3

Thailand

Electoral Intimidation

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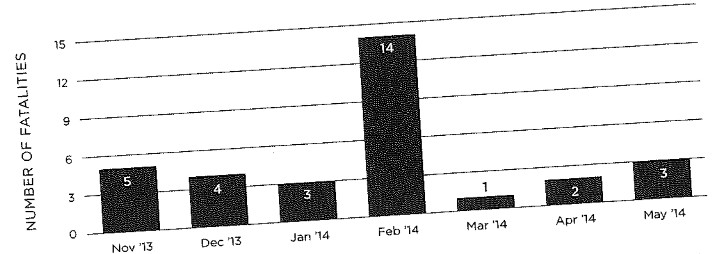
Thailand's snap general election of February 2, 2014, was among the most troublesome contests in the country's history. Called under duress, it followed massive street protests against the government of Yingluck Shinawatra, sister of former premier Thaksin Shinawatra. Thailand's politics had been growing intensely polarized for some years, especially after Thaksin was ousted in the 2006 military coup. Pro-Thaksin forces continued to win elections after the coup but were strongly opposed in certain segments of Thai society, notably the Bangkok middle class. The country's main opposition party, the Democrats, went so far as to boycott the 2014 election, and protest groups aligned with the opposition conspired to subvert the election process in a number of ways. Candidate registration was prevented in some parts of the country; the run-up to the election was marred by violent clashes; most of the polling stations in Bangkok and the upper south were closed on January 26, the day set for advance voting; and voting on February 2 was disrupted, especially in the south. The election was subsequently annulled by the Constitutional Court, and on May 22 Yingluck's Pheu Thai Party was removed from office in a military coup.

Unprecedented levels of intimidation, fear, and various forms of nonlethal violence had characterized the election.[1] The death toll was significant as well, at about thirty.[2] These developments reflected significant failings in the mechanisms that could have helped prevent election violence. No well-thought-out strategy was in place to mitigate the highly charged atmosphere. The few international and local preventive efforts were piecemeal and had little positive impact. This chapter argues that better election management, more systematic election monitoring, and above all a strong security-sector commitment to preventing intimidation would have increased the prospects for a more peaceful election.

Despite the prevalence of intimidation, however, fatalities were no higher than in 2005 (see figure 3.1). At the same time, applied models for preventing election violence (PEV models) were for the most part limited or absent: security-sector engagement was

Figure 3.1 Thailand Election Fatalities



Source: Erawan Emergency Center, January 19, 2015, supplemented by news reports; Prajak Kongkirati, "Bullets, smoke bombs, mass clashes and polling: conflict and violence in the February 2, 2014 general election" unpublished undated paper, c. January 2015

largely ineffective, election management and administration was weak, civic and voter education campaigns were absent, monitoring and mapping was piecemeal at best, and voter consultations were nonexistent. Despite a few weak and unsuccessful efforts at preventive diplomacy and partisan peace messaging the picture for the study of preventing election violence was fairly grim. The larger project behind this study asks why priority models often fail in high violence scenarios. The question here is how strong prevention models could have prevented violence in the Thai social and political context.

History of Election Violence

The norm in Thailand since 1975, election-related violence was widely anticipated in 2014—especially given the highly charged political conditions. Nationalism scholar Benedict Anderson famously argued that the rise of such violence in fact marks the coming of age of elections in developing democracies, indicating that political power may actually change hands as the result of polling.[3]

Invaluable data on Thai election violence gleaned from an extensive review of newspaper sources are collected in a database compiled by Prajak Kongkirati in 2013 for Australian National University. The database is populated by violent incidents in the period from the day after parliament was dissolved until a month after election day for fourteen national elections between 1975 and 2011.[4] Only physical violence against people, both injuries and fatalities, or the property of election-related actors is included.

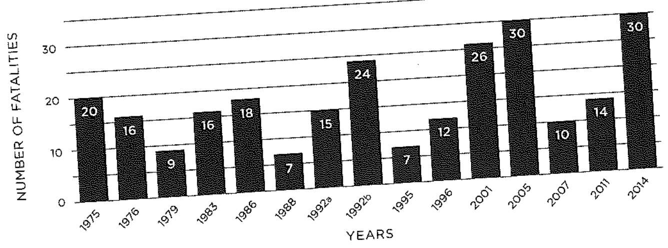
Voter intimidation, though it is difficult to quantify and is omitted in the Prajak study, is another form of election violence that can seriously thwart prospects for peaceful elections, both disrupting the election process and often heralding an escalation of physical violence.[5]

Throughout the period, preelection violence was by far the most common—accounting for more than 86 percent of the violence between 2001 and 2011, for example.[6] The clear implication is that violence is most useful in setting the tone for an impending election, removing potential threats, and intimidating or eliminating challengers. The main trend since the 1970s has been a sharp decline in election day violence, and a smaller increase in postelection violence to 12 percent for the 2001–2011 period. This suggests that one factor underpinning violence was "settling scores"—for example, punishing vote canvassers who had double-crossed candidates by taking money from both sides, or failing to distribute cash intended for vote-buying. Prajak argues that more effective PEV strategies have at times helped mitigate postelection violence: for example, he recommends the improved vote counting and complaints procedures used by the Election Commission (EC) in the 2005 elections.[7] Reducing election violence has been facilitated under the changed conditions since 2006 because Thai elections now entail greater real choice between alternative policy and political platforms, seen in the standoff between pro-Thaksin and anti-Thaksin forces. However, when polarization reaches an extreme form it may generate new modes of violence, incited this time not by provincial godfathers, but by national political figures who use overheated rhetoric to assail their opponents.

Unfortunately, Prajak omits data for the 2006 election—which, like that of 2014, was boycotted by the opposition and later annulled—from his work. Yet the overall level of election violence has changed relatively little over thirty-two years: an average of sixteen deaths and eighteen injuries. During the fourteen elections prior to 2014, the total fatalities dropped to single figures only twice, and exceeded twenty only three times: 1992, 2001, and 2005 (see figure 3.2). The high figure for September 1992 surely reflects the intense polarization following the so-called bloody May protests of that year, but the reason for high levels of violence in the two Thaksin victory elections is less obvious. Prajak attributes them to the highly competitive political atmosphere of this period, when Thaksin fought a controversial "war on influential people" aimed at curbing the power of provincial politicians and creating space for his candidates to appeal to the voters using populist policy platforms. The low levels of violence during the highly contested 2007 and 2011 polls are also quite surprising, although martial law was in effect in twenty-six provinces in 2007. The regional election monitoring body Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) ascribed the lack of violence that year to a postcoup climate of fear in which free speech was harshly suppressed.[8] The low levels of injuries during the fourteen elections prior to 2014 suggest that election violence was mostly targeted. Assassination attempts amounted to more than 50 percent of the total 463 violent incidents during elections in this period.[9]

On the face of it, the 2006 military coup and subsequent national political polarization did not increase electoral violence. In fact, until 2014, the opposite was true. The recent trend in Thai politics has been toward high electoral polarization, but extremely aggressive public rhetoric has been mirrored by an overall decline in political murders. Prajak argues that this trend shows how the more ideological character of Thai politics "stifled and marginalized provincial bosses, thereby decreasing the demand for violence."[10] Given this background, it may be unsurprising that only thirty people were actually killed in events relating to the February 2014 elections, despite the unprecedented fear and numbers of attempts to disrupt the election process. In 2014, the

Figure 3.2 Thailand Election Fatalities, Historic



Note: 1992a and 1992b were separate elections held in March and September of that year.

