chambers, 2008; Chambers & Croissant, 2010; Chattharakul, 2010). Meanwhile, other studies have emphasized the rising importance of national-level considerations. First, some works have noted the rising popularity, organizational skills, and personalistic approach of national leaders (Nishizaki, 2006; Phongpaichit & Baker, 2008). Second, research has suggested the increasing importance of party

10 For more detailed discussion on the goals and consequences of the 1997 constitution, see Hicken (2006, 2009, 2013), Kuhonta (2008), and Ockey (2003).
11 The effective number of parties nationally dropped from 7 in 1996 to 2.3 in 2005 (Hicken, 2013, pp. 202–203).

labels and national party platforms in campaigns (Hicken, 2013; Sinpeng & Kuhonta, 2012; Siripan, 2006). Thus, it now appears that both local and national levels are important in contemporary campaigns in Thailand, but no studies have systematically measured local and national campaign strategies and used them to test key driving factors.

**Local and National Campaign Strategies in Thailand**

This article examines Thailand's 2011 national legislative election campaign to understand the impact of electoral rules, the size of parties, and urban–rural differences. Thailand's mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) electoral system offers an ideal opportunity to understand how majoritarian and PR systems affect campaigns. In 2011, constituents had two votes—a constituency vote and a party-list vote. In the first vote, constituents voted for a single candidate to represent their constituency, and 375 MPs were elected using a majoritarian system, based on single-member districts and first-past-the-post. In the second vote, constituents chose a political party. From these votes, 125 seats were awarded to parties on a proportional basis. The seats were distributed to candidates from closed party lists based on a national constituency. The high ranking party-list seats were safe seats for parties who expected to do well. As a result, they were allocated to party leaders and their potential cabinet members.

For several reasons, the Thai case offers a uniquely suitable real-world setting in which to compare the impact of majoritarian and PR rules. First, it is a mixed system, so we can observe campaigns under majoritarian and PR rules in the same country at the same time. Second, compared to other mixed systems, the constituency and party-list PR elections in Thailand are quite separate; the party-list vote is not used to balance out any disproportionality in the allocation of constituency seats. Third, constituency candidates were banned from running

concurrently on the party list. Lacking a safe party-list seat to fall back on closely reflects the context faced by candidates in pure majoritarian systems. Thailand is one of the few mixed system in the world with all these features.[12]

Drawing on the broader literature, I expect that the majoritarian rules used to elect constituency MPs in Thailand should foster more local, candidate-centric campaign appeals. This is because majoritarian rules highlight the role of the candidate and offer a clear line of personal accountability. In the campaign to elect party-list MPs, I predict more national, party-centered campaign appeals, since proportional systems with closed lists and the presence of a large national constituency should produce centralized campaigns that appeal for votes broadly across the nation.

Forty parties competed in Thailand's 2011 election, and they can be categorized as large, medium-sized, or small. The differing characteristics of these three categories of parties resulted in differences in their national and local campaign strategies. The larger parties, Pheu Thai and the Democrats, were expected to do well in the constituency elections due to their majoritarian rules. However, these parties aimed to form a single-party or coalition government, so they needed to pursue wide support to maximize their tally of both constituency and party-list seats. As a result, they had a strong incentive to centralize their campaigns and promote broad national policies (like government services and infrastructure), their party label, and their leaders. Additionally, in their personal campaign efforts, candidates affiliated with large parties could advance their own electoral success by promoting their party affiliation.[13] A well-known party label can help candidates to distinguish themselves from minor-party candidates and thereby attract votes.

12 Ukraine, South Korea, and Taiwan are the other contemporary cases.
13 Party affiliation has been found to be an important tool for candidates and voters (Downs, 1957; Popkin, 1991).

Thailand's medium-sized parties, such as Bhumjaithai and Chart Pattana, were primarily regional in nature, composed of collections of individual politicians whose constituencies were strongly attracted to them personally. Their official (or de facto) leaders tended to be political dealmakers or provincial bosses for their constituency candidates, rather than inspirational party voices who could energize voters. Unappealing leadership has inhibited the development of strong party labels, as has the non-ideological nature of these parties, and the transactional way in which they operate—often selling themselves to the highest bidder in order to gain a place within a coalition government. For these reasons, I expect these parties to downplay the party label and its leadership when competing for constituency and party-list seats. If they play to their strengths, their campaigns should focus more on their candidates' images and on policy messages that resonate with the regions.

Compared to the larger parties, small parties lack both a strong party label and popular constituency candidates. As a result, they are not competitive in constituency elections. However, the party-list vote offers them an opportunity, since winning a sprinkling of party-list votes across the country can be enough to secure one or more party-list seats. Although this is generally true for small parties around the world, small parties in Thailand differ in other ways. Compared with their counterparts in the West, small Thai parties tend not to be founded by like-minded politicians and committed activists around particular issues neglected by mainstream parties. Rather, like Chuwit Kamolvisit's Rak Thailand, they are usually founded and bankrolled by opportunistic politicians with short-term goals of gaining a seat for the party leader and at most a few other seats in parliament. They often lack the expertise, interest, or time to formulate a policy platform or develop a party label. The one strength they can easily play on though, is

their leader's name recognition. As a result, these parties can be expected to focus on the party-list election and to campaign primarily on the leader's image.

In sum, I expect to find that large parties run national campaigns, prominently featuring their leaders, national policies, and the party label. Medium-sized parties can be expected to downplay the party and its leader, focusing instead on its candidates and policies relating to regions. Finally, small parties will focus largely on the party-list election with campaigns that revolve primarily around the image of the party leader.

There is also reason to believe that the local or national orientation of campaigns will vary by region in Thailand. Anek Laothamatas (1996) described Thailand as having two major categories of voters. Rural voters, he argued, are not influenced by policy appeals or the national interest; they vote for candidates who can bring jobs, money, and public works to their villages. On the other hand, middle-class Bangkok voters view patronage-style politicians as corrupt and are more interested in policies and issues. Similarly, other scholars have highlighted urban–rural differences in candidate leadership styles.[14] In inner-city urban areas, it is believed that voters prefer candidates who are sophisticated and refined; as a result, candidates present themselves as privileged elites—articulate, well-educated, and polite. In contrast, rural voters are viewed as admiring candidates who can appeal to the common man and local interests, so candidates seek to portray themselves as spirited, loyal, charming, and down-to-earth.

## Measuring Campaign Appeals from Election Posters

To study campaign strategies in Thailand's 2011 parliamentary election, I draw on an original collection of election posters and develop innovative methods to analyze their content.

