

A Comparison of Political Movements in Thailand from 2005–2013: Case Study on People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD), the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), and United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD)

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The Asian Conference on Education 2017
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper analyzed on three political movements in Thailand since 2005 – 2013 between the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD), the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), and United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD). Thus, it founded that there are both similarities and differences in Thailand’s political movements. Similarities which can be seen from demonstrations include the fact that demonstrators normally rally in downtown Bangkok, occupy public buildings, use social media to communicate, exchange information and mobilize people and aim for democracy. On the other hand, there are some differences in detail such as ideology, strategy, people to join, aims and goals to their achievement.

Keywords: Political Movements, Thailand, People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD), the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD)

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The International Academic Forum
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Introduction

This paper compares three political movements occurred in Thailand since 2005 to 2013. Social media were used during the three political movements to mobilize people to come out on the streets pursuing their goals and propose. The political movements' scenario began with the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) and the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) respectively. The discussion on mentioned political movement covers background, timeline events, and political movement process in terms of how they are organized, generated, mobilized and reacted.

The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD)

The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), which is also called the National Liberation Alliance, the National Liberation Party or the yellow shirts, is originally a coalition of protesters against Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, the former prime minister of Thailand. The PAD has its source in weekly political talk show by Sondhi Limthongkul named "Muang Thai Rai Sapda" (Thailand Weekly). The PAD started rally against Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his administration at the Royal Plaza and ended peacefully after midnight Saturday. The demonstrators set Feb. 26 as the day for their next gathering. This was the first PAD action in public space which was joined by people urging government to accept their demands.

The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) Aims and Goals

The PAD aims to get rid of corruptions. Thaksin Shinawatra, the billionaire and civilian dictator has left Thailand with extensively high level of corruptions and proxy politicians. Having cheated the country while being in power, Mr. Shinawatra hid his corrupt billions of dollars' worth of assets overseas. When he was ousted, Mr. Shinawatra was subjected to numerous convictions. He, however, cowardly avoided imprisonment by fleeing overseas and pulled strings on politicians to sabotage his homeland. The PAD protects the monarchy. Thaksin Shinawatra desires to launder himself by amending the laws to favor him and his proxy politicians. He is trying to abolish the monarchy and make himself a president by arousing turmoil and changing Thailand from being a "Kingdom" to a "Republic" instead. As a permanent cure for Thailand, the PAD intends to establish real democracy for Thailand. At present, it is not genuine democracy with bad on-sale politicians. To achieve all above, 1-3, we have to get rid of Thaksin Shinawatra and his proxy politicians and punish them according to the laws.

The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) Members and Support Group

The PAD members are initially consisted of middle and upper-class residents of Bangkok and Southerners and supported by the conservative elite, factions of the Thai Army, and state-enterprise labor unions. These include prominent socialites and some little-known minor members of the Thai royal family. The PAD's support base has expanded to include civil servants, state enterprise labor unions, the urban middle-class of other cities

and conservative Buddhist groups. Supporting Buddhist groups include the Santi Asoke sect and their “Dharma Army” (led by Thaksin Shinawatra’s former mentor Chamlong Srimuang). Moreover, General Pathompong Kesornsuk, a close aid of Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda, appeared in full uniform at the PAD protests and urged his fellow soldiers to follow suit. As Bouckaert (2011) mentioned in early 2006 that growing discontent among many social sectors including intellectuals, NGOs, business elites, the upper-middle class, civil servants, employees of state-owned enterprises and opposition political parties, particularly the Democrat Party which could not compete with Mr. Shinawatra geographically nor financially, had coalesced into an organized protest movement.

The People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) Mobilization and Reaction

The PAD is supported by Sondhi Limthongkul, the founder of Manager Media Group and the affiliated companies of Manager Daily newspaper and the ASTV satellite television channel. Sondhi took his anti-Thaksin talk show on the road broadcasting via satellite through his NEWS1 ASTV channel based out of Hong Kong and webcasting via the website of his Manager Daily newspaper. Talk show sites, including Sanam Luang and the King Rama V equestrian statue, became magnets for the PAD crowds.

In terms of people mobilization, the PAD has allied webpages and Facebook pages which are used as a communicating tool to gather people. Paireepairit (2012) points out that when Manager Group started rallying against Thaksin Shinawatra, Manager.co.th became the best online source for political news, especially for the anti-Thaksin camp. Once Muang Thai Rai Supdah was dropped from TV, Sondhi continued his show at a public park in Bangkok and broadcasted livestream versions of the show through Manager.co.th. The program was later on broadcasted via satellite TV station, ASTV. Manager Group utilized multi-medium media strategy effectively. Viewers who missed live events could watch archived clips online with full transcription within hours. Most articles on Manager.co.th were opened for discussion via a commenting system which has created a vibrant community among online politics followers.