Source: Prajak Kongkirati, "Bosses, Bullets and Ballots" (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2013), tables 2.11, 4.3, 6.1; data supplied to authors by Erawan Emergency Center, January 19, 2015, supplemented by news reports; Prajak Kongkirati, Bullets, smoke bombs, mass clashes and polling: conflict and violence in the February 2, 2014 general election, unpublished undated paper, c. January 2015

dominant mode of violence shifted from attacks on rival candidates and canvassers to large-scale attempts to intimidate voters—approximately six million of whom were affected—election officials, and those who supported holding the polls. This shift has, however, resulted in an unprecedented increase in election-related injuries, from sixteen in 2011 to 459 in 2014.[11] Although large-scale physical violence that resulted in fatalities was limited, this cycle was rife with other forms of election violence—including intimidation—that stronger prevention models could potentially have prevented.

Roots of Political Polarization

The February 2014 general election in Thailand was highly charged and took place in an intensely polarized political context. Thailand—formerly Siam—was historically an absolute monarchy. This changed in 1932, when the political system was opened up after a "revolution" staged by an elite group of military officers and civilian officials who called themselves the People's Party but were not supported by any mass mobilization of the populace.[12] From the outset, the new system of government proved highly contested as rival emergent cliques jostled for power and royalists sought to retain as much of their former influence as possible. By the end of the 1950s, the pattern began to change: the military formed a strategic alliance with the monarchy, greatly boosting the standing and prestige of King Bhumibol. Civilian political forces were marginalized until the 1970s—which saw mass student-led demonstrations on the streets of Bangkok—after which parliamentary politics staged a gradual comeback.

By the 1990s, Thailand superficially resembled many other countries in the Asia-Pacific, where rapid economic growth, the rise of a new middle class, the emergence of a dynamic provincial business sector, and an incredibly rapid social transformation was leading to a much more open and democratic political order. This openness was symbolized by the relatively progressive "people's constitution" of 1997, which codified a raft of new political and social rights and backed up a range of independent agencies, including a constitutional court, an election commission, and a national human rights commission.[13]

Unfortunately, this apparent democratic transition was only skin-deep. The dark side of Thai politics for decades had been a chronic instability, manifested in a vicious cycle featuring successively a military coup, redrafting of the constitution, a period of relative normalcy during which electoral politics was able to function, and then the emergence of crisis—often heralded by huge mass rallies in central Bangkok—which triggered another military coup. The result was that Thailand has experienced more military coups—and drafted more constitutions in recent decades—than any country in the world.[14]

The people's constitution was supposed to lay this vicious cycle of instability to rest. In practice, however, the new constitution coincided with the 1997 economic crisis, which saw the value of the Thai baht collapse and forced the country into the unwelcome arms of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The primary beneficiary of Thailand's new mood of economic nationalism was the billionaire telecommunications tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra, who had already made a couple of unsuccessful attempts to build a political power base.[15] His new party, Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais), brought up electable politicians from across the party spectrum and achieved overwhelming victories in the 2001 and 2005 general elections.

Thaksin's primary support base lay among the urbanized villagers of the north and northeast, many of whom spent most of their time working in Bangkok and other areas of the country with dynamic industrial and service sectors.[16] They were upwardly mobile and ambitious for themselves and for their children, weary of decades of royalist paternalism. By targeting rural-based voters and demonstrating that they could be mobilized for political purposes, Thaksin was undermining the traditional support base of the monarchy and tapping into the same areas of the population that supplied most of the conscripts for Thailand's armed forces. Over time, Thaksin began increasingly to alienate the Bangkok establishment. Thaksin was ousted from power in the military coup of September 19, 2006, and apart from a brief spell in 2008 has lived in self-imposed exile ever since, based mainly in Dubai.[17]

Attempts to eradicate Thaksin's influence recurred: his political parties were legally dissolved in 2007 and 2008; he and most of his lieutenants received a five-year ban on holding political office in 2007; and he was given a jail sentence in 2008 on corruption-related charges. Despite all this, a pro-Thaksin party won decisively in the 2007 general election. Nevertheless, tensions still ran deep in the highly polarized political order. In late 2008, the pro-Thaksin government was ousted from power by a series of backroom maneuvers that allowed the Democrat Party's Abhisit Vejjajiva to become prime minister. Street protests were followed by the pro-Thaksin red shirt movement in 2009 and 2010. The 2010 protests were in turn violently dispersed by the military, resulting in more than ninety fatalities. In August 2011, following another strong electoral showing, Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra became prime minister, apparently as a result of an elite pact under which she agreed both to not challenge the privileges of the military or the monarchy, and to keep her brother away from Thailand. Yingluck's government presided over a degree of normalcy until late 2013, when it apparently violated the tacit understandings behind the elite pact.

Key Developments

In the final weeks of 2013, anti-Thaksin protests started once again on the streets of Bangkok, this time triggered by ill-considered attempts on the part of the Yingluck government to push an amnesty bill through parliament for all those who had been charged of political offenses in the wake of the 2006 coup. It was an open secret that the main beneficiary of the legislation, approved by the lower house on November 1, would have been Thaksin himself. Under pressure from vociferous protests, the government withdrew the proposed legislation before it was promulgated.

This time the anti-Thaksin movement was spearheaded by a group calling itself the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC).[18] Its leader was Suthep Thueksuban, former deputy prime minister (2008–2011) and former secretary-general of the opposition Democrat Party. Violent clashes broke out between pro- and antigovernment protesters on November 30, resulting in five fatalities and more than a hundred injuries. The PDRC demanded that Yingluck dissolve parliament and call fresh elections, which she did on December 9. The PDRC, however, then escalated its protests, calling for a wholesale reform of the political system and the permanent exclusion of the Shinawatra family from public life. The Democrat Party proceeded to announce a boycott of the elections, doubtless hoping that this would delegitimize the process and force Yingluck from power.

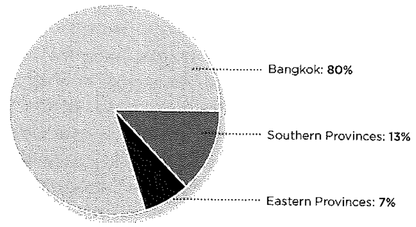
Further violent clashes between police and demonstrators took place at the Thai-Japanese Stadium on December 26, where protesters tried to disrupt the candidate registration process and three more people were killed. The PDRC protests culminated in the Bangkok Shutdown movement of January 13, 2014, when demonstrators occupied eleven major sites across the capital—paralyzing traffic, curtailing commerce, and driving tourists away in the height of the season. Each protest site was equipped with a stage for speakers and musicians and included hi-tech sound and video systems. Some of Thailand's top entertainment stars gave nightly free concerts at the rallies, which attracted a large following among middle-class Bangkokians.[19] The popularity of the protests, however, gradually waned after various incidents of violence—including twenty-eight people being injured by a grenade attack at the Victory Monument site on January 19—and growing complaints from the big companies underwriting their expenses that the extended demonstrations were harming business. PDRC leader Suthep abruptly called off Bangkok Shutdown at the end of February, and the remaining protesters moved to an off-street location in Lumpini Park on March 3.

