

***The Role of Political Party and Political Movement in Thailand:
A Case Study on People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and People's Democratic
Reform Committee (PDRC)***

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Abstract

This paper argues that there is an hidden factor which impacted on Thai political conflicts. Thus, the political party played the main role and had strongly relations with political movements in Thailand and it has been created a turbulence in Thai political history. In PAD and PDRC camps, the Democrat Party is a Thai political party and it is the oldest in Thailand, upholds a conservatively and classically liberal pro-market position. As well as, their political ideology shifted to pro-middle class and upper class level rather than labor class. Then, several Democrat Party leaders allied themselves with the PAD and PDRC camp. Yet, some of them became a leader to protest government and occupied government building. Therefore, without a doubt this Thai political turmoil since 2005 until present political party is highly dominated Thai political ideology to Thai people.

Keywords: Political Party, Political Movement in Thailand, People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC)

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Introduction

This paper compares two political movements occurred in Thailand since 2005 to 2013. The political movements' scenario began with the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC). The discussion on mentioned political movement covers background, timeline events, and political movement process in terms of how they are organized, generated, mobilized, reacted, and analyzed on political party factor that dominant political movements in Thailand.

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) and Political Movement Timeline

- 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.

- After military coup toppled Mr. Shinawatra administration, the PAD was re-established in Thailand on March 28, 2008 at Thammasat University auditorium. Several issues were raised by the PAD, including the Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej's ties to Thaksin Shinawatra, ties between some People's Power Party members and the banned Thai Rak Thai party, alleged interference in the justice system and attempts to amend the 2007 Constitution. Demonstrations and street protests by the PAD restarted on May 25, 2008 at Democracy Monument on Ratchadamnoen Road. The PAD supporters amassed to protest against the proposed constitutional amendments. The rally attracted ten thousand supporters.
- On August 26, 2008: The PAD protesters invaded Government House, three ministries and headquarters of the NBT (National Broadcasting Services of Thailand). Little effort was made to remove the protesters from Government House although minor clashes between police and protesters were seen.
- On November 25, 2008: The PAD blockaded Don Mueang where the government held its temporary offices and occupied Suvarnabhumi International Airports, leaving thousands of tourists stranded and cutting off most of Thailand's international air connections. Several explosions and clashes occurred in the following days.

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) and Political Party

According to The popularity of the populist Thai Rak Thai Party in Thai politics from 2001 to 2006 presented new challenges to the Democrat Party. The TRT championed populist policies with its focus on providing affordable and quality health care for all citizens, village-managed microcredit development funds, the government-sponsored One Tambon One Product program, and others. The populist policies earned

the TRT enormous support from rural constituencies, unprecedented in Thailand's history.

According to the Nation (2008) reported that the opposition to the TRT government rose in Bangkok after Thaksin's family announced their tax-free sale of their 49.6% stake in Shin Corp to Temasek for almost 73.3 billion Baht on January 23, 2006. The People's Alliance for Democracy began a series of anti-government protests. Several Democrat Party leaders also joined the PAD, which accused Thaksin of disloyalty to the throne and asked King Bhumibol to appoint a replacement Prime Minister. Thaksin Shinawatra dissolved the House of Representatives on February 24, 2006 and called for an election. As well as The nation (2006) reported that on March 24, 2006, Abhisit Vejjajiva publicly backed the People's Alliance for Democracy's call for a royally-appointed government. Bhumibol, in a speech on 26 April 2006, responded, "Asking for a Royally-appointed prime minister is undemocratic. It is, pardon me, a mess. It is irrational".

Moreover, as Straits Times (2008) pointed out that Abhisit and his allies of opposition parties boycotted the April 2006 elections, claiming it "diverted public attention" from Thaksin's corruption charges and his sale of Shin Corp. The boycott caused a constitutional crisis, prompting Thaksin to call another round of elections in October 2006, which the Democrats did not boycott. The Army seized power on 19 September and cancelled the upcoming election.

Furthermore, as Bloomberg (2008) mentioned that The People's Alliance for Democracy resurfaced to destabilize the People's Power Government, after having gone into dormancy following the 2006 coup. Several Democrat Party leaders allied themselves with the PAD in the subsequent 2008–2010 Thai political crisis. The PAD organized extended street protests and later led a months-long seizure of Government House, the seat of the Thai government. In November 2008, PAD forces seized and occupied Don Muang Airport and Suvarnabhumi Airport. The PAD declared that the only person they would accept as Premier was Abhisit of the Democrat Party. Abhisit disapproved of the sieges, but did not stop his deputies from their roles in the PAD.

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 Udon 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 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) and Political Movements Timeline

In November 25, 2013, the anti-government protesters led by Suthep caused the closure of several government offices without police intervention as the government feared that this could result in a repeat 2006 military coup. It was a first day of People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) to be formed and demonstrated peacefully. Thirat News (2014), however, reported that within three months of demonstration of the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), there has been more than 50 times of violence between government and PDRC. There were approximately 628 people injured and 11 people killed since November 30, 2013 to February 12, 2014.

- November 25: Anti-government protesters began marching to several government offices forcing their way inside the Ministry of Finance, the Budget Bureau, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Public Relations Department and urged for their closure. The prime minister, Yingluck Shinawatra, invoked the Internal

Security Act (ISA) in all districts of Bangkok, Nonthaburi Province, Bang Phli and Lat Lum Kaeo Districts of Samut Prakan Province and Pathum Thani Province to handle the crowd.

