

Electoral campaign: Businesswoman wants to become Thailand's first transgender prime minister

Saturday 23 February 2019, by [HARMER Jeremy](#), [VEJPONGSA Tassanee](#) (Date first published: 15 February 2019).

Former sports promoter envisions hope for marginalised.



Ms Ngarmpring greets locals as part of election campaigns in Bangkok.

As [Pinit Ngarmpring](#), he was a CEO and sports promoter, well known in the world of [Thai football](#). Now, under her preferred new name of [Pauline Ngarmpring](#), she's pursuing a bid to become the country's first [transgender](#) prime minister.

The 52-year-old is one of three candidates put forward by a political party for the post in next month's general election.

She says she wants her nomination to bring hope to the marginalised and open up political space for future generations of [LGBT+](#) people.

With over a month to go before the 24 March polling day, she campaigned this week in one of Bangkok's more infamous nightlife areas.

Many vulnerable or exploited people work in this twilight zone of go-go bars, cheap hotels and massage parlours. It's exactly the constituency the [Mahachon](#) party seeks to represent, and she's eager to hear their concerns.

Masseuse Wassana Sorsawang says her concerns are "our welfare, mostly - health". She complains that she and her colleagues often work double shifts, and it affects their health.

The Mahachon Party is contesting some 200 seats in the 500-member House of Representatives. About 20 of the candidates are openly LGBT+. Pauline joined only last November. Now, as their second-ranked nominee for prime minister, she finds herself a political trailblazer, a unique symbol of the fight for equality.

It's fine, she says, if she cannot achieve her goal of becoming prime minister because she is the first "who dares enough to announce: 'hey, we can do it!'"

She adds: "We are not saying we are better than male or female. We just want to say we are equal."

Until three years ago, Pauline was Pinit: a father of two, a reporter turned businessman who became well known by founding a football fan association that was influential in Thai sporting circles.

Since her gender transition she's made it her mission, she said, to educate society. Her new political role gives her the perfect platform to counter those who still view [LGBT+ rights](#) - and her candidacy - with skepticism.

"Nowadays people say, 'Oh you are transgender? You want to become our prime minister. It's going to be funny, it is going to be a very strange story,'" she says.

"But I don't think that way," she adds. "Whatever you are, you have your value. You love yourself and then you share with people."

LGBT+ activists have praised her efforts.

"Her decision to enter politics is great news for our community," says Wattana Keiangpa, founder of [Apcom Thailand](#), an organisation working for health and rights of gender minority groups.

He says groups like his have worked from outside the system on these issues. He adds: "The prospect of having someone in the government or the parliament being a spokesperson for our community is definitely a big step forward.

"In the end, it's the people who have faced the same challenges as us and understand us who should be speaking for us. Pauline is one of us, and has worked within our community so she would have great understanding of our challenges and needs. And I admire her and support her for doing such a thing."

The Mahachon party hopes its human rights-based agenda will appeal in particular to Thailand's large LGBT+ and sex worker population. One policy is to legalise prostitution.

The result, Pauline says, could be up to 10 lawmakers in parliament, thanks to a new electoral system that allocates some of the seats through proportional representation.

But, even given Thailand's traditionally accepting view of sexual fluidity, she knows she is not destined to lead the country.

"I will not be a prime minister," she says. "But it doesn't matter. It will take some time and it is not going to be the end of the world after the next election.

"It doesn't have to be me. It can be the next generation."

Jeremy Harmer, Tassanee Vejpongsa, Associated Press

P.S.

• The Independent, Friday 15 February 2019 10:39:
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/thailand-first-transgender-prime-minister-lgbt-election-pauline-ngarmpring-candidate-bangkok-a8780446.html>