

QUOTE OF THE DAY

IF YOU BELIEVE IN YOURSELF AND HAVE DEDICATION AND PRIDE - AND NEVER QUIT, YOU'LL BE A WINNER. THE PRICE OF VICTORY IS HIGH BUT SO ARE THE REWARDS. BEAR BRYANT

# An election not quite as it seems

*The one in Thailand on March 24 will be less a vote of confidence in the military than a test for the monarchy*



DAVID STRECKFUSS

On a recent afternoon, the horse tracks of a small northeastern town had the looks of an impromptu music concert for mostly older women, with large crowds packed around a makeshift stage near what seemed to be an unused racing lane. By my count, some 15,000 locals, many of them farmers with weathered skin, had gathered there for a rally of the Pheu Thai party, which calls for better health care, a higher minimum wage and subsidised agriculture prices. An heir to populist parties led by two former prime ministers who were deposed — Thaksin Shinawatra and his sister Yingluck — Pheu Thai is said to be the front-runner in the March 24 general election, the first since the military coup of 2014.

These residents of Khon Kaen — many of them disadvantaged people from rural areas, like other so-called red shirts — had come to cheer on Sudarat Keyuraphan, Pheu Thai's leading candidate for prime minister. Some 77 parties are running in the election, including Palang Pracharat, a proxy for the military, which has nominated Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, the former general who led the 2014 coup, as its candidate for prime minister.

Sudarat struggled to make it to

the racetrack: Too many cheering supporters blocked her way. When she finally got onstage, she seemed bowed down by the many orange flower leis they had placed around her neck. "Are you happier now than you were five years ago?" she asked. "Do you want to sell your agricultural produce on Mars?" — a reference to Prayuth's comment once, amid a global glut in rubber, that Thai farmers may have to sell their on that planet.

But the crowd didn't want to hear just about politics, and Sudarat knew that. "You can hug me! You can kiss me!" she said playfully. "But please don't pinch me! I'm bruised from all the pinching!"

A few days earlier, on the other side of town, a group of academics, business owners and aging democracy activists had met with Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, a young leader of the Future Forward Party, to discuss the fledgling party's long-term strategy in the region. Future Forward — created only a year ago by the 38-year-old billionaire Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit — is popular among young, tech-savvy voters and progressives who want to break with old-school politics and players (including the Shinawatras). The party also wants to keep the military out of politics for good and reverse decades of centralisation by giving more power and more money to local authorities.

The Northeast represents about one-third of the country's population of more than 68 million, and for nearly two decades the way the Northeast has voted,



Campaign posters lining a street in Bangkok.

Thailand has too. That outcome seems less certain this year — largely, the government's opponents say, because it has rigged the system in its favour.

In a recent survey of voters in the Northeast by the E-Saan Poll project at Khon Kaen University, two-thirds of respondents said they were likely to vote for Pheu Thai or Future Forward in Sunday's election. But according to a study by the Nation media group early this month, pro-democracy parties looked like they would fall short of securing a majority of seats in the 500-member House of Representatives (and that was before one of those parties was dissolved).

The great unknown of this election is what role Thailand's relatively new king, Maha Vajiralongkorn, might play, if only symbolically.

I have met leaders of all the main pro-democracy parties in

# The anatomy of whiteness



ASNE SEIERSTAD

Before he allegedly killed 50 Muslims praying at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, Brenton Tarrant, a 28-year-old Australian, reportedly posted a 74-page manifesto titled "The Great Replacement" online. In his tract, Tarrant wrote that he had only one true inspiration: the Norwegian political terrorist, Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in 2011.

I always thought that Breivik was at his most dangerous before we got to know who he was, when all we had was the photoshopped photographs he had posted online, the ones where he looked tall and well-built, blond and Aryan, posing with his gun.

Breivik wanted fame. He wanted his 1,500-page cut-and-paste manifesto to be read widely, and he wanted a stage — his trial in Oslo. He called the bomb he set off outside the prime minister's office in Oslo, and the massacre he carried out on the island of Utoya, his "book launch." He told the Norwegian court he had estimated how many people he needed to kill to be read. He had figured a dozen, but ended up killing 77.

Eight years after the massacre in Norway, the Norwegian political terrorist continues to be read by his desired audience: On far right forums on the internet the term "going Breivik" means a full commitment to the cause.

While researching Breivik, which included sending him questions by letters and receiving answers from him in prison, I found a life full of shame, failures, abuse and rejections. A boy who never got the attention or care a child deserves; a rejected, uncool teenager; a man who in his late 20s moved in with his mother and mostly played video games. Isolated and angry, but with newfound friends on the dark web, he decided how he would be seen, heard, recognised and feared. He plotted his attack with an audience in mind.

After my book about Breivik was published, I was often asked: Why do you publish his words and methods? I believed he was more dangerous as a symbol and less of an inspiration when seen with all his human failings. After his arrest he complained about lukewarm coffee and a lack of skin moisturiser in prison and whined that he did not have PlayStation 4.

But his fellow travellers and followers ignored the critical texts produced by journalists and went directly to his manifesto, which continues resonating with new audiences. Christopher Hasson,



50 Muslims were killed by Brenton Tarrant in New Zealand.

a lieutenant in the United States Coast Guard and a self-described white nationalist who wanted to trigger a race war, was inspired by the Norwegian.

Tarrant's tract is a lighter version of Breivik's manifesto, filled with references to memes and internet in-jokes, but similar in content, structure and tone. Both published their texts on the web right before their attacks. While

the Norwegian, who had planned to stream his attack on YouTube failed to do so, the authorities say Tarrant broadcast his terrorist act live on his Facebook page.

The two men mix rage with self-pity. They see themselves as victims and use terms like "invasion," "mass immigration" and "white genocide" to describe what they regard as the destruction of Europe and the white

race. Both the Australian and the Norwegian barely mention their own homelands and focus on Europe and the United States. Tarrant sees the white population of Australia and New Zealand as Europeans.

He writes how he decided on his "final push" after visiting France in 2017, where he saw how the European French had been "replaced" by "nonwhites." Thu

Anders Breivik, the Norwegian terrorist and Brenton Tarrant, who killed 50 worshippers in New Zealand, display similar traits