



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Thai Red Shirts protest against Thai Government, 2010

Time period notes: *It is difficult to put an exact date on the beginning of the protests, but people began organizing and traveling to Bangkok in the first few days of March, so March 1 was chosen as a starting point.*

March 1,
2010

to: May 20,
2010

Country: Thailand

Location City/State/Province: *Mostly in Bangkok*

Goals:

The United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship wanted the current Prime Minister (Abhisit Vejjajiva) to dissolve parliament and call for new elections in Thailand.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 025. Displays of portraits
- 038. Marches
- 042. Motorcades

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 016. Picketing

- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects › Throwing blood on the lawns of government buildings
- 025. Displays of portraits
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 025. Displays of portraits
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 137. Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 025. Displays of portraits
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 137. Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 020. Prayer and worship

- 025. Displays of portraits
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 137. Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 025. Displays of portraits
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 137. Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- farmers – especially in the North
- rural poor workers
- supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD)

Partners:

Not Known

External allies:

Not Known

Involvement of social elites:

Not Known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

No known joining order

Segment Length: *Approximately 13.5 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Thai Government led by Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Attacking policemen, burning buildings, use of grenades/petrol bombs

Repressive Violence:

Assassination of red shirts leader, violence against campaigners, killing campaigners

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The government never called for new elections and gave practically no concessions to the protesters.

As groups, the red shirts and the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship still existed after the campaign ended.

During the campaign, the number of protestors increased dramatically. However, at the end of the campaign, it is not clear that the red shirt movement grew as a result.

Although Thailand has had a constitution since 1932, the stability of the country's political structure is questionable. For instance, the country has had 17 different constitutions over this time period with government forms ranging from dictatorship to democracy. In addition, the country rarely has a prime minister who is able to serve a full term without being ousted, and corruption at the highest levels is a constant problem.

The 2010 protests stem from a military coup in 2006 that ousted former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and replaced him with current Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. This coup represented a larger dichotomy in the citizens of Thailand that

manifested itself in two socio-political groups, the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) and the Peoples' Alliance for Democracy (PAD). UDD, also called the red shirts, is comprised of poor, rural workers or farmers from North Thailand and supports former Prime Minister Thaksin. PAD, also called the yellow shirts, is comprised of elites, royalists, urban middle class, and the upper class, and supports current Prime Minister Abhisit. The main point of departure between the two parties was their economic policies; while Thaksin favored economic policies that helped the poorer class, Abhisit's policies focused mostly on helping urban business. This difference is the fundamental basis for the tension between the red shirts and the yellow shirts.

PAD is responsible for the 2006 coup that ousted Prime Minister Thaksin, banned his party, and planned new elections. Despite this, supporters of Thaksin reestablished their party for the 2007 elections and won, even though he was in exile. Within a year, the PAD protested again and succeeded in challenging the constitutionality of the pro-Thaksin party in the Thai courts. The PAD-friendly jurists ruled the party unconstitutional, which allowed Prime Minister Abhisit, a PAD candidate, to seize power.

In February 2010, Abhisit's administration seized almost 50 billion bahts worth of Thaksin's assets. This led Thaksin to appeal to his supporters directly and urge them to continue fighting for democracy. This was probably the most immediate cause of the UDD's decision to protest. Following this, red shirts from around the country converged upon Bangkok with strong urging from their leaders to remain nonviolent. Almost immediately, the government enacted the Internal Security Act that gave the military the power to impose curfews and limit peoples' movements within the country.

By March 12, around 50,000 red shirt protesters had arrived in Bangkok via trucks displaying large red flags and banners. The protesters were demanding the immediate dissolution of parliament and new elections. Within the week, 150,000 people had joined the protests in the streets and essentially shut down the financial district of the city because their sheer numbers prevented traffic from moving. The protesters gathered in the streets, listening to prominent leaders, playing music, and joining in chants. Also during this week, the leaders of the protests began collecting blood from the protesters and promised to toss the blood on the grounds of the main government building if their demands were not immediately met.

The government refused to negotiate with the protesters or meet their demands, so the red shirts continued with their plans and, on March 16, tossed approximately 300 liters of blood on the lawn of Prime Minister Abhisit's house and on the grounds of other government buildings. The government allowed this action, but kept thousands of soldiers on stand-by in case they were needed. This symbolic action brought a great deal of international media attention to the protests as well as fears about health issues. However, this did not provoke the government to any action.

On March 21, the red shirts drove around Bangkok in a parade of approximately 65,000 motor vehicles. The following day, they gathered poems, pictures, and other artistic works to add to a large canvas that also featured blood from the protesters. Leaders suggest this was intended to boost morale within the red shirts and create a larger picture of what the movement was trying to accomplish.

