

***The Role of Political Party and Political Movement in Thailand: A Case Study on
United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD camp)***

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Abstract

This paper aimed to analyze the role and relationship between political party and political movement. In this case, we will analyze the Thai Rak Thai Party and the Pheu Thai Party which are both of them dominated by Thaksin and Yingluck Shinawatra. Therefore, this paper found that both Thaksin who was a leader in Thai Rak Thai Party and Yingluck who was a member and leader in the Pheu Thai Party are influenced and had a main role to dominate United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD camp) in political conflict since 2005 to present. Also both political parties are a part of UDD camp which was demonstrated and occupied downtown Bangkok. Therefore, Thai political conflicts in 2005-2013 were a conflict between two big Thai political parties and demonstrators became as a tool for demanding against democracy rule.

Keywords: Political Party, Political Movement, United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship

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Introduction

According to Global nonviolence action database (2010) explained on Thai political conflicts that 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. Protests leaders 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.

The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD camp)

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.

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 state 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.

Aim and Goal of United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD camp)

According to the website of the red shirts or the UDD, the group has six objectives to achieve which are:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. To promote non-violence as the modus operandi for all activities.

4. 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.
5. 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.
6. To revoke the 2007 Constitution and its unjust laws that favor certain military and elite interest and to draw up a new democratic Constitution.

United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship’s people and political party

The United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD whose supporters are commonly called red shirts, is a political pressure group opposed to the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), the 2006 Thai coup d'état, and supporters of the coup. Notable UDD leaders include Jatuporn Prompan, Nattawut Saikua, Veera Musikapong, Charan Ditthapichai, and Weng Tojirakarn. The UDD allies itself with the Pheu Thai Party, which was deposed by the 2014 military coup. Before the July 2011 national elections, the UDD claimed that Abhisit Vejjajiva's government took power illegitimately, backed by the Thai Army and the judiciary. The UDD called for the Thai Parliament to be dissolved so that a general election could be held. UDD accused the country's extra-democratic elite the military, judiciary, certain members of the privy council, and other unelected officials of undermining democracy by interfering in politics. The UDD is composed of mostly rural citizens from northeast (Isan) and north Thailand, of urban lower classes from Bangkok, and of intellectuals. Although the movement seems to receive support from former prime minister-in-exile Thaksin Shinawatra, not all UDD members support the deposed prime minister. Also 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. Also, Moreover, Paireepairit (2012) gives some examples on red-shirt used 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.

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.

Moreover, the UDD in Northern and Northeastern part of Thailand gathered together and created a community which so called “Red-shirt villages” in the North and Northeast now number in the thousands, and their leaders are focused on expanding to the South. This proud show of grass-roots solidarity and political ideology concerns the group’s political rivals, and the military. The thousands of red-shirt villages were conferred by three groups; the Thai Federation of Red Shirt Villages for Democracy, the Democratic Front of Red Shirt Villages, and National United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), which is closely linked to the ruling Pheu Thai Party.

According to The nation (2012) reported that in October 2011, the Thai Federation of Red Shirt Villages for Democracy was officially set up by Anon and other leaders of red-shirt villages at the urging of former PM Thaksin Shinawatra. It now has about 1,000 villages under its influence, with more than 400 of them in Udon and Khon Kaen. Another group, the Democratic Front of Red Shirt Villages, is led by Phetsak Kittidussadeekul, a prominent red-shirt in Udon Thani. The group controls about 200 villages in Udon and Roi Et.

In the Red-shirt villages under the three groups carry signs with messages like “Red-shirt villages for democracy” or “red-shirt villages love democracy”. But the key difference between them is that villages set up by Anon’s and Phetsak’s groups also have Thaksin’s picture beside the village sign

Yet, according to Thabchumpon and Maccargo (2011), the most prominent leaders or the “trio” include: Veera Musikaphong, a veteran politician, former Democrat Party secretary general and deputy interior minister in the 1980s; Jatuporn Phromphan, Member of Parliament (MP) from Pheu Thai Party; and Nattawut Saikua, former government spokesman.

Despite the image of the UDD as a group which is based in North and Northeast Thailand, all three members of the trio are Southerners. In contrast to these professional politicians, some other leading figures in the UDD have an academic or social-activist orientation. For example, Jaran Dithapichai is a former university lecturer and human rights commissioner, Waeng Tojirakan is a doctor and former leader of the May 1992 pro-democracy movement, Wisa Khantap is a singer, artist, and political campaigner and Woraphon Phrommikabut is a lecturer and former dean of the Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology at Thammasat University in Bangkok.