14 Chattharakul (2010, p. 88) compared the more refined urban *phudi* style with the rural *nakleng* style.

Election posters can contain a wealth of both textual and visual information on parties, party leaders, candidates, favored policies, identity appeals, endorsements, and calls to action. The few existing systematic studies of election posters have found that they promote core campaign messages, raise the visibility and name recognition of leaders and candidates, and increase political participation (Dumitrescu, 2010, 2012; Kam & Zechmeister, 2013; Panagopoulos, 2009). Unfortunately, all these studies have drawn on limited sets of posters from advanced Western democracies. No large systematic research on poster campaigns has occurred in an emerging democracy where posters remain one of the dominant campaign tools for both large and small parties. Through my own observations I have found that Thai election posters are usually designed around candidates, leaders, and core campaign messages. A low cost medium, election posters blanket the country and create a carnival-like atmosphere during elections. Poster designs are also reprinted as press advertisements. Constituents, bloggers, and journalists regularly critique and comment on posters, while the poster messages can be heard repeatedly in the stump speeches of candidates and party leaders.

Beyond their importance in campaigns, posters are an ideal source of data for a study on the local and national orientation of campaigns. First, they contain local and/or national campaign appeal content that can be coded relatively easily—i.e., candidates' images and personal campaign appeals versus national policy appeals, party leaders, slogans, and labels. Second, posters can be compared across political parties, regions, and in the Thai case, even across electoral rule types. This is because some Thai posters were designed to appeal for party-list votes and others for constituency votes. Finally, election posters are a primary source, containing unmediated real-world appeals. They thus offer some methodological advantages over

post-election surveys that ask candidates about their campaign activities, because one cannot assume that the candidates will be fully transparent or even truthful in their responses.[15]

Posters were photographed in four main regions: Bangkok, the north, the northeast, and the south. These regions were selected because they varied in their level of support for the different political parties and provided reasonable coverage of both urban and rural constituencies.[16] Photographing took place during the last three weeks of Thailand's 2011 election. Using various forms of transportation, I randomly crisscrossed the four regions and individually photographed and geocoded every poster I saw on the street. By doing so, I created a dataset of 12,114 posters from 34 constituencies—4 in Bangkok and 10 each in the north, northeast, and south.[17] Most constituency candidates and parties each produced a number of posters with different designs and campaign messages. Each poster was then reprinted and posted in multiple localities. As a result, I often photographed the same poster in different locations. For coding purposes, I selected one image of each uniquely designed poster, resulting in a dataset of 588 nonduplicated poster images.

Relying on a codebook, four coders identified textual and visual elements in the posters that related to candidates, leaders, policies, party labels, and slogans.[18] Using specialized software, coders precisely traced around the outline of these elements and coded them (see

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15 Candidate surveys are a common approach in research on candidates' campaigns. For example see Karlsen & Skogerbø (2015) and Zittel & Gschwend (2008).

16 Beyond the technical difficulties involved in creating a random sampling strategy for posters that can be displayed on any road across the country, the limited time frame of the campaign and the travel time required made collecting a truly random sample infeasible.

17 The regions, provinces, and number of constituencies were as follows: Central Bangkok 4; north: Chiang Mai 4, Chiang Rai 3, Nakhon Sawan 1, Phitsanulok 2; northeast: Loei 4, Nong Bua Lamphu 3, Udon Thani 3; south: Pattani 4, Songkhla 4, Yala 2.

18 After I developed the codebook, it was tested and refined by coders before coding began. Poster content that could not be clearly defined as having a local or national orientation—for example, calls to action and educational messages on the voting procedure—was not coded. The detailed codebook is available on my website.

Figure 1). The type of clothing worn by politicians was also coded. For reliability, the traced selections were checked by another coder for errors, and all policy statements were coded by two different persons.[19] Any inconsistencies in the coding were discussed among the group to reach agreement on the correct code.

<Insert Fig 1 about here>

**Figure 1.** Samples of campaign posters with elements outlined.

For the main analysis, the prominence of local politics in campaigns was measured by the extent to which candidates were featured in the posters. Specifically, I calculated the percentage of poster space occupied by visual images and personal references to candidates. Personal references included any titles, references to candidate traits and attributes, and personal messages relating to the local constituency or on what the candidate had personally done or would do in the future. I termed this category of information *candidate image*.

To capture the relevance of national politics in campaigns, I measured the prominence of leaders, policies, slogans, and party labels. First, I defined *leader image* as the percentage of poster space occupied by images of and personal references to party leaders. The second measure was *policy*, defined as the percentage of space dedicated to policy-relevant messages and related images. Each policy-relevant message or image was coded according to one specific policy category, such as transportation, jobs, or farming. For a message to be coded as policy, it needed to have some level of specificity. The third measure of national politics was the percentage of space taken up by *slogans*. Slogans differ from policies in that they are not easily classified

19 Interreliability tests showed a high degree of agreement: Percentage of agreement, 0.95; Scott's PI, 0.9; Cohen's kappa 0.9; and Krippendorff's alpha, 0.9. Slogans were coded by the author and a research assistant during a second round of coding.

according to particular policy categories. Nevertheless, they can be considered part of national politics because they represent broad statements on the party's larger goals (e.g., change, continued progress, or peace and prosperity) and were printed on numerous posters across the country. Two separate approaches were used for the final measure, *party label*. First, I measured the space on posters dedicated to the party logo and any mentions of the party name; second, I coded whether candidates and leaders wore party clothing, as identified by the party's colors or logo.

This completed the coding process for the 588 nonduplicated poster images. I then assigned the measures from each of these posters to all other posters with the same design, regardless of the location in which they were photographed. This resulted in a final dataset of 12,114 fully coded posters.

For the statistical analysis, I analyzed poster campaigns rather than individual posters. There are two types of poster campaigns—those by constituency candidates seeking single-member plurality (SMP) votes and those by political parties seeking PR votes. For both categories, I engaged in some aggregation to create the final dependent variables. In the case of a constituency candidate, I took all of his or her constituency posters (including reprints posted in different locations) and averaged the percentage of space dedicated to each poster element (candidate image, leader image, policy, slogan, and party-label). In this way, I obtained measures of poster campaigns for 141 constituency candidates. In the case of political parties, I calculated the average space of poster elements from all their party-list posters in each particular constituency. This gave me multiple campaign measures across the country for each party. For example, for Pheu Thai I obtained 30 sets of measures for leader image, one for each of the 30

constituencies where they displayed party-list posters. In all, I collected 240 distinct observations of party campaigns across different electoral districts.[20]

Using poster campaigns as the unit of analysis has a number of advantages. First, it fits with the logic of the argument, which focuses on how, as a whole, candidates or parties campaign. Second, it helps to reduce potential bias resulting from the fact that certain candidates or parties may have very large numbers of posters in the dataset. Each candidate or party with posters in a given district was weighted equally. Third, this method allows for particular posters that were posted in many locations across a constituency by a candidate (or party) to be more heavily weighted in the candidate's (or party's) campaign measures. Because it is reasonable to infer that the messages on these posters were considered particularly important, giving them greater weight helps to improve the meaningfulness of the campaign measures. Finally, this method enables us to test whether the party campaigns vary across the country by creating multiple district-level measures for each party-list campaign.

