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## THAILAND'S ELUSIVE QUEST FOR A WORKABLE CONSTITUTION 1997-2007 REPORT EBOOKS 2019



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In 1997 Thailand drafted its much-vaunted "People's Constitution" which many observers saw as a watershed event in Thailand's convoluted constitutional history. (2) In September 2006 popularly elected Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was ousted in a military coup after weeks of protests in the capital about executive abuse and allegations of corruption. Less than a year later, on 19 August 2007, a public referendum approved a new Constitution. (3) The Council for National Security (CNS), the military junta that had launched the coup but promised to return democracy to Thailand within a year, had appointed a Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA) to prevent further erosion of constitutional practice. The process was far from being as consultative as the previous exercise had been, but public approval of the CDA draft paved the way for parliamentary elections in December 2007, ending the military interregnum and returning Thailand to formal democratic practice, though under a drastically different Constitution. Thailand's constitutional history has been tumultuous, as the eighteen Constitutions it has adopted--usually under the control of the military and monarchical networks--surely attest. (4) Since the country became a constitutional monarchy in 1932, Constitution drafting has generally been part of a vicious cycle of elections, instability and military coups in which the political elites in power used constitutional reform to legitimize whatever regime they put in place. (5) Generally directed at limiting political participation, Constitution-making thus has been largely "a matter of consolidating elite power" and "diverting dissenting voices". (6) The 1990s, however, produced something qualitatively new: with Thailand's rapid economic transformation and new demands from the urban middle class and civil society generally, rural as well as urban, the dynamics of institutional reform began to change significantly.

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