The source of concerns by the opposition is from both government and anti-PAD groups. People daily (2006) reported that the organizer of the rally failed to meet the legal requirement and was fined by metropolitan police for disturbing other people’s rights by using loud speakers and causing traffic problems when staging the demonstration. “The law is to be enforced now compromisingly after last Saturday’s rally caused traffic congestion and disturbing noises in the area,” Government Spokesman Surapong Suebwonglee was quoted by the Thai News Agency as saying after the demonstration began in late afternoon.

On the other hand, the UDD supporters have been opposing the PAD since the 2006 coup accusing the PAD of supporting the coup. Since then, clashes between supporters of the two groups have taken place from time to time. One example can be demonstrated by the clash in Udorn Thani in July 2008 where the red-shirt UDD supporters attacked the PAD

rally injuring several PAD supporters. Moreover, the PAD meeting in Chiangmai, the bastion of Thaksin Shinawatra, was also disturbed.

The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD)

According to Thai Red Shirt website (<http://thairedshirts.org>), the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), also known as the red shirts, is the biggest pro-democracy movement in Thailand's history. Red Shirts are social activists who believe that the people of Thailand deserve a political and judicial system that ensures their universal human rights and justice. Most red shirts are ordinary working-class Thais. They include unregistered laborers, farmers, the poor and those who are not qualified for any kind of welfare or pension. Red shirts also include employees in industries and other services such as restaurant and hotel. While it is difficult to give an exact total number of Red shirts, there are almost certainly in their millions, and their supporters are in their tens of millions.

The Red shirts roots are in the various groups who protest against the military coup in 2006, such as the Federation for Democracy back in 1992, the Saturday Voice against Dictatorship, 19th September Group, PTV Group and Ex-Thai Rak Thai members. These groups protest against the military coup of 19 September 2006 and have gradually grown from small gatherings to large protests. The Red color was first adopted in 2007 as a symbol against the 2007 constitution drafted by the 2006 coup makers.

According to Wikipedia (2014), the first name of UDD is "Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship" (DAAD), and it was later on changed to "United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship" (UDD). The UDD was first formed in 2006 to oppose the military government and the military coup, which overthrew Thaksin five weeks before the scheduled elections. UDD organized anti-government rallies during the military government's rule in 2006–2007 and opposed the military's 2007 constitution. UDD website points out that the Democrat Party represents Thailand's conservative forces who seek to hold power over the country both within and outside of the system and with no mandate from the people. These conservative forces rely on various stale apparatus such as the army, judges, appointed senators and independent organizations which were, in fact, appointed by military coup maker. The red shirts have struggled against all these elements in order to return power to the people and nullify the effects of the 2006 coup.

The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) Aims and Goals

According to the website of the red shirts or the UDD, the group has six objectives to achieve which are: To attain true democracy and to ensure that sovereignty is truly in the hands of the people of Thailand with the King as the head of state; To unify grassroots masses as the main social and cultural force together with people from every sector who seek democracy and justice and to resist "aristocratic" forces that obstruct equitable and democratic national development; To promote non-violence as the modus operandi for all activities; To fight against poverty by tying economic policies on poverty reduction through political strategies which stress that economic policy must be directly formulated

by an elected government; To reinstate the “Rule of Law” through ensuring equitable and transparent judicial process for all, along with putting an end to the “double standards” policies which are currently under control by aristocratic interests and elite networks; To revoke the 2007 Constitution and its unjust laws that favor certain military and elite interest and to draw up a new democratic Constitution.

The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) Members and Support Group

As Thabchumpon and Maccargo (2011) points out, the UDD has gathered people with a wide range of backgrounds, ranging from former communists to liberals and rightist hardliners. The lack of clear lines of command and accountability among the various core leaders of the UDD undermines the effectiveness of the movement. Overall, the red-shirt movement represents an extremely pragmatic alliance among groups ranging from idealistic post-leftists to others of a rather thuggish disposition, and the elements from the two sides that had fought one another in the 1970s were now collaborating. Moreover, Paireepairit (2012) gives some examples on red-shirt social media after the military coup which are collected from 19Sep.net, Saturdayvoice.com, Thai Free News and Thai E-news. Those are notable forums used by anti-coup and Thaksin Shinawatra supporters. The red-shirt website also provides links to their alliances, for example, 2 Bangkok.com, Asia Provocateur, BlogSpot, Chicago Red Shirts For Democracy (illinoisredshirts.blogspot.com), RED IN USA (redusala.blogspot.com), Robert Amsterdam Thailand, UDD Red, and UDD TODAY.