To analyze the impact of electoral rules, I compared the constituency and party campaigns. For the statistical analysis, I created an *election* variable, which was equal to 1 for party campaigns (PR rules) and 0 for constituency campaigns (SMP rules). To examine the influence of political parties, I compared campaigns across large, medium-sized, and small parties. The size of a party was based on the number of constituencies in which each party ran a candidate. *Large parties* put forward candidates in all 375 constituencies, *medium-sized parties* competed in at least 40% (150) of the constituencies, and *small parties* competed in fewer than 40%. This measure is a reasonable indicator of the size of a party's organization and campaign

20 Posters that had the name of a constituency candidate and appeared only in the candidate's constituency were defined as constituency posters. Posters that appeared in more than one constituency were defined as party-list posters. See the appendix for a summary of the number of constituency and party-list posters by party.

capacity. Although the 40% threshold was somewhat arbitrary, it appeared to capture the generally recognized distinctions between party sizes. Pheu Thai and the Democrats were the two large parties; Bhumjaithai, Chart Pattana Puea Pandin, Chart Thai Pattana, and the New Aspiration party qualified as medium-sized parties, with the remainder, including Rak Thailand, Social Action, Matubhum, and Rak Santi among others, being classified as small. Overall, 40% of the posters from the total dataset were produced by large parties, 32% by medium-sized parties, and 28% by small parties. Alternative measures of party size based on the number of party members, the size of campaign budgets, or past electoral performance were either infeasible or inferior.[21] Finally, to study any regional effects, campaigns were coded according to where they occurred, i.e.,, in the *north, northeast, south,* or *Bangkok*.

## Findings

For the statistical analysis, I first performed regressions on each of the five dependent variables (candidate image, leader image, policy, and party label) on all campaigns. I then segmented the data and ran regressions on constituency campaigns and party-list campaigns. All regressions used ordinary least squares (OLS) with robust standard errors (Table 1). A number of alternative models and robustness checks were performed, and their results aligned with the statistical findings presented below.[22]

21 Party membership is small, and members usually are not required to pay dues or engage in party activities (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2008, p. 76). Official party budgets vastly underestimate the real costs of campaigns. Finally, splitting, merging, and reformulation of Thai parties is routine, confounding any effort to measure the size of parties from previous election results.

22 To ensure that the results were not driven by any particular party's campaign, the regressions in Table 1 were re-run multiple times. Each time, I dropped one party from the dataset to see if the results held up. This process was repeated for each of the most prominent large, medium-sized, and small parties in the dataset. The regressions were also run using the poster as the unit of analysis—both the full set of 12,114 posters and the unique set of 588 distinct posters. In all these alternative models, the key variables reflected the findings in the main regression table, in terms of both statistical significance and coefficient size. See the appendix for the full results and

## Electoral Rules

**Majoritarian rules and local campaigns.** In view of the electoral rules, I first expected that majoritarian rules would foster local and candidate-centered campaign appeals more strongly than PR rules. The statistical findings from the poster campaigns supported this hypothesis. Party-list poster campaigns had 29% less space dedicated to the candidate image than constituency posters. Virtually all constituency posters in the dataset featured a large image of the local constituency candidate, and many included messages referencing the candidate and his or her constituency. Popular messages included being female, honest, hardworking, caring, and a native of the constituency.

In many posters, party leaders were featured in a box above the candidate or in photographs with the candidate. They largely played a supporting role in the posters, helping candidates to gather votes from middle-class voters who based their evaluations on national platforms and leaders rather than on the merits of constituency candidates (Chattharakul, 2010). Constituency posters usually included a general party slogan, but they rarely promoted their party's policies. In addition, the prominence of the party label was somewhat smaller than on party-list posters. In sum, the constituency posters promoted the local candidate's image, personal messages, and affiliation with party leaders.

**PR rules and national campaigns.** In contrast, I expected that the PR rules would foster national and party-centered campaign appeals. Statistical evidence showed that, on these posters, more space was dedicated to the leader image, policy, slogans, and party label (Table 1). The appearance of candidates on party-list posters was far more limited than on constituency posters. Importantly, those list candidates who did appear on posters were often well-known individuals

summary statistics.

who could draw broad support based on their personal image: high-profile party members, contenders for ministerial posts, celebrities, and sports stars. For example, Chart Pattana Puea Pandin featured soccer stars and Olympic medalists who were among their party-list candidates. This observation offers a twist on theoretical expectations. In closed-list PR systems with a large constituency, list candidates have very strong incentives to campaign on a party reputation rather than their personal reputation (Carey & Shugart, 1995). However, findings from the posters indicate that parties actually recruited specific party-list candidates and promoted their *personal reputation* (i.e., their celebrity status) to foster national party support.

Compared to the constituency posters, leader images were more common and often much larger on party-list posters. Many party-list posters were designed to exclusively feature and promote the party leader, often with an enlarged photo, some reference to the leader's experience, and a call to vote for the leader as the next prime minister. Party-list posters also frequently promoted policy messages, often with policy statements filling the whole poster. These brief policy messages served to reinforce the more detailed versions distributed through the media, television, and campaign speeches. Posters also used images to reinforce policy messages. These images included inanimate objects (e.g., trains, roads, car keys, and automatic teller machines) as well as the groups of people at whom the policies were aimed, such as farmers, students, civil service workers, construction workers, the elderly, and local merchants. See Figure 1 (center and right) for two examples. Slogans and the party label were also more prominent on the party-list posters as expected, but only marginally so.

In line with these findings, other scholars have observed how Thai campaigns have become increasingly centralized around national party leaders in recent years. Leaders are playing larger and more crucial roles in candidate selection, party communications, strategy,

finance, and policy formulation (Chambers & Croissant, 2010; Siripan, 2006, pp. 121–145). Other scholars have observed the prominent use of policy in the 2011 Thai election and, more broadly, a rise in party-centered campaigns since 2001. Recent Thai campaigns have incorporated more detailed and elaborate national programmatic policy platforms, and some researchers have noted their particular importance for the party-list vote (Chattharakul, 2010, p. 70; Hicken, 2006, pp. 15–16; Phongpaichit & Baker, 2008, p. 67; Sinpeng & Kuhonta, 2012, pp. 393–395). Although these insights are reflected in the poster campaigns, the systematic comparison of constituency and party-list poster campaigns offers the clearest and most concrete evidence that the national orientation of campaigns is largely driven by the electoral rules—specifically, the use of closed-list PR with a national constituency. Meanwhile, majoritarian rules have continued to foster a more local orientation, with campaigns focusing on the image and personal messages of local constituency candidates.