- November 27, 2013: The protesters continued their activities by rallying to another ten ministry offices, cutting the electricity supply and forcing the evacuation of the people who worked at Department of Special Investigation's headquarters and staging a sit-in at the Chaeng Watthana Government Complex. Protesters also rallied to twenty-four provincial halls which were mainly in the South, a traditional Democrat Party base of support.
- November 30, 2013: An Internet services had been disrupted for several hours in the evening and in the morning of the next day. Violence erupted between anti-government protesters and the red shirts near Rajamangala Stadium. With gunshots fired, the clash resulted in 4 people died and 57 people wounded. The UDD leaders subsequently ended their rally in the following morning.
- December 9, 2013: The protest was attended by 160,000 people in the “final battle”.
- December 8, 2013: All 153 minority Democrat MPs jointly resigned. The collective action was seen as an attempt to further pressure the government.
- December 17, 2013: The PDRC Secretary Suthep Thaugsuban called for rallies with demanding slogan: reform before election, immediate resignation of Ms. Shinawatra and the cabinet, establishment of a non-elected People’s Council to start a reform process within 12 to 18 months and election under newly reformed Constitutions and Election Laws.
- December 27, 2013: Mr. Thaugsuban announced in a speech at the Democracy Monument in Bangkok that the anti-government protesters planned to shut down the Thai capital city following the so called “shut down Bangkok” campaign.

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, Wimolphan Pitathawatcha, Dr Pichet Wiriyachitra, Taya Teepsuwan, Sakchai Guy, Krisana Mutitanant, Police General Kittirattanachaya, Chitpas Kridakorn and Issara Vongkusolkrit.

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) and Political Party

According to Feigenblatt (2014) emphasized that it is important to understand the interests of the PDRC and its supporters. While the PDRC is a relatively diverse coalition they share some important interests. Many of the movement's leaders are disgruntled Democrat politicians who have found it increasingly difficult to have an impact on national policy due to the dwindling support for their party and the resulting weakness in the legislature.

In the same way, as Kongkirati (2015) stressed out that the urban middle class protesters and the southerners who were the staunch supporters of the Democrat Party, mobilized under the movement called the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) led by the then deputy head of the Democrat Party Suthep Thaugsuban, similarly as Sinpeng (2014) emphasized that the protest movement, the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), was largely led by the main opposition party in parliament, the Democrat Party. The Democrats, who have failed to win an election since 1992, decided to pursue street politics full-time and walked out of parliament to fight for power not through the ballot, but through the streets. Building on the frustration of the various groups that had been disaffected by the Shinawatra's rule, the Democrats saw an opportunity to mobilize their supporters to not only oust Pheu Thai, but also to put an end to electoral democracy.

Moreover, as Tiebtienrat (2015) pointed out that it is undeniable that among all PDRC leaders, Suthep Thaugsuban, former Secretary General of Democrat Party and Deputy Prime Minister of Democrat Administration, is most prominent. Similar to Chamlong, Suthep is an experienced politician as well as an exceptional orator. Referred to by supporters as "Uncle Kamnan" (District Headman), Suthep has been involved in national politics since 1979 as MP from Surat Thani. Throughout his long political career, he has been one of the most influential politicians as he was the

key informateur of many Democrat-led coalitions. Suthep nominated himself to the Secretary General of PDRC, which was well accepted by PDRC supporters. Beyond Suthep, the PDRC brought in a new generation of speakers. They may not be powerful enough to be considered leaders, but it is undeniable that these icons of a young generation have attracted significant numbers of young followers. Chitapas Birombhakdi Krisdakorn, who worked as deputy speaker of the Democrat Party, is among the most popular figures in social media. She has attracted large media attention in traditional and social media.

Furthermore, as Haller (2014) pointed out that The Democrat Party is the only serious opposition to Thaksin's Pheu Thai Party has not won an election since 1992. Knowing that the Democrats have little chance of gaining an upper hand in free and fair polls and frustrated by their regular defeats against the emerging political powers from the rural areas the Democrats and their Bangkok-based supporters are boycotting the February elections. "Democracy has not worked for the Democrats" is how The Economist described this phenomenon in an ironic remark. In a show of strong defiance, yellow-shirt protesters began to obstruct candidate registration by blocking access to temporary registration offices. It is still not clear if elections can proceed as planned.

In the same way, Thabchumpon, Sangkhamanee, Middleton, and Wongsatjachock analyzed that as within the Thai political situation in 2013, there were a lot of emerging political groups established as anti-government groups, not only in parliament but also outside of the formal government system. Although many groups had their own direction and strategy to oppose the government, they moved in general under the banner of the PDRC movement, which was also had informal links to the Democrat party.

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

As Tiebtienrat (2015) analyzed that the politicians having played prominent roles in civil movements can be discerned from the analysis presented here. Politicians such as Suthep are skilled orators who can influence a crowd. Politicians can provide an organizational structure and committed followers for a range of issues. As shown with the PAD and PDRC, new forms of technology can create a near-organizational structure: for the PAD/PDRC, the 4G internet network and social media, along with media organs including ASTV Manager, Bluesky Channel, and even RSU Wisdom TV. However, such structures do little to promote commitment to a cause.

It is easy to ignore a message over the internet, a Line message or phone call, but if one is a member of the Dharma Army or a politician's support network with one's friends and acquaintances, it is difficult to ignore a call for action. Furthermore, even well-organized civil society networks, such as state enterprise unions, may struggle to compete with political organizations. Because civil society networks are generally issue-oriented, they can have difficulty in maintaining loyalty, as seen in the defection of the NSCT and the Metropolitan Electricity Authority from the PAD/PDRC. On the other hand, political networks are loyal and committed to their leaders over the long term on a range of interests. This greater commitment seems to be the key to the role of politicians when civil society movements set out to overthrow a government. Therefore, without a doubt both PAD and PDRC camp. Are highly dominated and supported from Thai political party.

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