Other second-tier leaders are essentially populist agitator: For example, Arisman Phongruangrong is former pop singer and May 1992 activist, Kwanchai Phraiphana used to be a popular community radio host, Suphorn Atthawong is known as Rambo Isan and a

former Thai Rak Thai MP from Nakorn Ratchasima Province, and Yosawarit Chooklom is known as the comedian named Jaeng Dokjik. Apart from Mr. Phromphan, most of these leaders were supportive of a negotiated settlement in May 2010. However, the deal was blocked by three hard-line elements which are:

1. Members of Thaksin Shinawatra's family, including his sister Yingluck Shinawatra who was elected as a prime minister in August 2011.
2. A group known as "Red Siam," led by self-exiled former Prime Minister's Office Minister Jakkrapop Penkair, joined by a former member of Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), Surachai Danatthananusorn, and accused of having strong ties with Mr. Shinawatra by the authorities of republican leanings.
3. Maverick army General Khattiya Sawasdipol, best known as Seh Daeng. Seh Daeng was the chief trainer of a key element in the UDD security team called "King Taksin's warriors" (Nakrop Prachao Tak). He was widely seen as the leader of a shadowy group of "men in black" and was allegedly responsible for grenade launcher attacks on both military and civilian targets.

Furthermore, according to BBC (2012) analyzed that Mr Thaksin, a telecommunications magnate had governed Thailand for five years. He was very popular among the rural farmers and urban working class because he initiated policies that benefited them, such as funding for health-care and education.

When elections were held 18 months after the military coup, this rural support had not changed, even though Mr Thaksin was in overseas exile. Voters from Thailand's north and north-east returned his allies to power, only to see the government fall after a series of opposition protests and court rulings. So the red-shirts began protesting. Their first major protest began in March 2009 with a series of sit-ins outside government offices, but quickly escalated.

In April 2009 they forced the cancellation of a regional political summit after storming the venue in the seaside resort of Pattaya. Violence then erupted in Bangkok. Clashes involving troops, protesters and Bangkok residents left at least two people dead and dozens hurt. As troops massed, the red-shirts called off their protests. Leaders said they feared more loss of life. But their anger had not gone away and, in March 2010, they called fresh protests in Bangkok aimed at toppling the government. Tens of thousands of people occupied Bangkok's historic and commercial districts and at one point stormed parliament, forcing MPs to flee. Red-shirts also stormed a satellite transmission base, in a bid to restart a television station which had been shut down by the government.

The first bloodshed occurred on 10 April when at least four soldiers and 17 civilians were killed in clashes as the army tried to disperse the red-shirts from one of their two bases in Bangkok. The violence shocked the city - but the red-shirts consolidated their forces in one camp, closing down the city's commercial heart for several more weeks. On 19 May armed government troops moved into the red-shirt camp, smashing through barricades. By the end of the day, the camp had been cleared, several of the group's leaders arrested and dozens of people, including protesters and soldiers, killed. A year on, many of their

leaders have been released on bail. The red-shirts are now allies of the ruling Pheu Thai Party. Yingluck Shinawatra, Mr Thaksin's sister, led the party to a landslide victory in July 2011 and became Thailand's first woman prime minister.

Also, Walker (2008) analyzed that it seems hard to escape the conclusion that the Red Shirt protests of 2010 were a calculated coalition between two broad sets of interests. On one hand were the lower and middle-income peasantries of Thailand's north and northeast who believe with some justification that development in Thailand is avoiding them. On the other hand were Thaksin Shinawatra and his supporters who wish to oppose the current regime, unfreeze his assets, and even possibly allow Thaksin to return to power. In this sense, it seems both sides are using each other the peasants to gain funding and political visibility and Thaksin to mobilize people to destabilize the government. After all, this is a similar situation when Thai Rak Thai was elected in the early 2000s. Thaksin mobilized poorer voters to allow him to gain power. We should not be surprised if voters support him if he also provides them with benefits.

As Thabchumpon and Mccargo (2011) pointed out that overall, the redshirt movement was an extremely pragmatic alliance among groups ranging from idealistic post-leftists to others of a rather thuggish disposition: elements from the two sides that had fought one another in the 1970s were now collaborating. The ambiguous relationship between the self-exiled Thaksin and the redshirt leaders was a complicating factor in understanding the movement's decision-making process because it was unclear how far the hard-liners really represented the former prime minister's own stance. Yet, a focus on the leadership reveals relatively little about the movement itself, given the lack of direct connection between many of the UDD's leading figures and their grassroots supporters. Respected medical doctor, social activist, and elder statesman Prawase Wasi later appointed by the Abhisit government to chair a national reform committee argued after the April 10 violence that there were five types of redshirts.¹⁵ These he classified as (1) Thaksin himself; (2) those hired by Thaksin; (3) "idealistic" reds; (4) violent extremists; and (5) the poor and their sympathizers, from both urban and rural areas. Prawase was entirely correct to highlight the diverse nature of the redshirt movement, and there is ample evidence that Thaksin, idealists, and extremists were all involved.

Conclusion

Without a doubt, Thailand has been experience politics unstable since 2005 until present. It was begin since Thaksin Shinawatra took his position as Prime Minister of Thailand in 2001, until now his sister Yingluck Shinnawatra took control Thai government and ran country under "populist policy". However, under populist policy, Thaksinomic, and governed by Thaksin regime have been created political tension between supporters and protesters. The supports as UDD group or RED camp empirically that both Thanksin who was a leader in Thai Rak Thai Party and Yinkluck who was a member and leader in the Pheu Thai Party are influenced and had a main role to dominated United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD camp) in political conflict since 2005 to present. Also both political parties is a part of UDD camp whose was demonstrated and occupied downtown Bangkok. Therefore, Thai political conflicts in 2005-2013 was a conflict

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