## Political Parties

In addition to the electoral rules, political party size also played an important role in shaping campaigns. The number of posters posted during the election indicates that, as expected, the smaller parties focused primarily on the PR elections. Among small parties' posters in the full dataset, 78% were designed to appeal for party-list votes, compared to 60% for medium-sized and 40% for large parties. Moreover, the strongest party, Pheu Thai, had the lowest proportion of party-list posters (34%), followed by the Democrats with 46%. In sum, as the size of Thai parties declined, campaign activity shifted toward appealing for the party-list vote.

**Candidate and leader images.** In comparing the use of politician images across parties, I expected that small parties would dedicate the most space to their leader's image whereas

medium-sized parties would dedicate the least amount. The statistical results supported these expectations. Medium-sized parties dedicated little space to leaders in both their constituency and party-list posters. Meanwhile, large and small parties emphasized their leaders to a similar extent in constituency posters, but in party-list posters, leaders of small parties were significantly more prominent.

The Rak Thailand Party is one example of a small party that campaigned for the party-list vote based on the image of its leader and founder, Chuwit Kamolvisit. A colorful character and massage parlor owner, Chuwit focused on promoting his personal image, hoping to win election by picking up a sprinkling of party-list votes across the country. He appealed to people disillusioned with politics by presenting himself as an angry man with a single mission: to scrutinize government. He filled his posters with his image, overlaid with humorous messages criticizing Thai politicians as dishonest and corrupt. Beyond that agenda, he had no policy platform. In mobilizing voters, he downplayed the party name, opting instead for “Vote for Chuwit” and displaying the party number prominently. Chuwit was not alone in this approach; other minor notables with sufficient resources to sponsor a national campaign centered on their own image took advantage of the party-list PR system and used small parties as their personal election machines.

Medium-sized parties severely downplayed their leaders in posters. These leaders tended to be unpopular or relatively unknown and often served as proxies for banned politicians who continued to control the party from behind the scenes. In the absence of popular well-known leaders to give a face to the party, they recruited celebrities and sports stars for their party list and used those widely recognized figures’ images to promote the party. Contrary to expectations, however, the images of their constituency candidates, while more prominent than those of large-

party candidates, did not differ significantly in size compared to those of small-party candidates. Finally, the images of candidates from the large parties were the least prominent. As argued, this is because these parties and their candidates had strong incentives to promote a greater focus on the national party and its more national party-centered elements—specifically their leaders and policies.[23]

**Policies and slogans.** Whereas small parties focused most heavily on leader image, I expected the larger parties to emphasize policy. The statistical findings supported this prediction as well. Again, the trend was strongest for the party-list vote, where medium-sized and large parties dedicated 17% and 21% more space, respectively, to policy when compared to the small parties.

In terms of the types of policies promoted, scholars have observed how Thai parties have gotten on the bandwagon of Thaksin-inspired populist policies in recent years (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2013; Sinpeng & Kuhonta, 2012, Siripan, 2006). Unfortunately, little systematic research has been done on how Thai policy platforms vary. Figure 2 shows the average percentage of space devoted to different policies across parties in the party-list posters. Even though the Democrats had criticized Thaksin's pro-poor policies as populist in previous election campaigns, the policies that they presented in 2011 were remarkably similar to those of Pheu Thai. Both parties largely focused on public goods, such as government services and infrastructure, as well as on employment and farming. The policy proposals promoted by medium-sized parties also

23 This was in spite of the fact that some context- and party-specific factors may have muted the presence of party leaders in the posters. Yingluck was selected very late in the campaign as Pheu Thai's leader; although she was a likable figure and not tainted with corruption, she was still a novice in politics and her appeal was untested (Thalang, 2011, p. 635). With regard to Abhisit, Democrat leaders tend to be less powerful and entrenched than other Thai party leaders, because the Democrats have a formalized process of selecting and replacing leaders and make their selections based on personality and leadership qualities, not wealth (Chambers & Croissant, 2010).

included plans to increase employment, but they differed by stressing primarily access to consumer goods and increasing regional revenues. These differences indicate that in terms of types of policy, large parties were more nationally oriented whereas medium-sized parties were more regionally oriented. Since the medium-sized parties had regional strongholds, these approaches make strategic sense.

<Insert Fig 2 about here>

**Figure 2.** Policies promoted on the party-list posters by party size. Posters from large parties = 1,963, from medium-sized parties = 2,565, and from small parties = 2,623. Total N = 7,151.

Although the size of the slogans varied only slightly across parties, the actual content of the slogans was more interesting. Slogans from the large parties often emphasized the importance of policy and service—for example, “Proceed with policies for the future” (Democrats) and “We are ready to serve the people” (Pheu Thai). In contrast, many of the other parties used their slogans to more directly confront the deeply divisive nature of Thai politics, casting themselves as honest and fair brokers who would facilitate compromise and an end to the bitter rivalries.[24]

**Party label.** Contrary to my expectations, the statistical analysis showed that large parties promoted their party label less than small parties. The difference was statistically significant though relatively small, at only 2%. However, this measurement was based on the space devoted to the party’s logo or name. Arguably, a more meaningful way to investigate the importance of the party label would be to consider whether candidates and leaders wore recognizable party

24 Examples include: “We do what we say, brave to do it for Thais” (Bhumjaithai); “The middle way is Thai's alternative way” (Rak Santi); “Move forward and proceed without blood and violence.” (Social Action); and “Compromise. Reduce conflict.” (Chart Thai Pattana).

clothing (distinguished by the party's color and/or logo) in the posters. Figure 3 shows the percentage of posters in which politicians wore party clothing for each party size. Party clothing was most prevalent among constituency candidates from the large parties. Almost 80% of Democrat and Pheu Thai constituency candidates wore party clothing, compared to 20% of medium-sized party candidates and almost no candidates from the small parties. In addition, the two leaders of the large parties, Yingluck and Abhisit, were more likely to wear party clothing than other party leaders. Overall, candidates and leaders from large parties promoted the party label while the other parties downplayed it.

<Insert Fig 3 about here>

**Figure 3.** Percentage of posters with politicians wearing party clothing. Posters from large parties = 4,869, from medium-sized parties = 3,884, and from small parties = 3,361. Total N = 12,114.