Up to this point, Abhisit had remained mostly quiet in regards to the protesters, but he did mention that he was willing to consider some of the demands and meet with protest leaders to talk about the situation. However, some external commentators claimed that talks were unlikely to amount to any type of compromise because neither side could afford to be seen as giving in.

On March 25 and 26, several grenades exploded in different areas of Bangkok. Although it was never firmly established which side threw the grenades, it is likely that the protesters are to blame because, out of eight casualties from the blast, five were soldiers. This was the first violence of the protests, but because of their extremely isolated nature and immediate condemnation from red shirt leaders, they did not provoke the government to a more drastic response or undermine the red shirts.

As the protests continued into a third week, the government began to feel more and more pressure. The protests had shut down a large part of the city and prevented many business people (who would identify as yellow shirts) from working. This led to the yellow shirts announcing they would hold counter protests if the government did not deal with the situation soon. Additionally, tourism took a hit as international travel to Thailand dropped approximately thirty percent. These factors led the government to

begin talks with leaders of the protests.

After two rounds of talks, nothing had been decided. Abhisit offered to hold an early election in nine months if the protesters stopped, but the protesters retorted with demands for the parliament to be dissolved within 15 days. The impasse continued and the yellow shirts only became angrier.

On April 7, the government declared a state of emergency and shut down a TV station that was paid for by red shirt sympathizers claiming that it was inciting violence on April 9. Rejecting the state of emergency, the red shirts broke through the police cordon, seized the soldiers' weapons, and occupied the TV station for three hours on April 10. The issue was resolved after Abhisit promised the TV station would no longer be banned. However, this was the turning point for the protests.

Abhisit also promised he would return Thailand to "normalcy" as fast as possible and issued arrest warrants for the leaders of the red shirts. On April 11, the military, still operating under the Internal Security Act, attempted to forcibly retake parts of the city that the protesters occupied. Supposedly armed with only tear gas and rubber bullets, the military attempted to disperse the protesters, but eyewitnesses say that the military was using live rounds at times. In response, the protesters began using petrol bombs. That day, the death toll rose from 8 to 21 and more than 800 were injured.

The protesters continued to rally and began to build bunkers in the street to defend against attacks by the military. Adding to the chaos, the yellow shirts began their own protests against the government for not having stopped the red shirts. It is important to note that the yellow shirts were also protesting against the red shirts, though. The military again responded with violence, killing one and injuring a number of others.

On May 3, feeling pressure from both the red shirts and the yellow shirts to find a quick conclusion to the protests, Abhisit promised to hold elections by November 14 if the red shirts ended their protests. This compromise was accepted by the leaders of the red shirts the next day, but later rejected when they found out that the compromise also allowed legal exemption for government leaders that had been responsible for protesters' deaths.

With no end in sight and compromises seemingly unworkable, Abhisit took firmer military action on May 14. The military surrounded the protesters in their main camp in Bangkok and the clashes quickly turned violent. In the first day, the military killed ten people, including some foreign journalists, more than a hundred people were injured, and a sniper assassinated one of the red shirt leaders while he was giving an interview. The next day, the military killed fourteen more and injured approximately 200. Protesters threatened to actively change from nonviolent tactics to violent tactics. In response, the military created "live fire zones" and shot anybody who entered these areas upon sight. By the third day, the military had killed another nine. Of the 35 killed at this point, only one was a soldier.

On May 19, the military attacked the red shirt camp. Eleven more died, hundreds were injured, and many more were arrested. After this direct assault, the majority of the red shirt leaders either surrendered or fled. Although random acts of violence continued for weeks to come, the majority of the protests were broken up by May 20 and Thailand was returning to "normalcy."

Ultimately, the protesters did not meet any of their goals, but they did bring substantial international attention to class issues in Thailand. Additionally, the red shirts began discussing the possibility of further protests in early October 2010, so it is obvious that, while these campaigns are over, the red shirts' movement continues.

Research Notes

Influences:

Previous protests between the red shirts and yellow shirts in Thailand, notably 2006, 2008, and 2009, influenced this campaign

(1)

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Additional Notes:

It is important to note that the protests remained nonviolent for about a month. With the exception of three isolated grenade attacks, they only became violent when the police became violent.

Although the yellow shirts also began to protest, I hesitate to categorize these protests as nonviolent response by the opponent because the yellow shirts were actually protesting against the government. However, I also do not feel it is applicable to say

they are partners or allies of the red shirts because they were also protesting against the red shirts.

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

Matthew Heck, 17/10/2010

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