The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) Mobilization and Reaction

According to Thabchumpon and Mccargo (2011), it is shown that without denying the agency of the protesters themselves, it is also important to recognize that the red shirts are highly susceptible to politicization and mobilization by community leaders who are often linked to pro-Thaksin politicians. The red shirt movement is a loosely structured network organization rather than a hierarchical one. Members expand the network by reaching out to friends, relatives, and people in their own villages and communities. Red shirt groups communicate through community radio stations, the distribution of CDs and hard-copy newsletters which are reproduced locally as color photocopies. The networks are organized in the way that the demonstration outside a provincial hall could be held within half an hour notice.

Before the daybreak of September 2, 2008, the UDD supporters rallied to Sanamluang and decided to attack the PAD demonstrators who were gathering at the Makkhawan Rangan Bridge on Ratchadamnoen Klang Avenue. The ensuing clash left several injured on both sides with one dead on UDD side resulting in a weak state of emergency in Bangkok. The military was called to secure the situation but not to disperse the demonstrators. The UDD was then seen by the public as the main adversary of the PAD, the red and yellow rivalry has become significantly evident.

The People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC)

As Wikipedia (2014) puts it, The group was formed on 29 November 2013 by protest leader and former Democrat Party MP Suthep Thaugsuban, who appointed himself as secretary-general. The movement was supported by various organisations including the Democrat Party, the People's Alliance for Democracy (a coalition of opposition to Thaksin), student activist groups, state workers unions and pro-military groups. The PDRC's support stemmed mostly from affluent Bangkokians and Southerners. Whistle-blowing was a central symbol of the protests.

Moreover, according to Agence France Presse (2013), anti-government protesters returned to the streets of Bangkok on Thursday as Parliament were debating the amnesty bill which the opponents believed that it would “whitewash” past abuses and allow ousted prime minister to return. Critics of the controversial legislation say it could unleash a fresh bout of political turmoil in a country rocked by a series of rival demonstrations since royalist generals toppled Thaksin in 2006. The opposition, Democrat Party, called for a mass rally against the planned amnesty outside a railway station in Bangkok on Thursday evening, thousands were predicted to attend.

By late afternoon, hundreds of people had already gathered at the site. Some were wearing bandanas reading “Fight” and waving clappers with the slogan “Stop the amnesty for corrupt people.” The ruling Puea Thai Party of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra ordered all its lawmakers to support the bill which would cover crimes related to political unrest since 2004. While a vote was expected to take place in the next few days, the demonstration was still in unrest.

The People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) Aims and Goals

Protests in recent years are seen to take place as to achieve two main political goals. The first one is working toward the rejection of an amnesty bill. According to the Guardian's report (2013), Thailand's Senate convened a highly charged session to determine the fate of an amnesty bill, which could pave the way for the return of the self-exiled former leader, Thaksin Shinawatra. Thousands of protesters rallied across Bangkok, raising concerns of renewed political violence after three years of relative calm. Nearly 7,000 police officers were deployed around the parliament, near the main protest site.

Consequently, Bangkok Post (2013) reported that senators have rejected the blanket amnesty bill in a bid to defuse political and social tensions. Anti-amnesty bill demonstrators march from Asok intersection to converge with another protest group from the Silom area at the Royal Thai Police Headquarters near Ratchaprasong and headed to Ratchadamnoen Avenue altogether. After 12 hours of debate, the senators shot down the controversial bill by 140 votes to 0.

After the rejection of an amnesty bill, the protest had shifted their aim and goal to Yingluck Shinawatra's resignation and political reform. Burma News (2013) reported that the Thai people at the moment stood resolute in their goal of creating a better,

brighter future for future generations. To attain these goals, reformation before the next bout of elections was necessary. Laws must be fair and just, corruption must be abolished and electoral fraud and vote buying leading to endless vicious cycles of graft must be uprooted. However, the illegitimate government under Yingluck Shinawatra which defiantly maintained its invalid claim to office was the main impediment to these reforms.