**Elitist or casual style.** Although I had no theoretical expectations in this regard, the analysis of the posters revealed some substantial variation across parties in terms of politicians' choice of casual or formal clothing. Figure 4 shows the percentage of posters with various types of clothing worn by constituency candidates across parties. Candidates from small and medium-sized parties favored government uniforms and formal business suits,[25] by which they projected an elitist image of authority, power, status, and wealth.[26] In contrast, most candidates from the

25 Some candidates in the south also chose Islamic clothing to appeal to the predominantly Muslim electorate.

26 Government uniforms signify status and indicate access to resources. Also, in recent years, the image of a business entrepreneur has shifted from one of low status to signifying high status (Ockey, 1992).

large parties (who would win the vast majority of the seats) wore casual or semi-casual clothing, projecting an image as easy-going and down-to-earth.

<Insert Fig 4 about here>

**Figure 4.** Type of clothing worn by constituency candidates by party size. There were 4,919 constituency posters with images of constituency candidates—2,926 from large parties, 1255 from medium-sized parties, and 738 from small parties. 64 constituency posters had no constituency candidate image. The semi-casual category included candidates wearing a casual jacket and a tie. "Casual" included candidates wearing casual sporting clothing, or a shirt with or without a casual jacket but no tie.

Variation in clothing among party leaders was more leader-specific. In most of the posters, Yingluck wore a formal suit. New to politics, she presented a credible image that aligned with her professional business background.[27] However, her Democrat opponent, Abhisit, largely presented himself as a down-to-earth leader, engaged with regular Thai voters. In half of the posters in which Abhisit appeared, he was dressed casually. Numerous posters featured him in an open shirt, conversing and joking with farmers in the fields, workers on construction sites, or gatherings of students. (For an example, see Figure 1, center.) This was clearly an effort to soften his elitist public persona and craft a more friendly, humble image.[28] Abhisit was not alone in this

27 A prominent marketing expert, Songsak Premsuk, was called on to craft Yingluck's public image, particularly in campaign advertisements. For a review of reports on Yingluck's campaign see Bangkok Pundit (2011).

28 The posters complemented Abhisit's campaign activities during visits to the north and northeast, where he stayed in a temple, assisted a revered monk, and chatted with villagers.

strategy; many leaders from the small parties also presented themselves as down-to-earth leaders through their casual clothing.

The perceived value of a common-person style of campaigning is a relatively recent phenomenon in Thai politics. It represents a shift away from an elitist campaign style and is closely associated with Thaksin's populist turn since his initial success in the 2001 election. In analyzing that election, Ockey (n.d.) found that candidates primarily demonstrated their authority and high status on their election posters; the entrepreneur's business suit was a very common type of clothing, and images of candidates serving constituents were very rare. In their study of the same election, Phongpaichit and Baker (2008) noted the formal way in which Thaksin presented himself to the public, dressed in a business suit and peppering his speech with English words. Following this electoral success, Thaksin changed to a more informal man-of-the-people style, using colloquial language in his speeches and dressing in an open shirt rather than a suit. Case study evidence also indicates that more candidates have adopted a down-to-earth, easygoing, casual style in recent elections (Chattharakul, 2010, pp. 87–89). Although this shift is partly due to Thaksin's populism, the professionalization of campaigns, and marketing efforts to connect with constituents, it also reflects broader socioeconomic changes and the breakdown of traditional hierarchies and forms of authority.[29]

In conclusion, both the statistical analysis and a qualitative examination of the posters indicate that party size affects how Thai parties campaign. Large parties' campaigns were centralized, party-centered, and nationally oriented, actively seeking both party-list and constituency votes. Large parties campaigned on national policies and on the image of their leader, whereas their constituency candidates drew most heavily on the party's label while

29 See Walker (2012) on rural socioeconomic changes and Hewson (2013) on challenges to hierarchical institutions.

campaigning in a casual easy-going style. The content of medium-sized party campaigns placed little emphasis on the party label or leader. These parties promoted the celebrity image of their party-list candidates and policies that would benefit regional constituencies. Their constituency candidates drew on their status as local government officials or business entrepreneurs. Finally, the campaigns of small parties were centered on the personalistic image of the party leader and primarily sought party-list votes. They offered virtually no policies, and the few constituency candidates whom they put forward presented themselves as independent business entrepreneurs.

**Region**

Finally, I turn to the rural–urban distinction. Based on prior literature, I expected rural campaigns to be more candidate-centric and personalistic while urban campaigns focused more extensively on national policies and parties. Findings from the statistical analysis shown in Table 1 offer no support for this prediction. Overall, the amount of space dedicated to candidates, leaders, policy, and party labels showed no consistent urban–rural differences. However, there was some support for the second expectation, namely, that rural candidates would exhibit a down-to-earth casual style while candidates in the urban area of Bangkok would present themselves in a more formal style. Figure 5 shows the percentage of constituency candidates wearing different types of clothing in urban and rural constituencies. The main difference was that Bangkok candidates preferred to present themselves in formal suits whereas rural candidates from the north, northeast, and south preferred more informal dress.[30] The use of casual clothing

30 There was not much regional variation in leaders' clothing. In all the posters gathered in Bangkok, Yingluck wore a business suit, but she was less formally dressed in some posters in the north and northeast. Abhisit was just as likely to wear a suit or casual clothing in posters in either Bangkok or the peripheries.

in rural regions reflects a higher degree of personalism relative to the high-status orientation of formal clothing in Bangkok.

<Insert Fig 5 about here>

**Figure 5.** Type of clothing worn by constituency candidates in urban and rural regions. 3,989 posters were from the three rural regions (north, northeast, south) and 930 were from Bangkok. Total N = 4,919.

Despite this difference, the evidence overall suggests that regional differences have less of an impact on Thai campaigns then do electoral rules and the size of political parties. The lack of regional difference might be explained by other factors that have undermined urban–rural distinctions in recent years: the increasing centralization of election campaigns, the spread of Internet communications across the country, and the fact that many rural Thais migrate to Bangkok to work for part of the year but still vote in their rural province.[31]

## Conclusions

Pheu Thai won the election convincingly with 265 (53%) of the 500 seats,[32] and Yingluck went on to become Thailand's first female prime minister. The Democrat Party won a disappointing 159 seats and became the main opposition party. The medium-sized parties fared

31 Thabchumpon and McCargo (2011, p. 1002) found that the majority of members of the Bangkokian pro-Thaksin redshirt movement were migrants who lived most of the year in Bangkok but voted in their home provinces.
32 Compared to the 2007 election results, Pheu Thai made gains of between 6% and 10% in the party-list vote in all regions except the south, where their vote totals remained the same. In the constituency elections, Pheu Thai improved by 5% and the Democrats improved by 1.5%.

