

# Meet Pita Limjaroenrat, the 42-year-old Harvard grad vows to become Thailand's next prime minister

Marielle Descalsota



Move Forward Party leader and prime ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat in Bangkok. Jack Taylor/AFP via Getty Images

The results of Sunday's election suggest Pita Limjaroenrat is on track to becoming the next Prime Minister of Thailand. The 42-year-old business executive is the leader of the Move Forward party, one of the country's liberal opposition parties.

Pita has achieved celebrity status among young Thais — and his fame and fandom is most evident on TikTok. The Thai hashtag of his name — #พิธาล้มเจริญรัตน์ — has garnered some three billion views on the platform. A video that recorded one of his speeches has over 7.6 million views and thousands of comments showing support for his campaign. And, at many of his rallies, thousands of students gathered, holding banners with his face on them and chanting his name. *"I am ready to be the prime minister for all, whether you agree with me or not,"* Pita said on May 15, the day 99% of the votes were counted, per the Straits Times.

Pita promises to revive Thailand's "lost decade." His platform? To "**demilitarize, demonopolize, and decentralize**" — a plan that hopes to revive the economy by investing beyond tourism in major cities like Bangkok, Pita said in an interview with Bloomberg. Now, all eyes are on the ballot box as his supporters eagerly wait for a new era in Thai politics.

## **Pita was the first Thai student to receive an international scholarship from Harvard.**

Pita moved to Hamilton, New Zealand when he was 11 years old. Growing up, he described himself as a youngster who smoked cigarettes and fought in school. At the time, he attended Bangkok Christian College, according to local publication Nation Thailand. In New Zealand, Pita lived on a farm with a local family. There, he attended high school — and picked strawberries and delivered milk and newspapers in his free time, according to New Zealand-based publication The Spinoff, citing a 2012 interview.

*"I got shipped to the middle of nowhere in New Zealand and there were three channels back then. Either you watch Australian soap operas, or you watch the debates in parliament,"* Pita told the Thai YouTube program Aim Hour.

Pita then returned to Thailand to pursue a bachelor's degree in finance and banking at Thammasat University, per his profile on Thailand's parliament's website. He **graduated in 2002 with first class honors**. He went on to obtain **a master's degree in public policy from Harvard Kennedy School and an MBA from MIT Sloan School of Management**, per his LinkedIn profile.

Pita did not immediately respond to Insider's requests for comment.

## **Before becoming a politician, Pita Limjaroenrat worked in consulting and operations.**

In 2018, Pita became a member of parliament in Thailand, a move that skyrocketed his rise as the leader of the Move Forward party. Before that, Pita was a business executive who worked in multinational corporations. Most notably, Pita served as the executive director of Grab Thailand, a ride-hailing and food delivery app, from 2017 to 2018, according to his LinkedIn profile.

Pita's career also extends to working in the government. After a few years as a senior associate at the Boston Consulting Group, he took on a role in Thailand's Office of the Minister for two years, working on issues including trade and investment, according to his profile.

## **Pita's family is known for their prominence in politics and business.**

Pita's father, Pongsak Limjaroenrat, was an advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture, per the Guardian. His uncle, Padung Limjaroenrat, was a close aide to the billionaire and former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. His family also owns a successful company — and it's in large part because of Pita's efforts. In 2006, his father died, leaving him to take over as CEO of Agrifood, their rice bran oil company, according to Tatler's 2017 profile. The then-25-year-old Pita rescued the company from bankruptcy and turned it into a thriving business. Pita served as the company's managing director for a decade, per his LinkedIn profile.

***"We humans are all born with sufferings and mistakes, but we must not fear to fail,"*** Pita told the Bangkok Post in a 2014 interview. ***"We have to fail and fail better. And don't let guilt in the past or emotion get in your way,"*** he added.



Pita was married to a TV actress, whom he had a daughter with. Pita married Thai actress Chutima Teepanart in 2012, but the couple divorced seven years later. Chutima, whom he met online, is seven years his junior, according to an interview with Prestige in 2016.

*Pita Limjaroenrat holds his daughter on stage during a rally in Bangkok. Lillian Suwanrumpha/AFP/Getty Images*

Chutima once accused Pita of physical abuse, but her claim was thrown out in court in 2016. She later said that while he was never violent towards her, he still abused her psychologically, as quoted by the Bangkok Post. Pita is a single father, with sole custody of their daughter

Pipim, per the Bangkok Post. He is often seen carrying Pipim at his rallies.

*"I want her to appreciate good food, enjoy good music, travel a lot,"* Pita told Prestige. *"I want her to enjoy life to the fullest, and I would definitely support her in any possible way that I can: her endeavors and her journeys,"* he continued.

Thailand's Electoral Commission has 60 days after the results were announced on May 15 to certify the election results and confirm the winning party