The People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) Members and Support Group

According to Bangkok Post (2014), although the Centre for Maintaining Peace and Order (CMPO) had decided to postpone revealing the names of 136 firms and individuals said to be funding anti-government protests, a list of 32 alleged financial backers has been leaked to the media. The reports identified 19 companies and 13 individuals who were allegedly funding People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) protests.

Post Today newspaper named the 19 companies as Saha Pathanapibul Plc, Gaysorn Plaza, Siam Paragon Department Store, King Power Group, Dusit Thani Hotel, Siam Intercontinental Hotel, Riverside Hotel, Mitr Phol Group, Wangkanai Group, Boon Rawd Brewery Co, Thai Beverage Plc, Yakult (Thailand) Co, Neptune Co, Thai Namthip Co, Muang Thai Life Assurance Co, Hello Bangkok Co and Metro Machinery Group. The 13 individuals were identified as Chumpol Suksai, Chalerm Yoovidhya, Pramon Suthiwong, Khunying Kallaya, Nuanphan Lamsam, Wimolphon Pitathawatcha, Dr Pichet Wiriyachitra, Taya Teepsuwan, Sakchai Guy, Krisana Mutitanant, Police General Kitti Rattanachaya, Chitpas Kridakorn and Issara Vongkusolkit.

However, PDRC secretary general, Suthep Thaugsuban, told supporters that none of the people on the list, except Sakchai Guy, had provided financial support to his political movement. Mr. Thaugsuban said Mr. Guy's donation to PDRC was from T-shirts selling. Similarly, many companies and individuals who were named to support PDRC denied that they did not support PDRC. For example, Saha Pathanapibul chief executive officer, Boonchai Chokwatana, denied that he helped funding the anti-government movement, and Mr. Pramon, chairman of Toyota (Thailand), also denied any financial involvement with the PDRC. Moreover, Bangkok Post (2013) reported that former leader of the People's Alliance for Democracy, Sondhi Limthongkul, was to join the rallies for the first time by starting a march from Ban Phra Arthit. Therefore, the yellow shirt group was to join PDRC to the massive rally against Yingluck Shinawatra's government.

The People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) Mobilization and Reaction

According to RT.com (2014), thousands of anti-government protesters marched through the streets of Bangkok to mobilize support for their campaign of shutting down the Thai capital on January 13 in their bid to topple Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's government. The march was the second in a series of marches planned to rally support for their goal. The protesters also claimed that early elections cannot be held until reforms had taken place. The Anti-government protesters began the "occupation" of Bangkok and the campaign called "shutdown Bangkok" by blocking major road intersections in the

center of the city. According to Asia Foundation survey report (2013), 98% of respondents participated in the PDRC organized Bangkok Shutdown campaign in an independent personal capacity, and 99% of respondents were reported that they made their own way to the demonstration sites and used the Internet, smart phones or social media to involve with the events.

According to Jakarta Post (2014) analysis, the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) has been extensively using social media to inform, invite and connect with supporters and the public. They are active in posting information, news and updates many times a day. They do this via facebook.com/PDRCThailand and Twitter at @CMDThai. The PRDC's Facebook page had 27,040 people talking about it and nearly 19,000 "friends" who liked it.

The PDRC's action is responded by two main groups namely the UDD, or the red shirts, and the caretaker government led by Yingluck Shinawatra. Both groups are against PDRC movements. Since PDRC seized of government buildings and public streets, the government considered the action to be threatening to the country, it thus declared a state of emergency. Consequently, the Centre for Maintaining Peace and Order (CMPO) was set up for dispersing the protesters.

Furthermore, The Nation (2014) reported that, on January 17, 2014, many red-shirt supporters arrived on motorcycles and in vans to challenge the anti-government protesters near the Chaeng Wattana rally site. Tension rose at the site at 11am when the red shirts arrived together with a sound truck. They announced through the public address system that that the rally at Chaeng Wattana was causing hardship to passenger van operators and local residents. Thai PBS (2014) also reported an attack in other areas. While the leader of anti-government groups were trying to campaign for the local people to support national reform to take place before an election, the crowd were harassed by red-shirt followers in Muang District of Chiang Mai.

Conclusion

According to the political movements in Thailand which have persisted since 2005, it is shown that Thai people have become increasingly involved and highly participated in both public space and cyber space. Many Facebook pages, websites and blogs have allowed Thai people to share their opinions and feelings about politics. These activities on the Internet are seen to be used by the Thais for mobilizing people on the street, rallying and occupying government building or main streets in the downtown of capital city. This chapter examines three main people factions who demonstrate and make an impact to Thai politics. These three groups of people have some similarities and differences in terms of aims, goals and political perception.