Because of the disruption by the PDRC and its allies, conducting the 2014 general election was difficult. The scale of the likely problems became apparent on Sunday, January 26, the designated day for early voting. On this date, those who would not be in their home areas were supposed to be able to cast their ballots. More than two million people had registered for advance voting, including just under one million in Bangkok. Polling on the day, though, was disrupted in ten provinces, mainly in Bangkok and the upper south; did not take place in eighty-seven of the country's 375 constituencies; and was prevented or halted in forty-nine of Bangkok's fifty administrative districts, which do not correspond to its thirty-three parliamentary seats. Those people unable to cast preregistered advance votes were not eligible to vote on election day itself.[20] More than 97 percent of advance votes were by absentee voters—people who were living away from the places where they were registered to vote, many of whom were pro-Pheu Thai "urbanized villagers." In other words, disrupting the advance voting process directly affected Yingluck's core vote. On the night of the early voting, speakers at the PDRC stages were jubilant about the degree of disruption they had caused. One speaker declared that people he had seen trying to vote that day did not love Thailand in the same way that he and his audience did. Indeed, he was sure that most of them were not Thai at all but instead Cambodians with fake voter identifications. For the protesters, voting was now far from a civic duty or a political right: it had become instead an act of national betrayal.

On election day, 127 of Thailand's 375 constituencies saw disruptions (see figure 3.3). No voting at all was conducted in nine provinces in the upper south: Songkhla, Trang, Phatthalung, Phuket, Surat Thani, Ranong, Krabi, Chumphon, and Phang-nga. It went ahead unhindered in the insurgency-affected Malay majority provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, where local political leaders apparently made clear to PDRC-leaning government officials that they would not tolerate any attempts to interfere with polling. Nor did voters in the populous north or northeast, both Thaksin strongholds, encounter any problems, and polling was disrupted in only five of 127 constituencies in the central and eastern regions.

During the early voting there were violent clashes between PDRC protesters and pro-government groups: one PDRC leader was shot dead and ten people were injured at a polling station in Bang Na (in Eastern Bangkok) on January 26. The day before the election, a dramatic gunfight broke out on the streets in Laksi district (Northern Bangkok) between redshirts and PDRC supporters who had been preventing the distribution of ballot boxes. Seven people were wounded, including three journalists.[21] On election day, disruption in the capital was confined largely to three districts where polling was halted: Ratchathewi, Laksi, and Din Daeng.

Figure 3.3 Geographic Spread of Fatalities in Thailand



Source: Author's calculation

Protesters occupied the Ratchathewi District Office—the ballot box distribution center for the eighty-six polling stations across the district—from early morning. A large PDRC sound truck was stationed outside the district office; a succession of speakers addressed a crowd of hundreds from the top of the vehicle, urging them to make sure that no voting took place. Inside the official compound, white ballot boxes were laid out in rows rather like tombstones, "guarded" from a distance by dozens of PDRC supporters intent on ensuring that they did not leave the district office.[22] One of the officials in charge of the polling seemed resigned to canceling the ballot. Meanwhile, a local school principal who was supposed to serve as director of one of the polling stations complained that too few volunteers served on the polling station committees. Thirty of the eighty-six polling stations had no committees at all, only directors. Normally, some of the polling officials would be sent by the district office to make up the shortfall, but this time the task had been delegated largely to schoolteachers.

Protesters and district officials, most of whom appeared to be PDRC sympathizers, colluded actively. One senior official repeatedly declared his unhappiness that they had been asked to hold the election, which he considered illegitimate. Indeed, it later transpired that voting tents—normally erected the day before an election—had not been set up at polling stations in the district. Little serious effort to hold the election was actually made in Ratchathewi; the loud cheers that went up from the crowd when local officials announced the cancellation of polling in the district were just the culmination of an elaborate charade.[23] Overall, what happened in Ratchathewi was atypical: 6,155 of the capital's 6,671 polling stations opened on voting day; 516 (less than 8 percent) did not. But this form of structural violence—complicity between election officials and protesters to prevent and obstruct the polling process—epitomized the fraught nature of the electoral process in Thailand.

Following the election, the Democrat Party compounded matters when it took legal action to have the polls invalidated on the basis that they were illegitimate. Ultimately, the Constitutional Court did retroactively declare the February 2 election invalid, on the grounds that voting had not taken place in all constituencies on the same day. As International Crisis Group noted, "The decision did not mention the actions of anti-government protesters that prevented the election from taking place on the same day throughout the country."[24] Yingluck herself was ousted as premier on May 7. But even her departure was not enough to stabilize the situation. Thailand's military declared martial law on May 20 and then staged a full-blown coup d'état two days later.

The most striking features of the February 2014 elections included the boycott by the opposition Democrat Party and the anti-election demonstrations and disruptive tactics by the PDRC, a movement with very close ties to the Democrats. In effect, the Democrat boycott rendered the elections meaningless, ensuring that even a strong win for the Pheu Thai Party (PTP, or For Thais Party) could not offer Yingluck a viable way to restore her authority in the wake of the amnesty bill crisis and the Bangkok Shutdown protests. In short, the 2014 election was bound to fail.

Judged as a short-term instrumental measure, the boycott was highly successful, putting Thaksin and Yingluck on the defensive and preventing them from capitalizing on their main strength—popularity at the polls. But by boycotting elections and supporting

Photo 3.1 Respect My Veto poster at PDRC rally site

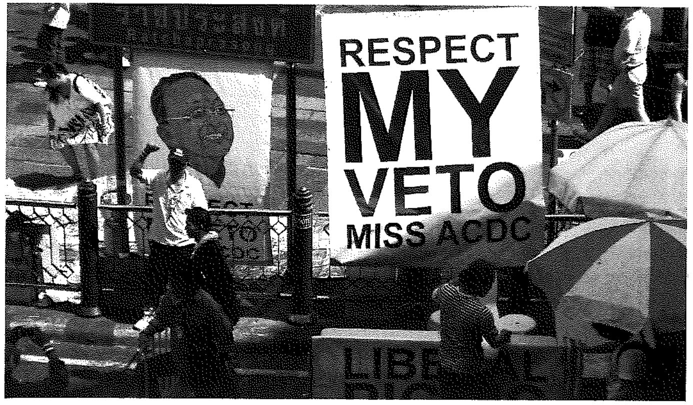


Photo Credit: Duncan McCargo

Photo 3.2 Protestors celebrate successful polling disruption

Photo Credit: Duncan McCargo

a shift to rally politics, the Democrats were violating their own long-standing insistence on supporting the constitutional order; arguably, polling boycotts themselves constituted a form of electoral violence. The willingness of the main opposition party to subvert the electoral process helped create the conditions for a disrupted election, and made violence an extremely likely outcome.

The presence of large numbers of PDRC-aligned protesters in Bangkok—and others in many parts of the south—made conducting a peaceful and orderly election extremely difficult. Emotions were running high, not only among those who regularly attended the PDRC rallies, but also among sympathizers who sported Thai-flag-themed clothing and accessories throughout the period. In such a climate, even expressing support for holding an election was regarded in many circles as an expression of social deviance that bordered on the treasonous. Saying anything positive about Yingluck or Pheu Thai was even more difficult.

