**Headline:** Another Shinawatra Suspended

**Teaser:** In Bangkok, there were familiar scenes as Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra was suspended on 1 July by the kingdom’s Constitutional Court in what many interpret as yet another judicial coup against the party which forms the beating heart of Thailand’s long-running Red Shirt Movement.

By Kay Young

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**[Article Body:]**

Paetongtarn becomes the third Shinawatra to be ousted from the Prime Minister’s office, following her aunt (Yingluck 2014) and her father (Thaksin 2006). The Shinawatra family, in particular Thaksin, have long been the figureheads behind the Red Shirt movement – a big tent coalition made up largely of the rural poor, but also including some big capitalists and local elites. These were the same people who were killed during the infamous Red versus Yellow street wars of the 2000s.

The past three years of governance were relatively successful for the Red Shirt (Phue Thai) Party, consistently upholding its mandate to uplift and empower the rural poor. Such policies included a mass expansion of universal health care to include dentistry and mental health, a large cash stimulus for the poorest 20% of society, the stabilisation of rice prices and the passage of the 2024 Farmer Debt Moratorium Act, suspending loan repayments for millions.

This was all achieved despite a significantly waning percentage of the vote, in large part due to [the newly established Liberal Party](https://www.samudra.dindeng.com/orange-people/).

After the 2023 elections, Phue Thai was forced into a governing coalition along with military-aligned parties – including Bhumjaithai and United Thai Nation. While many saw the coalition as a betrayal, after decades of violent oppression, it was the only strategic manoeuvre on the table to prevent total exclusion from power. Pheu Thai faced an existential choice: collaborate with reactionary establishment factions or allow a royalist-military government to dismantle every pro-rural policy enacted since 2001. As Thaksin Shinawatra said himself, ‘We enter the fire to rescue the people, not to burn with them’.

However, despite the coalition’s relative success in parliament during the past 3 years, the reactionary state apparatuses have again been mobilised to create a *casus belli* against Phue Thai. Prime Minister Paetongtarn’s suspension was engineered by reactionary elements within the Thai state. The inciting incident was a leaked diplomatic call between her and former Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen in which she is heard trying to calm tensions and apologising for the Royal Thai military [killing a Cambodian soldier](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/cambodia-says-soldier-killed-brief-border-skirmish-with-thai-troops-2025-05-28/) on a disputed patch of border. In the phone call, she says, regarding a Royal Thai Military General, ‘[He is on the opposite side](https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/thailand-cambodia-border-dispute-paetongtarn-shinawatra-hun-sen-leaked-call-5191786) (to her)’. This is an oblique reference to what everybody in the region has known for decades, that the Royal Thai Army, which has enacted [more coups](https://www.samudra.dindeng.com/coups-violence-and-coups-a-deep-history-of-deep-state-governance-in-thailand/) than any other army in modern history, are not answerable to a civilian parliament.

It was this phone call that led to her suspension as Prime Minister and the resignation of a large number of reactionary MPs from the coalition, throwing the government into further jeopardy. Yet this continued persecution seems to only validate the Shinawatras’ calculus: that Thailand’s elite tolerates rural empowerment only when utterly powerless to prevent it. Their willingness to endure judicial assaults and public scorn reflects a commitment to sustaining incremental gains rather than martyrdom. Despite being far from perfect, the Phue Thai party is the only real force capable of challenging the reactionary military-monarchy complex, which has dominated the Kingdom since the end of WWII. The most recent assault is just the latest in a decades-long war against both the Phue Thai party and the kingdom’s poor. As of 3 July, what the next few months hold is unclear, be it a weaker coalition government or another coup.

The Phue Thai story transcends the Shinawatras. It exposes a structural truth: in Thailand’s oligarchical system, advancing rural interests demands morally fraught alliances that *appear* to betray ideological roots. Yet these compromises – from accepting military-backed partners to tolerating judicial humiliation – have shielded foundational pro-poor institutions for 25 years. Universal health care still functions. Village funds still finance tractors and community seed banks. The tragedy lies not in Phue Thai’s pragmatism, but in a system that forces reformers to collaborate with their jailers to achieve even minimal justice for the poor. The party and the poor have weathered harsher storms than these and will surely continue to do so into the future.