First of all, this paper compares each organization by focusing on social movements, political participation and democracy perception. In regard with the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), they started protest the government because of "policy corruption" in Thaksin Shinawatra's government and monarchy scandals. Similarly to the People's

Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), they also started protest government because of “policy corruption”, especially rice pledging scheme and bad public policy in Yingluck Shinawatra’s government. In contrast with the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), they started protest because of military coup and the rejection of Abhisit Vejjajiva’s government which they believe that the government was set up by military coup.

Moreover, each faction has similar strategies to mobilize political movements. All of them rally on the street especially in downtown Bangkok. The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) occupied luxury malls and was seen to use more violence than the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC). The PDRC, nevertheless, occupied government offices, asked bureaucrats to join their movements and seized main intersections around downtown Bangkok.

Furthermore, People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) have similar goals and aims which are: (1) to protect monarchy, (2) to oppose corruption, (3) to reform political system and (4) to eliminate Thaksin regime. On the other hand, objectives of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) are: (1) to create economic equitability, (2) to end aristocratic interests and elite networks, (3) to bring the ousted Thaksin Shinawatra back to Thailand and (4) to revoke the 2007 Constitution.

The People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD), People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) and United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) are all supported by different political parties. Both the PAD and the PDRC have Democrat Party to support their political movements. The PAD receives a partial support from the Democrat Party while the PDRC has a full support from the Democrat Party evidenced by the fact that its core leaders are former Democrat Party members. Similarly, the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) has also been fully supported by the Pheu Thai Party on their activities and movements.

The People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) have similar strategies to mobilize people. Both of them use social media. The PDRC successfully use social media as a tool to mobilize people. It is evident that the PDRC has used Facebook more extensively than the PAD and the UDD have. Meanwhile, United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) uses its own networks and use social media less than the two other groups. In addition, the majority people who join the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) are middle-class people, especially from Bangkok and the south, while the glass roots, who are mainly from the north and northeastern regions, join the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD).

In regard with the social movement aspect, all of them inevitably accept new social movement’s ideology. The NSMs has created the network linking movements of individual, community, and others. In this context, the PAD and the PDRC share some

similarities which are their organization and the people who support the movements and have common political ideology. When compare to the PAD and PDRC, the UDD's political ideology is more liberal, particularly in an economic aspect. Moreover, the UDD has a strong relations and network with political party as they are homogeneous, and they are thus definitely different from PAD and PDRC. Therefore, all of movements do not fit in the classic social movements which concern only class inequality. It can be concluded that these movements go beyond the classic and are shifted into a complexity of political ideology.

Apart from a new social movement ideology, each movement has similar and different political movement typology. Both the PAD and the PDRC are political movement groups while the UDD is a political interest group. The main reasons making the PAD and the PDRC political groups are they have common aims and goals, and they are not a solid organization unlike UDD. On the other hand, UDD is a political interest group because they focus on public policy rather than the other two, and they settle and expand their networks by reaching out to friends, relatives, and people in their own villages and communities rather than the PAD and the PDRC which rely on social media such as Facebook, Line and website.

In political participation aspect, all of political movements have been shifted from the past in Thai context. As Phongpaichit (2002) points out, the movements in Thailand include a wide variety of social groups. However, the significant fact about the Thai political movement that it is the large participation by the "little people" (marginal people) who have traditionally been excluded from a political voice. Therefore, ongoing political movements clearly indicate that the people are no longer "little people", instead, people from every class and every interest group in Thai society are all included. However, the majority who support each movement can be distinguished. The majority who support or join in PAD is the middle class, the UDD supporter's base are among glass roots people, and the PDRC is backed by the middle class particularly in Bangkok and the south.

Finally, democracy perception can be one of the most paradoxical concepts in the Thai political movement context as each political faction uses "democracy" to represent their movement and title. Each movement is driven by different democracy perceptions. The goal of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) is concerned with real democracy which has not been so far satisfied by the Thai representative democracy political system. This is evidenced by the fact that Thaksin Shinawatra can dominantly select the political party members to be his proxy. Although the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) also has a similar goal of overthrowing the Thaksin regime, it desires to go further than an elimination of Thaksin regime. The group wants the Thai political system to be reformed to be a more "green politics" and free from corruption. Meanwhile the aim of United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) is equal economy and economic policies must be formulated directly by an elected government. Therefore, the difference of democracy perception is the bedrock that brings about political conflict and unrest political movement.

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