At the same time, the conditions in central Bangkok and the upper south were quite different from those in the rest of the country. Support for Yingluck and Pheu Thai remained strong in the north and northeast, where there were few attempts to disrupt polling. For those living in the capital, the firm support of most voters for the election was both invisible and inaudible—a testament to the large gaps in geography, income, ethnicity, class, information and perception that characterized Thailand's polarized political order. The badly written (or perhaps well-written) electoral laws, which stated that a new government could not be appointed if any fewer than 95 percent of parliament could take their seats, meant that disrupting the ballot in a relatively small number of constituencies allowed protesters to sabotage the entire election.

Expectations of further electoral disruption and violence were widespread in Thailand before February 2014, reflecting the extremely political polarization in the country, the mass demonstrations under way for more than three months, the eleven key blocked intersections in Bangkok for three weeks prior to the election, and the series of violent clashes in the run-up to the polls. The mass violence of April and May 2010—in which more than ninety people were killed—was nearly four years in the past, but they were a reminder that street protests in the capital could easily spill over into bloodshed. Holding elections in February 2014 was rather gratuitous: the Yingluck government still had nearly eighteen months in office. In retrospect, nothing was gained by her dissolving parliament; holding an election was simply an additional step in opposition attempts to challenge the authority of the ruling party and lay the groundwork for removing Yingluck from office without an election, facilitating an eventual military coup.

The election process included a series of troubling incidents and triggers for disruption and instability. The opposition—both the Democrat Party and those aligned with the PDRC—engaged in constant verbal personal attacks on Yingluck, Thaksin, and the ruling Pheu Thai Party, often using misogynistic language.[25] In an attempt to bolster the image of the election, pro-government groups mounted a Respect My Vote campaign, using the slogan "Don't look down on the people." The PDRC countered with Respect my Veto posters that ridiculed the PTP and cast aspersions concerning Yingluck's supposedly ACDC sexuality.

Other important triggers for instability included the persistent legalism of those who opposed the election. Initially, the PDRC and the Democrats loudly demanded that Yingluck dissolve the parliament and call an election. But, having achieved this goal, they then began a series of challenges—submitted to the Election Commission and the courts—aimed at delaying the polls. Once the election had been held, the opposition promptly complained that it was invalid and sought to have it annulled. They accused the Yingluck government of abusing its power by spending money on holding an election, even though the opposition had demanded the election and the government had never sought it. This alleged abuse of power was one basis of the calls for Yingluck's impeachment.

Electoral System

Thailand's electoral system has undergone regular changes over the past two decades: a multimember constituency system was replaced by a combination of single member constituencies and proportional representation in 1997, and further modifications came in 2007. Broadly, these changes have favored larger parties; smaller parties struggled to win seats, and several of them merged with larger parties or were unable to re-form when they were banned by the courts; relatedly some parties have been banned since 2006 for alleged election fraud. The result was a virtual two-party system, in which a large pro-Thaksin party has competed at election times mainly with the old-established Democrats. This system favors majoritarian governments, which has fueled political polarization and with it the potential for election violence. For most of this period, the Democrats have been the more popular party in Bangkok, especially among higher- and middle-income voters; the two major parties have never been all that far apart in the proportional representation vote. However, pro-Thaksin parties easily won the 2001, 2005, 2007, and 2011 elections based on their consistently stronger appeal to constituency voters in the populous north and northeast regions of the country. Thus the ideological divide between the two main parties was also a class and regional divide.

Electoral outcomes are only one factor in determining who holds political office in Thailand; support from the military and the monarchical network are almost equally important. Governments and prime ministers have changed with great frequency in recent decades in the wake of elections, the collapse of governments following no confidence debates, coalition reshuffles, judicial ousters, and military coups: seven prime ministers between 2006 and 2014 alone.

Contextual Vulnerabilities

Contextual vulnerabilities define the context or risk environment in which preventive efforts operate, based on the existing literature about the drivers of election violence. In the Thai case, they include overcentralization, internal contestation among state agencies, incomplete democratic consolidation, and polarized civil society.

Centralization

Thailand has a highly centralized political order in which power and resources are overwhelmingly in the hands of the Bangkok elite. In this respect, power structures mirror horizontal inequalities in society. Elected local government is in place at the subdistrict, municipal, and provincial levels, but local politicians are closely overseen by the bureaucracy and have limited freedom of maneuver. Most important, their capacity to raise local tax revenues or to determine local legislation is highly restricted. Provincial governors, all of whom are appointed in Bangkok and sent out to the provinces, still hold considerable authority and prestige. Local army and police commanders, also centrally appointed, are especially powerful. Wealth is overwhelmingly concentrated in and around Bangkok, which is also home to virtually all of the country's top schools, hospitals, and universities.

This centralization fuels resentment in the regions, especially in those with long-standing grievances against Bangkok: the northeast (Isan, where most people are of Lao ethnicity), the north (Lanna ethnicity), and the deep south (Malay ethnicity). Although ethnic grievances against the Thai state have in recent years generated serious violence only in the deep south, in late 2013 and early 2014 pro-Thaksin groups in the north and northeast began to articulate regionalist and separatist aspirations, a development that alarmed the military. The twenty million people of Isan have a history of rebellion against Bangkok. The region has long suffered from relative socioeconomic deprivation, and Isan people are typically patronized and discriminated against by central Thais. Regionalist sentiments in northern Thailand are less intense, but have been boosted by Thaksin's origins in Chiang Mai, which Bangkok has refused formally to recognize as the country's second city.

Internal Contestation

Thailand's state elites are characterized by intense contestation among the legislature, the bureaucracy, the police, the army, and what is known as the network monarchy,[26] a loosely structured power grouping that includes the judiciary and senior bureaucrats. In recent years, parliament and the police have been dominated by pro-Thaksin forces, and the military and bureaucracy have been broadly aligned with the Democrat Party and the monarchy. Whenever pro-Thaksin forces gained the upper hand through elections, other components of the elite have sought to remove them from office without the bother of an election. Thailand is thus a remarkably disunited unitary state, partly because elections provide the winners with overwhelming control over state resources. Intense intra-elite contestation is thus one of the major drivers of the country's political instability: if the "wrong" party is in power, the other side will stop at nothing to remove it from office. In recent years uncertainty about lower house electoral outcomes has been scant: pro-Thaksin parties have consistently won.

Incomplete Consolidation

Normally, a country that has successfully conducted two general elections after the end of an authoritarian regime may be considered to have passed through the consolidation phase. In Thailand's case, this milestone was arguably passed in mid-1995, after the second election following the military coup of 1991 and Black May crackdown of 1992. Certainly, the milestone was more than passed by 2005, by which time Thailand had successfully promulgated the more liberal 1997 constitution and peacefully conducted five general elections. But the 2006 military coup overturned all previous assumptions. The relatively smooth 2007 and 2011 elections could not gloss over the disturbing 2008 and 2009 mass protests, or the violent repression of the 2010 redshirt demonstrations. Some scholars have argued that Thailand is a clear example of a reverse trend toward authoritarianism, in contrast to the global trend toward democracy in the 1980s and 1990s.[27] Regardless of whether Thailand should be termed an autocratizing state or an anocracy, it shares many of the features of such states: unstable governments and a propensity to switch abruptly into rally mode.[28] Most important, changes of government in Thailand result as frequently from military coups, judicial outcomes, or clandestine elite maneuvers as from election outcomes.

