

# **PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION ELECTIONS AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE POWER STRUCTURE IN A PROVINCE: CASE STUDIES IN BURIRAM AND PATHUM THANI**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to study changes in the political power structure in a province of Thailand after the concrete implementation of decentralization beginning in 1994. Elections of Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) mayors in two provinces, Buriram and Pathum Thani, are comparatively examined. The methodology is comprised of a document analysis, a field survey, and an interview. There are three major findings. Firstly, before decentralization, the power structure in the province was concentrated into the province's members of parliament (MPs) and senior bureaucrats. After decentralization, the power structure was basically fragmented into local administrators and councilors, all with experience as vote canvassers for the MPs. Therefore, the MPs attempted to expand their influence by supporting those cliques in local elections. Secondly, a fair allocation of benefits between the MPs and local administrators and councilors is the most important factor for preserving or breaking down the relations among them. The political parties they belong are less important than the candidates' characteristics and behavior. Finally, owing to decentralization, local administrators and councilors have gained increased authority over the local budget and have acquired their own supporters within their constituencies. This enables them to be efficient agents for the balance of political power in the province. The MPs, senators, and other provincial senior officials have found it difficult to preserve their higher status compared to those local leaders. Rather, the relationships have tended toward horizontal coexistence with an equilibrium of reciprocal benefits.