worse than expected,[33] underperforming in constituency elections in their regional strongholds and not doing much better in the party-list PR election. Voters looked primarily to the large national parties in the party-list vote, and most also voted for the national party's constituency candidate. The lack of vote splitting compared to previous elections indicates that national party labels, platforms, and viable leaders are increasingly aiding the electoral success of major-party constituency candidates. For the small parties, the tactic of largely focusing on the party-list PR election proved relatively successful. Chuwit Kamolvisit, who pursued this strategy with rigor, shocked many (including himself) by winning four party-list seats. Several other small parties picked up one party-list seat each but no constituency seats.[34]

This article has important implications for both theory and elections in emerging democracies. First, it presents evidence that aligns with theoretical expectations on the divergent effects of electoral rules on campaigns. Majoritarian rules fostered campaigns that promoted the image of local candidates, whereas closed-list PR rules encouraged centralized and nationalized campaigns around party labels, policies, and leaders. These findings can inform approaches to either strengthening local representation and accountability or fostering more national and programmatic representation. The mixture of campaign styles observed in the 2011 election illustrates that Thailand's mixed system provided incentives for candidates and parties to appeal to both local interests and national priorities.[35]

Second, the evidence shows that large parties and their candidates are campaigning nationally, centralizing their campaigns around their party label and national policies and pursuing both constituency and party-list votes. The rise of two large parties that campaign on

33 Bhumjaithai placed third with 34 seats; Chart Thai Pattana won 19 seats and Chart Pattana Puea Pandin won 7.
34 Matubhum was an exception, winning one constituency seat in Pattani.
35 Shugart and Wattenburg (2003) argued that mixed systems were growing in popularity, in part because they offered the best of both worlds in this way.

national platforms has fostered partisan identities, reduced vote splitting, and resulted in higher margins of victories in most electoral constituencies (Hicken, 2013; Phongpaichit & Baker, 2013, pp. 607–608). This national orientation has had some positive implications for the conduct of elections. The decline in the number of close races has diminished the utility of vote buying[36] and electoral violence. Accordingly, Kongkirati (2014) observed fewer incidences of violence in recent elections.

Although we might expect these large national parties to institutionalize and begin to look more like the mass parties of the West, with extensive internal organizations, this does not appear to be the case. Serious efforts to develop party structures or local branches or to broaden the base of committed party members have been lacking (Croissant & Chambers, 2010; Siripan, 2006). Instead, Pheu Thai and the Democrats have become what we could call electoral parties.[37] They employ public relations agencies and consultants, use modern marketing techniques to identify constituents' demands and opinions, and promote policy platforms and the image of the party leader through the media.[38] Professionalization has enabled these parties to maintain a centralized, top-down organizational approach and largely avoid participatory involvement by ordinary supporters while still establishing a solid social base and partisan support (Hicken, 2013; Hicken & Selway, 2013). In this way, Thailand's national parties have drawn on professional campaign techniques to leapfrog the mass party stage that has characterized party development in the West. This observation fits with other research indicating that parties do not

36 Vote buying is largely a personal method of vote gathering, especially prevalent in candidate-centered electoral systems (Hicken, 2007, p. 50). As Thai elections have become more party-centered, this tactic has become less useful.

37 McCargo (1996) and more recently Croissant and Chambers (2010) drew on Panebianco (1988) to describe the major Thai parties as "electoral-professional" or simply "electoral" parties.

38 These techniques are consistent with global trends in modern professional campaigning (Farrell & Webb, 2002; Mancini & Swanson, 1996).

always evolve through similar stages but, rather, are products of their unique social, political, and technological circumstances (Bartolini & Mair, 2001).

The third main finding concerns the behavior of small parties. Although Thailand's party system has increasingly moved toward a two-party system, small parties can still compete with some success in the party-list PR election. Some of them did so in 2011 by centralizing their campaign around the personalistic image of their leader. This strategy contrasts starkly with that of small parties in the West (particularly Europe), which often emphasize strongly held positions on particular policies or issues in their campaigns. The personalistic nature of small parties has important implications for emerging democracies like Thailand. Whereas policy-oriented small parties in the West can engender a more inclusive democracy by offering alternative views and promoting issues ignored by mainstream parties, these benefits are lost when small parties become merely personal vehicles for opportunistic political leaders.

Finally, Thai politics rarely stands still. Political disputes, the issue of amnesty for Thaksin, and his potential return to Thailand resulted in yet another military coup in 2014. After being removed from office, Yingluck and other members of her government faced criminal charges relating to a failed rice subsidy scheme. Expecting to receive a jail sentence, Yingluck fled Thailand before her verdict was announced. In preparation for new elections, Thailand's military government forced through a new constitution without any public debate. The changes give the military the power to shape any new government, weaken political parties, and undermine their incentives to pursue national policy development. The new elections, currently scheduled for 2018, will reveal the impact of this political restructuring on campaigns in Thailand.

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**Table 1.** The Impact of Rules, Parties, and Region on Local and National Campaign Appeals in Poster Campaigns

| | All campaigns (SMP and PR rules) | | | | | Constituency campaigns only (SMP rules) | | | | | Party-list campaigns only (PR rules) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Candidate image | Leader image | Policy | Slogan | Party Label | Candidate image | Leader image | Policy | Slogan | Party Label | Candidate image | Leader image | Policy | Slogan | Party Label |
| Election (PR = 1) | -0.29** | 0.08** | 0.17** | 0.02** | 0.01* | | | | | | | | | | |
| | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | 0.00 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Large party | -0.05** | -0.14** | 0.14** | -0.01 | -0.02** | -0.08** | -0.02 | 0.00 | 0.02* | -0.03** | -0.05** | -0.20** | 0.21** | -0.03** | -0.02** |
| | (0.01) | (0.02) | (0.01) | (0.01) | 0.00 | (0.03) | (0.02) | 0.00 | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.01) | 0.00 |
| Medium party | 0.03^ | -0.25** | 0.14** | -0.02* | -0.01* | -0.04 | -0.11** | 0.03** | -0.01 | -0.02** | 0.07** | -0.31** | 0.17** | -0.02^ | 0.00 |
| | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.01) | 0.00 | (0.04) | (0.02) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.01) | 0.00 |
| North | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.02 | 0.00 | -0.01* | -0.05 | -0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | -0.02* | 0.05* | 0.00 | 0.04^ | -0.01 | 0.00 |
| | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.01) | 0.00 | (0.04) | (0.02) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.02) | (0.03) | (0.02) | (0.01) | 0.00 |
| Northeast | -0.02 | 0.01 | 0.03* | 0.01 | -0.01^ | -0.02 | 0.01 | 0.01* | 0.02* | 0.00 | -0.02 | -0.01 | 0.06* | 0.00 | -0.01 |
| | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.01) | 0.00 | (0.03) | (0.02) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.02) | (0.03) | (0.03) | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| South | 0.04* | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.02^ | -0.01** | 0.03 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.02^ | -0.01 | 0.05** | -0.01 | 0.00 | 0.02 | -0.02** |
| | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.01) | (0.01) | 0.00 | (0.03) | (0.02) | 0.00 | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.02) | (0.03) | (0.02) | (0.01) | 0.00 |
| Intercept | 0.36** | 0.21** | -0.10** | 0.06** | 0.09** | 0.41** | 0.12** | 0.00 | 0.04** | 0.09** | 0.04** | 0.33** | 0.02 | 0.09** | 0.09** |
| | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.01) | 0.00 | (0.03) | (0.02) | 0.00 | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.02) | (0.01) | (0.01) | 0.00 |
| N | 381 | 381 | 381 | 381 | 381 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 240 | 240 | 240 | 240 | 240 |
| R Squared | 0.55 | 0.42 | 0.43 | 0.05 | 0.19 | 0.10 | 0.33 | 0.19 | 0.12 | 0.23 | 0.16 | 0.43 | 0.40 | 0.05 | 0.17 |