Lack of Civil Society Space

In the 1990s, Thailand was widely praised for having a vibrant civil society and a relatively free media, and for providing abundant public space in which to debate much-needed social and political reforms. The more recent picture, though, has been less positive. During his time in office between 2001 and 2006, Thaksin sought actively to curtail dissenting media voices and co-opt critical elements of civil society. By the 2006 coup, highly partisan pro- and anti-Thaksin newspapers and satellite TV channels were fast gaining ground, and during the 2014 elections were exceptionally polarized. The main role of this one-sided reporting and commentary was to exacerbate tensions around the election and promote a culture of defamation and verbal violence.

Prevention in 2014

This study evaluates eight of the most widely used practices for the prevention of election violence, and examines the extent to which they mattered in each of the elections under review in this volume. The objective is to better understand the extent to which election violence may be preventable using targeted peacebuilding efforts.

Security-Sector Engagement

Ensuring orderly elections generally requires overt commitment from a relatively neutral security sector. Rivalry between the military—broadly aligned with the conservative establishment—and the generally pro-Thaksin police force meant that the security forces were fragmented and partisan. As a result, the security sector failed consistently to safeguard election procedures, its actions ranging from candidate registration to distribution of ballot boxes and indeed polling itself. The sector did not operate in a nonpartisan way or follow clear rules of engagement. These failures contributed to a climate of intimidation and violence throughout the election cycle.

Responsibility for security enforcement during the February 2014 election was shared among the police, the army, and the Centre for the Administration of Peace and Order (CAPO) later replaced by the newly formed Centre for Maintaining Peace and Order (CMPO).[29] Primary responsibility for security enforcement lay with the police and CAPO, which was tasked with addressing the antigovernment protests. In the past, the army would occasionally be involved in elections, either to provide extra security or in some cases to help with vote counting in the event of a staff shortage at polling stations.[30] As the violence began to escalate in January 2014, the government set up the CMPO to enforce the emergency decree and asked the military for help with election security.

In practice, the Royal Thai Army, with its long history of coups and other political interventions, was by far the most powerful component of the security sector, and was actively courted by both sides throughout the conflict. As early as December 11, 2013, PDRC leader Suthep Thueksuban called on the military to join the protesters' side and to help them oust Yingluck's government and install an unelected People's Council that would reform the country before any election took place.[31] A number of prominent retired military officers joined Suthep's calls for the army to side with PDRC, raising more questions about the army's claims to neutrality.[32] Following deadly clashes at the Thai-Japanese Stadium, the military changed its public position on the conflict. Army Commander General Prayut Chan-ocha, who had previously claimed that a military coup would not solve anything, said on December 27, "The military does not shut or open the door to a coup, but a decision depends on the situation."[33] This was effectively a green light for the PDRC, increasing the likelihood of further violence that could be used to justify military intervention.[34] As one columnist explained, having failed to bully the military into openly siding with the PDRC, Suthep was left with "no choice but to organise another, larger rally. That would heighten the chance of violence. And the situation could get out of hand."[35] Pro-government supporters, an interviewee said, were allegedly instructed by Thaksin not to get involved in violent clashes because that would mean the end for the Yingluck government. As time wore on, it became increasingly apparent that the military did not support the election, and was usually nowhere to be seen when protesters turned up to disrupt polling.

The Royal Thai Police has a generally poor reputation and is seen by most Thais as both highly corrupt and of doubtful competence. Nevertheless, the police have rarely been centrally involved in the fatal shooting of political protesters: this has been the domain of the army. Thaksin Shinawatra is a former police officer, and for the most part the police have been supportive of pro-Thaksin governments, in contrast to the more royalist and pro-Democrat military. From the very start of the PDRC protests, the police were directed to exercise utmost restraint and so reduce the risk of precipitating a coup.[36]

However, the response to violence during candidate registration at Thai-Japanese Stadium revealed serious weaknesses in police security enforcement. Three fatalities (two policemen and one protester), more than 150 injured (including twenty-three policemen), allegations that live rounds were used by the police to deter protesters, and a picture of four policemen beating an unarmed protester, all told stories of police failings.[37] Although the escalation of violence could not be solely blamed on the police—hard-line factions of the Network of Students and People for Reform of Thailand (NSPRT) were believed to have initiated the violence—the indiscriminate use of force against protesters could not be justified.[38] Lame attempts by senior police officers to blame abuses on a third party made matters worse, and General Adul's eventual acknowledgment of police culpability came too late.

Following the events at Thai-Japanese Stadium, pressure on the police from the antigovernment side increased. On January 22, just days before advance voting, hard-line protesters tore the signage from the front of the Royal Thai Police Headquarters in central Bangkok and defaced the gates with insulting graffiti. Police commanders watched the entire episode on CCTV from their control room inside the headquarters. General Adul never flinched: his admirable restraint undoubtedly averted a riot that could have plunged the country into chaos. At the same time, the line between restraint and passivity was fine. Satit Wongnongtaey, a core PDRC leader, criticized the police for their unwillingness to help the protesters during a violent incident at a Bang Na temple on the January 26 that left a leader of the People's Army to Overthrow the Thaksin Regime (Suthin Taratin) dead and another ten protesters wounded. Allegedly the military had to step in to help the protesters.[39] Police inaction gave the protesters another pretext for calling on the military to intervene. "We don't want them to seize power," Suthep claimed. "We only need them to help protect the people. We can seize the power ourselves."[40]

Following this disruption, which largely determined the fate of the February election before it even took place, the regional election monitoring organization ANFREL criticized the police for doing little to ensure that voters' rights were protected.[41] ANFREL observers reported that heavily outnumbered police made no efforts to prevent PDRC protesters from obstructing the ballots and instead stood by watching the protesters close down polling stations. Although the police were right to have exercised restraint at key junctures in the run-up to the election, police passivity may have contributed to increased violence during the polling itself. General Chaisit Shinawatra, who served as army chief under his cousin Thaksin, described the situation as a "quiet coup," remarking that neither the army nor the police did anything to contain the protests.[42]

After advance voting closed, Foreign Minister Surapong Tovichakchaikul condemned the disruption and simultaneously blamed the EC for "failing to ask for help from the government to provide safety for voters."[43] Yet under the emergency decree, CMPO had a mandate to limit people's movements, set curfews, and censor the media: the government did not need to await any request from the EC. As one volunteer explained, it seemed that the government sometimes wanted the "violence to come from the other [PDRC] side" because this would make it look more legitimate. The emergency decree thus made no difference to the situation on the ground: no visible additional security measures were put in place. The government designated parts of Bangkok as prohibition zones, but the protesters largely ignored them and the security forces did nothing to enforce them.[44] In reality, the Yingluck government had little capacity to enforce the emergency decree, given the reluctance of the security forces to cooperate, and the very real prospect that clamping down on anti-election protesters would have triggered more violence. Although previous governments had staged clampdowns on protests (notably in April 2010), doing so was less of an option for elected pro-Thaksin administrations. It would have been difficult to deploy the security forces more effectively unless the military had been ready to take a tough line to ensure that the election went ahead.

The government's decision to invoke emergency legislation was fiercely contested by a number of senators, who filed a case with the Constitutional Court claiming that the measures were unnecessary, and by the National Human Rights Commission. A civil court ruling on February 19, 2014, stripped the government of most of its powers under the emergency decree on the grounds that they violated the rights of protesters to gather freely as granted by the 2007 constitution.[45] This ruling rendered the state of emergency meaningless, leaving the government with no powers to contain postelection violence.

