



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Burmese (Myanmar) monks campaign for democracy (Saffron Revolution), 2007

August 19,

2007

to: September 29,

2007

**Country:** Burma

**Country:** Myanmar

**Location City/State/Province:** *Yangon (Rangoon), Mandalay, and other cities*

**Goals:**

Economic reform and a return to civilian rule

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 056. Selective social boycott › Refusal to accept alms from generals

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 096. International trade embargo
- 137. Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 037. Singing
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Economic Justice

Human Rights

**Group characterization:**

- Buddhist monks
- political activists
- students

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

All Burma Monks Alliance, Students

**Partners:**

Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB),

**External allies:**

European, U.S., and other foreign Governments, the Dalai Lama

**Involvement of social elites:**

Foreign Government leaders and the Dalai Lama supported the campaigners

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

### Groups in 1st Segment:

- Democratic Voice of Burma

### Groups in 2nd Segment:

- All Burma Monks Alliance

### Groups in 3rd Segment:

### Groups in 4th Segment:

### Groups in 5th Segment:

### Groups in 6th Segment:

### Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

It is unclear when the foreign governments and the Dalai Lama began to support the campaigners

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 7 days*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### Opponents:

Ruling military junta in Burma created as State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and renamed State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)

### Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

### Campaigner violence:

Officials were held hostage in a monastery once.

### Repressive Violence:

Many demonstrators were beaten, killed, or detained (essentially kidnapped).

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

### Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

### Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

The campaign was the first since 1988 to really challenge the government, but did not succeed in removing power from the rulers or changing the economic situation.

Many of the leading organizers survived, but they were badly repressed by the government and this eventually led to the failure of the campaign.

After several weeks the campaign gained tens of thousands of supporters, however only 2 growth points were given because of the decline in participation that led to the end of the campaign.

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In 1988 Burmese students led mass demonstrations against the oppressive military junta of Burma (the country now referred to as Myanmar). The result was 3,000 civilians dead after a governmental crackdown and a prevailing junta. Shortly after, as the “rallying symbol for the population,” pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi was confined to her house by the junta, not to be seen by the public for 12 out of the next 18 years. For these reasons, the people of Burma quieted their cries for democracy and fell back into life under the military junta that called itself the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

That is until 2007, when the government, under immense strain due to financial mismanagement, removed all fuel subsidies without any announcement and allowed the price of oil and gas to rise dramatically. Oil prices rose by as much as 66% and natural gas increased nearly fivefold. This also caused the prices of all other commodities to skyrocket.

Student protesters from 1988 led demonstrations against the price hike as early as August 19, four days after the price hike. As soon as the protests began, video journalists from The Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), an independent media organization committed to circulating real news footage from the otherwise closed country of Burma, started to record the events that transpired. On tape they caught the initial demonstrations being quickly suppressed by police officers roaming the streets, carrying demonstrators off in vans, and arresting anyone suspected of involvement. If the activists weren't detained they were forced to go into hiding from the government and could not continue organizing.

But the campaign took on new significance on August 28th when Buddhist monks joined a protest in the city of Sittwe. Turning their alms bowls upside down, the monks refused alms from generals. In this act of defiance the monks were symbolically refusing to give the Buddha's blessings to the generals. In the religiously devout nation of Burma, this participation by the monks had powerful impacts. Normally, monks did not associate themselves with political matters (although some had joined in the 1988 uprising); thus, to join the political campaign at this time was that much more of a statement.

Demonstrations led by monks steadily spread from city to city in Burma and police opposition also grew. On September 5th activists held a peaceful demonstration in the city of Pakokku, which SPDC officers broke up by firing warning shots into the crowd. The officers also severely beat several monks and took others into custody. Due to the revered nature of monks in Burma, these injuries served as a major catalyst for the demonstrators and sparked increased protests around the country.

Later, 20 government officials were briefly held inside a monastery they had travelled to with the purpose of telling the monks to cease demonstrations. The newly formed All Burma Monks Alliance gave the officials the ultimatum that if their colleagues and all other activists were not released from jail and prices were not cut by September 17, the monks would march. After the message was delivered the officials were released. Some reports say that while the officials were being held in the monastery a few young monks had damaged their cars with rocks.

September 17th came and went with no response from the junta to the monks' demands. The monks immediately began to lead nationwide protests that gained the support of tens of thousands of Burmese citizens, most of whom had been too afraid of the regime to speak out in any way. Now they proudly chanted in the streets “the monks' demands are our demands” and “*do-aye*”, the catchphrase of the '88 campaign meaning “It is our task.”

On September 22nd 2,000 monks and civilians in Yangon passed directly by a police barricade as they marched on to Aung San Suu Kyi's house. She greeted them in tears inside the gate of her home and prayed with the crowd. The public had not seen her since 2003. The clergy was now connected with Aung San Suu Kyi and the pro-democracy movement, a bond that ensured even greater public mobilization.

On that same day, 10,000 people marched in the city of Mandalay. The next day over 15,000 monks and laypeople marched in Mandalay and the Alliance of All Burmese Buddhist Monks declared that they would continue protesting until civilian rule was returned. This marked a shift in the goals of the movement, originally aimed specifically at the removal of fuel subsidies, to the larger goal of political change.

By September 24th citizens and monks in 25 cities throughout Burma were taking part in marches, with 100,000 people participating in Yangon and 30,000 in Mandalay. DVB was successfully dispersing footage of the demonstrations around the

world and back into Burma.

By September 26 soldiers began responding to the growing campaign by gathering at intersections with machine guns in hand. Many people thought that the violence suffered in the 1988 campaign would not occur during the 2007 demonstrations because of the presence of the monks. However, this theory would soon be proved wrong. The junta prepared for its crackdown as they disabled the Internet and phone connections throughout Burma and instated a curfew. Additionally, they transferred Aung San Suu Kyi to a prison in order to prevent her from greeting protesters outside her home.

The government raided monasteries the night of the 26th. They arrested thousands of monks or prevented them from leaving the area. The government deployed soldiers in every city to seek out and arrest prominent organizers.

Despite these actions by the government, however, tens of thousands of Burmese citizens and remaining monks continued protests. On September 27 soldiers released tear gas into a crowd of 50,000 in Yangon, opened fire, and reportedly killed 9 people. Demonstrators did not retreat, but as a result, more were arrested, injured, or killed by the hour.

As the crackdown was publicized worldwide, supporters in many different countries held vigils for the demonstrators of Burma. The governments of the United States and Europe enforced an economic boycott on the country. During the campaign, the Dalai Lama also offered his blessing and support to the protestors.

Nonetheless, in the face of police violence the protests slowed. Monks and activists mounted occasional isolated demonstrations in the months and years that followed, but the large-scale public momentum of September 2007 had been extinguished. Monks in Burma continue to spread awareness of their government's brutality and the situation of its people.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

Influenced by Burmese democracy campaign of 1988 (see "Burmese citizens campaign for democracy, 1988")(1).

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### Additional Notes:

The monks marched to democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi's home (where she has been confined for 12 out of the last 18 years), reintroducing her into the political sphere at the time of their campaign. This strengthened the campaign in terms of civilian participation and overall energy.

This campaign was originally researched and written separately by both Alexa Ross (Swarthmore, 10/10/2010) and Evan Abrams (Georgetown, 29/11/2010). Max Rennebohm (Swarthmore, 12/04/2011) edited and combined both narratives.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Alexa Ross 10/10/2010 and Evan Abrams 29/11/2010

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