*Note*: SMP = single-member plurality; PR = proportional representation. Results of regression analyses for independent variables (rows) and dependent variables (columns). Entries are coefficients from the OLS regression model. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.
^$p < 0.10$ ; *$p < 0.05$ ; **$p < 0.01$.




**Figure 1.** Samples of campaign posters with elements outlined.

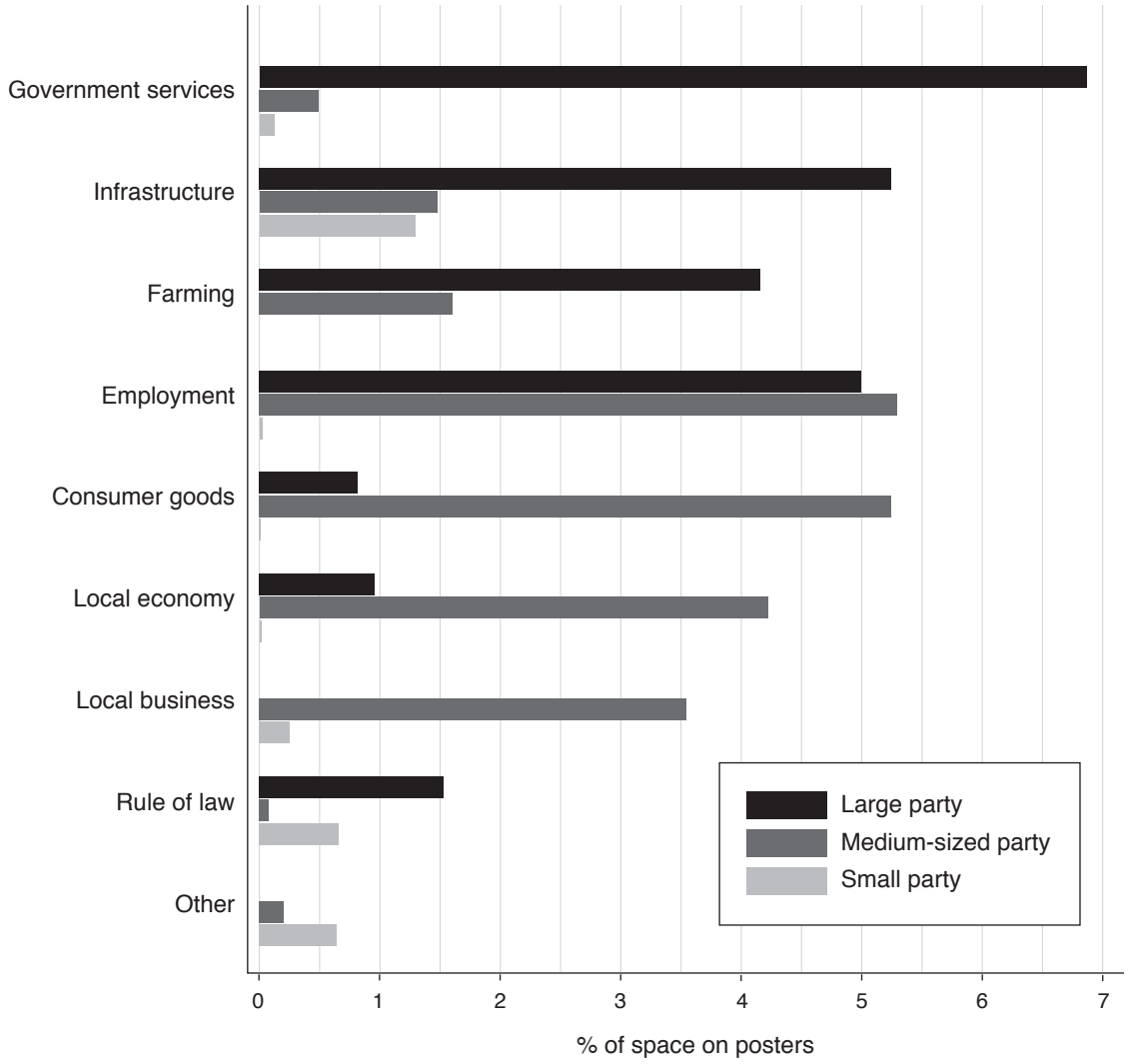



**Figure 2.** Policies promoted on the party-list posters by party size. Posters from large parties = 1,963, from medium-sized parties = 2,565, and from small parties = 2,623. Total N = 7,151.