The security sector during the February election was characterized by minimal effectiveness and a lack of proper governance, especially of the military, over which the prime minister had no real control. Given the lack of legitimacy enjoyed by the police in the eyes of antigovernment protesters, only nonpartisan and transparent joint security-sector engagement led by the army could have created the conditions for a more peaceful election. The unwillingness of the military to perform this role was an important factor accounting for high levels of violence (fuzzy set score: 0.25).

Election Management and Administration

Sound management is an extremely important factor underpinning the success of any election process. Primary responsibility for this election was in the hands of the Election Commission, which was extremely tentative about holding the polls, and kept seeking opportunities and pretexts for postponement. The 2007 constitution gave the EC significant powers to ensure that elections were conducted fairly and peacefully: it could suspend political rights of candidates, investigate allegations, issue election regulations, and control and oversee election budget allocation. The EC can also request security enforcement to prevent election violence at and around the polling station—something not done during the February 2014 election.[46] No efforts were made to change venues to prevent disruption and the related violence, one interviewee indicated, even when widely predictable. Similarly, after the disrupted candidate registration, the EC did not extend the registration period to allow candidates to register in the affected constituencies left without candidates. This decision alone effectively sabotaged the February election because it meant that the required 95 percent of seats for a quorate parliament could not be achieved. The EC's ambivalence about holding the election was arguably the single biggest obstacle to preventing election violence.

The Yingluck government was engaged in a constant tug of war with the EC to ensure that the election went ahead. As late as January 28, Somchai Srisuthiyakorn, the election commissioner in charge of managing the election, was calling for a postponement of polling for three to four months.[47] In effect, holding the election became a pro-Yingluck move and postponing it became a pro-Democrat/PDRC move. Opposition calls for postponement were part of attempts to make the country increasingly ungovernable, and to force Pheu Thai from office nonelectorally or even unconstitutionally.

Persistent anti-election statements by EC members generated widespread skepticism about the integrity and political biases of the commission, led by a new team of commissioners who assumed office only on December 13, 2013. No one seriously doubted the technical capacity of the EC to stage the election.[48] The big questions concerned the commission's willingness to do so. The EC was accused by one commentator of having a "hidden agenda" to delay the election, and the commissioners were criticized by some of their predecessors for an alleged lack of political neutrality.[49] Many constituencies in the south and in Bangkok had too few polling station officials to manage the election process because many local people who normally performed this function had resigned or simply failed to carry out their assigned duties.[50] ANFREL officials felt that the EC was trying to prevent the election, rather than to prevent election violence, and did not mind the disruption of the polling. One informant argued that the EC could have taken various steps to make the election more workable, but declined to accept any advice.

The EC also knew very well that for the election to be valid it had to be completed within a single day nationwide, a key argument used by the Constitutional Court to nullify the February election on March 21, 2014.[51] Thus the EC was in no particular rush to set early dates for the election reruns in constituencies where the polling was disrupted or completely absent.[52] The new dates for the election reruns in disrupted constituencies were eventually scheduled for late April but no agreement between the government and the EC had yet been reached as to whether a new royal decree was needed to open candidate registration in constituencies with no candidates, given that the Constitutional Court had nullified the election.[53]As one of the volunteer observers aptly put it, the EC's big-picture election management was "a joke." Nevertheless, the election process was managed quite smoothly in many areas of the country, thanks largely to the dedication of provincial EC officials. The technical capabilities and competencies of the commission were excellent.

The Election Commission's mismanagement was the biggest hurdle to holding the February 2014 election.[54] A well-functioning election management body confers legitimacy on an election process and alleviates frustrations. In the Thai case, however, the EC's overt bias and obvious reluctance either to proceed with the election or to ensure the security of voters fueled the frustration of the pro-government side and inflamed the passions of antigovernment protesters (fuzzy set score: 0.25).

Preventive Diplomacy

The international community did make significant efforts to help deter or mitigate violence during the February 2014 election cycle. These efforts were rather sporadic and low profile, however, and had little positive effect on the level of political stability. No coordinated international response was made to the increasing violence, especially during the preelection build-up.

Siam-Thailand was never formally colonized, and its governments have long resisted any lecturing from the international community, especially on questions relating to politics and governance. Thailand has a dynamic economy, has not been a significant aid recipient in recent decades, and is thus largely immune from external political conditionalities. Although Foreign Minister Surapong Tovichakchaikul asserted that more than forty countries had expressed their support for the February 2014 election within a week after the dissolution of government, much of this support was allegedly generated by the foreign minister himself, by lobbying fellow Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members and the diplomatic community in Bangkok.[55] Government critics took Surapong to task for "using foreign diplomats as a human shield for the government's political manoeuvrings."[56] Leaks about Surapong's lobbying activities were orchestrated by pro-PDRC elements in the Foreign Ministry, many of whose diplomats made little secret of their contempt for Thaksin, Yingluck, and their own minister.

The lack of visible coordinated efforts by the international community to put pressure on the opposing factions made it relatively easy for commentators to question international support for the election.[57] Only the Swiss and Swedish ambassadors to Thailand sought more direct involvement with the election, when they offered to act as observers.[58]

The eruption of violence at Thai-Japanese Stadium during the candidate registration on December 26, 2013, which resulted in three deaths and more than 150 injuries, was largely overlooked by the international community. Neither the U.S. Department of State nor the UK government, both close allies of Thailand, commented publicly on these events—which may have encouraged the opposition to believe that their election-blocking tactics would not generate much international criticism.[59] At the same time, efforts at preventive diplomacy did go on behind the scenes.

Thailand enjoys a complex relationship with the United Nations (UN), and hosts a large contingent of UN agencies and officials. Former prime minister Thaksin spoke for many Thais when he famously declared (concerning a proposed investigation into his controversial war on drugs policy), "the UN is not my father."[60] Nevertheless, during the period surrounding the 2014 election, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made several mediation attempts, phoning Yingluck Shinawatra and the Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva in a bid to bring the opposing sides together and reach a peaceful resolution to the country's political crisis.[61] The UN secretary-general then issued a statement saying that he was "very concerned that the situation could escalate in the days ahead" and urged "all involved to show restraint, avoid provocative acts and settle their differences peacefully, through dialogue."[62]

As the political crisis deepened, he made another effort to offer Thailand UN assistance in resolving the situation peacefully, by sending the UN Development Program (UNDP) chief Helen Clark to Bangkok. Clark met separately with both Yingluck and Abhisit. Yingluck was willing to work with the UN; but Abhisit made clear that the Democrats were entirely unwilling to hold any talks. Clark's visit received no media coverage and was never made public, though it was common knowledge in Bangkok diplomatic circles, and among community leaders in the deep south, who had hoped that Clark would pay a visit to the troubled region.

In late February, Surapong made a telephone call to the UN secretary-general requesting the UN to intervene—a final bid to salvage Yingluck and her government.[63] The failed 2006 election was still very much alive in the country's memory: by involving the UN, Surapong was hoping he could prevent another military coup.

A desire for mediation also featured on the European Union (EU) agenda, as revealed in a short policy report commissioned by the European Parliament in February 2014. The report suggested a number of policy options, but these efforts never materialized.[64] Humanitarian Dialogue, a Swiss-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) with close links to the Norwegian and Swiss embassies, made attempts to promote dialogue in collaboration with Thai establishment groupings such as the Reform Now Network. Their dialogue meetings, though, consisted mainly of second-tier players who had no real influence over the government, the Democrats, or the PDRC. Following the election day

events, the UN and the United States condemned the protesters' attempts to block voting as undemocratic—preventing voters from exercising their basic rights—and called for a peaceful resolution of the situation.[65] Clearly, protesters were doing anything they could to create a political vacuum that would allow for another military coup or at least another intervention from above: the installation of an unelected government.

The U.S. Embassy in Bangkok was subject to severe criticism from the opposition forces after Washington expressed its support for the snap election. A statement issued by the State Department on December 9, 2013, declared that the United States "strongly supports democratic institutions and the democratic process in Thailand," encouraging the country to "resolve political differences peacefully and democratically in a way that reflects the will of the Thai people and strengthens the rule of law."[66] The PDRC viewed this statement as a sign that the United States was siding with the Shinawatra family. Nitithon Lamleua, the leader of the NSPRT, attacked the United States at a public rally for its constant calls for democracy and human rights. He also threatened to occupy its embassy in Bangkok if the U.S. government did not stop siding with the Yingluck government—threats that brought back dark memories of the 1979 Iranian embassy siege.[67] Having the backing of the international community was an important bargaining chip against the power held by the military and a source of political legitimacy. This helps explain the antagonism of NSPRT protesters toward the United States after it expressed its support for the February elections.

Ahead of the disruptions on advance voting day, PRDC leader Suthep Thueksuban sent an open letter to Barack Obama, assuring the American president that the PDRC's antigovernment campaigns would be violence-free. However, the clashes between the protesters and Red Shirts at a polling station in Bang Na on January 26 that left one PDRC leader dead and ten people injured showed the thuggish side of Suthep's "peaceful" protests.[68]

Opposing factions' eagerness to "explain" Thailand's domestic political situation to the world showed that international opinion did indeed matter. Some credit needs to be given to the international community for the various efforts made to support a free and fair election, especially given the obstacles it faced in doing more. At the same time, these efforts varied in quality (fuzzy set score: 0.75).

Peace Messaging

Peace messaging can be an important tool to raise awareness about the possibility of election violence and help defuse tensions. Quite a bit of self-proclaimed peace messaging went on in the period leading up to the February 2014 election, often carried out by ad hoc groups and networks that had emerged out of the ongoing political standoff. Most were created in the first half of January 2014, coinciding with the Bangkok Shutdown campaign that made the threat of violence imminent. The campaigns were largely reactive but enjoyed a relatively wide geographical reach through social media.

A Facebook group called YaBasta Thailand was founded by Kittichai Ngarmchaipisit and a group of his friends to campaign against election-related violence.[69] The group's full name—YaBasta Thailand: Stop protests that create conditions for violence—suggests that it was formed primarily in response to antigovernment protesters who were seen as the main drivers of violence. YaBasta organized candlelit vigils to commemorate peacefully those who lost their lives in violent events with the message Enough Is Enough. Banners carrying this message were displayed at their events, and throughout Bangkok. Besides the vigils, YaBasta initiated both a Post-it campaign and the Respect My Vote poster campaign. To brand themselves within Thailand's color-coded politics, the group donned white T-shirts and used largely white props. The campaigns were especially popular with younger generations and students who often used their schools or universities to organize the vigils.[70]

Although the activities of YaBasta were mostly confined to Bangkok, its social media profile helped spread their messages beyond the capital. YaBasta developed an almost nationwide network of supporters who posted photographs of their own candlelit vigils to the group's Facebook page. However, despite YaBasta's avowedly peaceful agenda, some images from the candlelit vigils show banners using offensive language toward the PDRC, the Democrat Party, the Election Commission, the National Anti-Corruption Commission, and the National Human Rights Commission. Unsurprisingly, according to one interviewee, such sentiments only fueled rumors that YaBasta was just another front for the Pheu Thai Party.

Another group with a peace-messaging agenda was the Network of 2 Yeses and 2 Nos established on January 10, 2014. The network was a grouping of prominent academics, intellectuals, and other highly respected Thais—including some leading figures from the NGO sector—with different political stances but at least four common standpoints: no to a coup and no to violence (two nos)—and yes to elections and yes to democratic reform (two yeses).[71] Given the high profile of leading members, the group received extensive media coverage. However, feelings were mixed about the network's manifesto. The group was praised by some as a long-awaited and sensible middle ground that could help build bridges in Thailand's highly polarized society.[72] For others, it was a group promoting pro-government propaganda. An article by Sombat Kusumawali of the National Institute of Development Administration in *Manager Online*—a strongly pro-PDRC newspaper—harshly criticized the group, saying that its 2 Yeses and 2 Nos painted the PDRC protesters in a bad light, as an undemocratic mob yearning for a coup, that uses violence, and has no regard for voters' rights.[73] However, the network drew support not only from intellectual and academic circles but also from rural areas.[74]

Other groups, such as the Network of Servants for Thailand's Peaceful Reform (NSTPR) and Reform Now Network (RNN) were more reform than peace oriented, and their initiatives cannot be seen as apolitical either. For instance, the NSTPR, comprising 185 prominent public Thai figures, had strong pro-PDRC sentiments: a number of its members also spoke at PDRC rallies against the government and the Shinawatra family.[75]

In Thailand's highly polarized climate, for any peace-messaging group to succeed it would have to refrain from expressing public support for the election and to campaign only on the need to end violence. The credibility of each group, and their campaigns, was fiercely questioned—and often deliberately undermined—by people on either side of the divide. Overall, the quality, geographical scope, and implementation of peace messaging were patchy during the 2014 election process (fuzzy set score: 0.50).

Civic and Voter Education

In previous elections, the Election Commission carried out extensive campaigns to inform voters of their rights and responsibilities, and to disseminate information about how to take part in the polls. For example, in 2007 it sent informational booklets to every household in Thailand, recruited celebrities to spread the word, and used radio and television extensively.[76] By contrast, the run-up to the 2014 elections offered little evidence of voter education activities.

Because expectation was scant that the February election would be a game changer, interviewees indicated, neither the political parties nor the EC were eager to invest significant time or money to educate voters. The traditional role of celebrities as election ambassadors was less evident given the level of polarization: many celebrities openly voiced their support for the PDRC activities and even encouraged people to join National Picnic Day—a PDRC-led anti-election celebration held on election day.[77]

Most Thais are well aware of how to vote (partly because they have a great deal of practice) and in recent years the number of invalid votes cast in error has been relatively low. During the 2006 snap election, the Democrat Party actively encouraged voters in its southern heartlands to cast a Vote No (that is, to vote for no one). According to interviewees, this helped create the political deadlock that contributed to the election's being annulled and opened up the way for the September 2006 coup. During the February 2014 election, the Democrat Party instead urged people not to vote at all. Voter education was largely absent during the 2014 election, instead giving way to anti-election activities (fuzzy set score: 0).

Monitoring and Mapping

Election monitoring and mapping can help mitigate violence by increasing transparency and highlighting potential flashpoints. Thailand's election monitoring "business" is a complex network of professional and personal affiliations that span the governmental and nongovernmental sectors. During the February 2014 elections, the network operated at only a fraction of its usual capacity, a factor that surely contributed to the widespread violence and intimidation.