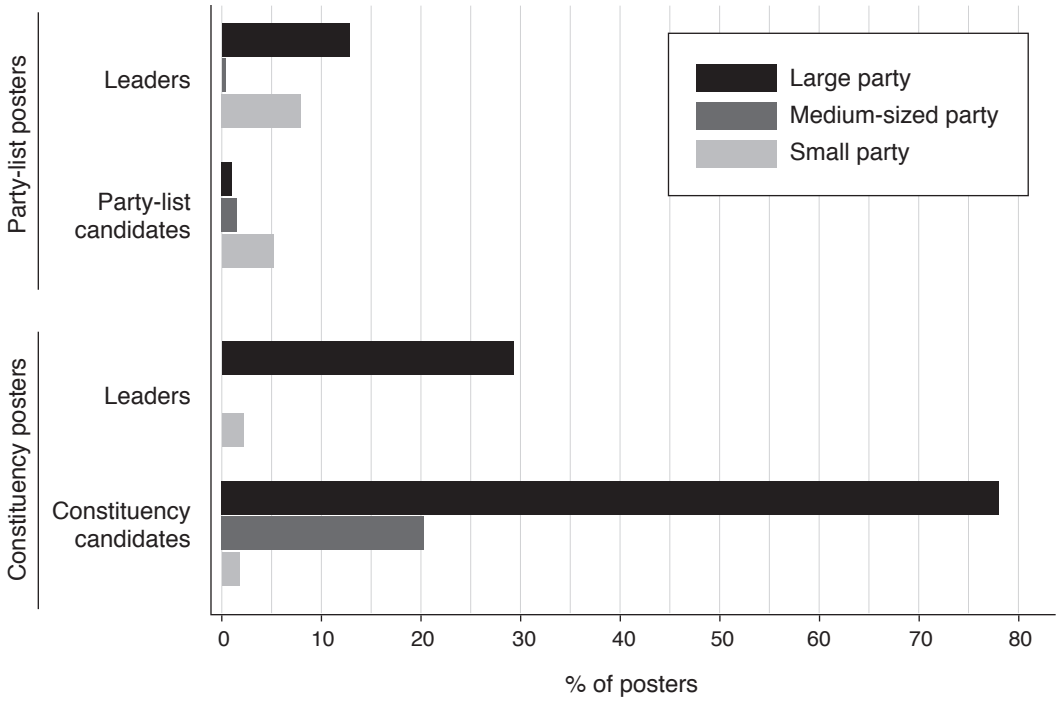



**Figure 3.** Percentage of posters with politicians wearing party clothing. Posters from large parties = 4,869, from medium-sized parties = 3,884, and from small parties = 3,361. Total N = 12,114.

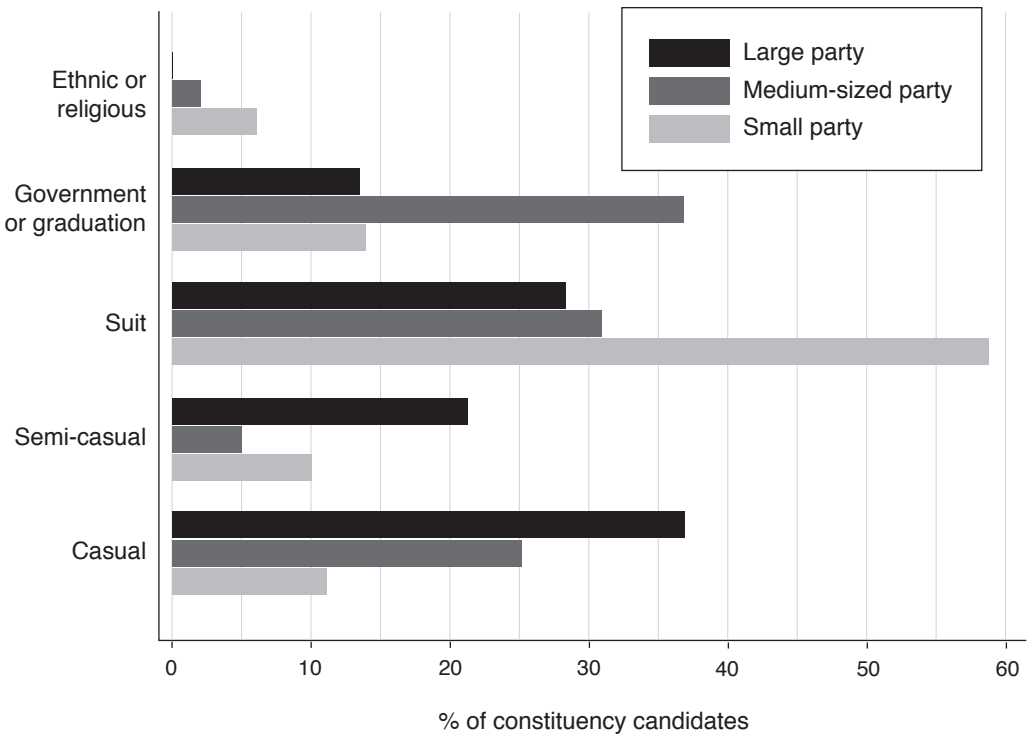



**Figure 4.** Type of clothing worn by constituency candidates by party size. There were 4,919 constituency posters with images of constituency candidates—2,926 from large parties, 1255 from medium-sized parties, and 738 from small parties. 64 constituency posters had no constituency candidate image. The semi-casual category included candidates wearing a casual jacket and a tie. "Casual" included candidates wearing casual sporting clothing, or a shirt with or without a casual jacket but no tie.

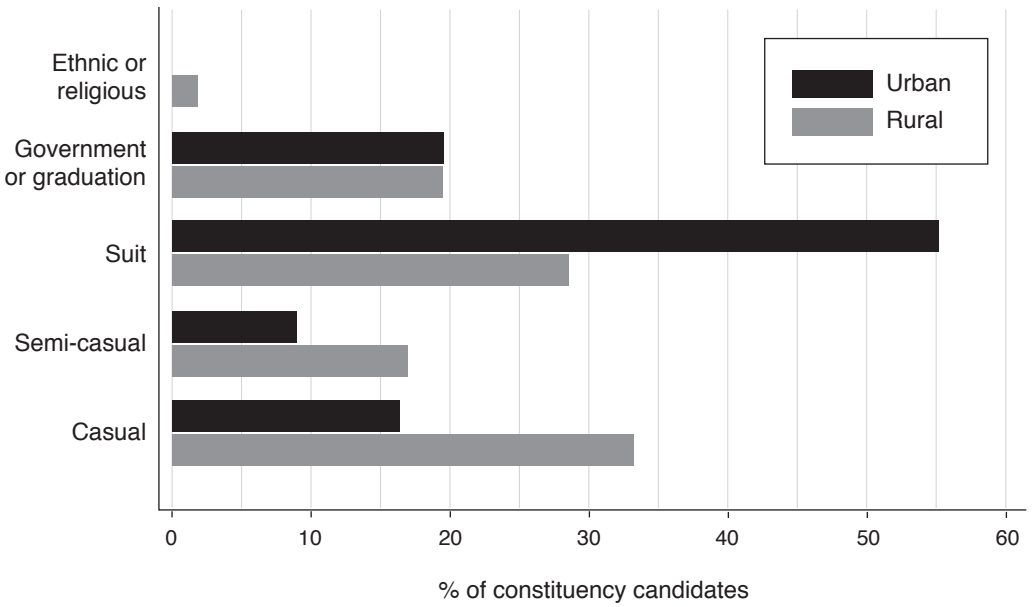



**Figure 5.** Type of clothing worn by constituency candidates in urban and rural regions. 3,989 posters were from the three rural regions (north, northeast, south) and 930 were from Bangkok. Total N = 4,919.