Thailand has little tradition of permitting missions of international election observers; global organizations such as the Carter Center, the EU, and the International Republican Institute have never undertaken a full monitoring mission in the country. Starting with the September 1992 election, Thailand launched a home-grown monitoring agency known as PollWatch, which had close ties to the then vibrant local NGO community.[78] In September 1998, PollWatch joined forces with around a hundred NGOs to create P-NET, a volunteer monitoring network. In successive elections, the Election Commission issued permits for registered election observers in each province, and sometimes provided funding for PollWatch and P-NET monitoring activities. Nevertheless, the heyday of PollWatch was in the 1990s, before the creation of the Election Commission: the Thai NGO community never really recovered from the political polarization that followed Thaksin's rise to power in 2001.

In February 2014, PollWatch and P-NET did not carry out any official election monitoring. The organization's acting director, Sakool Zuesongdham, explained in an interview that he found the election legally questionable and believed the government should have resigned rather than dissolving parliament. He also felt that the election was both "too risky to achieve its goal" and "meaningless" given the tense political situation. Warin Taemjarat, a P-NET board member, also argued that the February 2014 election should not have been held because it created divisions and violence. He believed that the PDRC had every right to disrupt the election process.

The EC did not register PollWatch or P-NET observers to monitor the election. Sakool explained in an interview that PollWatch had become reluctant to ask for funding from the EC because of previous misunderstandings. During February 2014, some PollWatch officials carried out informal election monitoring but not in a systematic way. Leading figures in PollWatch and P-NET were sympathetic to the PDRC and hostile to the Yingluck government, which helps explain why PollWatch made little attempt to mobilize observers. With some justification, PollWatch could argue that conditions were not safe for their volunteer monitors to observe the polling; at the same time, however, the absence of independent monitors made voting conditions significantly less safe. Former leading P-NET members included current EC commissioner Somchai Srisuthiyakorn—who during his tenure as P-NET's coordinator refused to monitor the 2006 snap election that was followed by the coup that deposed Thaksin Shinawatra—and General Saiyud Kerdphol, who was also a founding member of ANFREL and a vociferous opponent of the Shinawatra family. Saiyud led a group of retired military officers calling for a military intervention to depose the Yingluck government before the February election.[79] Thai election observation bodies thus have a history of anti-election sentiments.

The only quasi-international monitoring agency permitted formally to observe Thai elections is the Asian Network for Free Elections, established in 1997. Physically based in Bangkok, ANFREL had a Thai executive director for many years and is a predominantly Southeast Asian body. PollWatch's hostility toward the February election made it also increasingly difficult for ANFREL to monitor the situation. Although ANFREL publicly distanced itself from anti-election sentiments shared by Sakool Zuesongdham and other P-NET members, according to one interviewee, a rift ran deep within the organization and Thailand's NGO sector as a whole. One early ANFREL election report contained extremely Bangkok-centric, patronizing, and inappropriate views of the Thai rural electorate, similar in tone to the rhetoric of the PDRC.[80] In a January 2014 interview, ANFREL Director Ichal Supriadi (an Indonesian national) expressed a desire for the election to go ahead, arguing that any postponement would need to be based on a stronger justification and accompanied by a clear timeframe.[81] ANFREL also made explicit demands for investigations into the violent incidents that occurred since the beginning of the protests in November 2013, and for the election rerun. ANFREL called on the Election Commission to "better prepare" for the election rerun "moving proactively forward with a plan to hold the elections as is constitutionally mandated"—an implicit criticism of the EC's anti-election stance.[82]

Western embassies in Thailand, according to one interviewee, were also generally reluctant to provide donations to ANFREL—unlike in previous years—because most diplomats believed that the election was not going to resolve the crisis. Even those donors who initially promised support later pulled out, apparently fearing that they might be accused of legitimizing a flawed election process. Despite limited funding, ANFREL did carry out some modest election monitoring in 2014: altogether it deployed ten international observers, thirty-five local observers across the country, and an additional thirty-two observers in Bangkok. Beyond Bangkok, the number of observers was entirely inadequate, enabling ANFREL to monitor the situation in only thirty provinces of seventy-six.[83]

The EU sent a two-person Expert Electoral Mission to observe the February election.[84] This was a low-profile exercise: no mainstream media in Thailand reported on its presence, its focus was confined to some limited "technical" issues, and its report was never published. The mission had little direct contact with the Election Commission.

Some independent monitoring and mapping was carried out by a Bangkok-based NGO, Thai Violence Watch (TVW), funded mainly by the UNDP. Its monitoring commenced with the start of the Bangkok Shutdown campaign on January 13. During the advance voting and on election day, it sent observers to polling stations and to high risk areas such as Lak Si, where an hour-long shootout took place on February 1. Despite a limited geographical reach, TVW monitored PDRC rally sites systematically twice a day during the preelection period and once a day after the election until after the May 22 coup d'état.[85] This was arguably the most systematic monitoring effort carried out for the February 2014 election.

In terms of mapping, TVW published its findings daily on its website evaluating potential risks, using its own coding system. Besides the usual factors, such as the use of weapons, physical violence, and property damage, TVW also analyzed softer forms of violence, such as hate speech, and included these in its coding rubric of violence. It also published numerous diagrams and maps on its website illustrating the scope and form of violence as it unfolded. Based on their observations, TVW issued a set of recommendations ahead of the February 2 to election advising stakeholders—including the security forces, EC, protesters, media, and on-ground medical personnel—on how to reduce the risk of violence, and outlining the major risk areas.[86]

Independent election monitoring efforts were also undertaken by a group of volunteers coordinated under the Citizen Media Network, a department within Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS). Following the Bangkok Shutdown campaign, the Citizen Media Network (CMN) deployed approximately thirty active volunteers nationwide to observe and report the situation. However, none were trained observers. Many were university students and unable to conduct systematic observations. The observers would phone in their findings to CMN, which would then liaise with Thai Violence Watch—with which it worked closely—and Thai PBS News. Due to the high risk of violence and safety concerns, CMN discouraged students from direct involvement in observations at major PDRC rallies and polling stations within Bangkok. In other provinces, where the risk of violence was significantly lower, students were encouraged to participate in monitoring activities.

Although the monitoring and mapping efforts of ANFREL, the EU, Thai PBS, and Violence Watch were extremely commendable, they were confined mainly to the Bangkok area and parts of the south, were not systematic, and did not cover the entire election cycle (fuzzy set score: 0.25).

Voter Consultations

A range of fora were organized at which different political proposals concerning reform were discussed and presented. Some were initiated by nonpolitical groups such as an alliance of seven private-sector and business organizations, the RNN and the NSTPR, and the Network of 2 Yeses and 2 Nos.[87] Party rallies were also held around the country, especially by the PTP, at which policy platforms were elaborated. But whether these activities amount to the kinds of voter consultations that fit the rubric of a PEV model is questionable.

The PDRC protests, especially in the early stages, created opportunities for voter consultations—the Democrat Party could have capitalized on the popular discontent and built its policy platforms around PDRC demands, shifting political contestation from the streets to the ballot boxes: for better or worse, according to interviewees, the party chose not to do so. Similarly, PDRC leaders could have formed a new political party and contested the election: again, they did no such thing. Despite the number of political fora during the election period, then, none of them amounted to proper voter consultations (fuzzy set score: 0).

Youth Programs

In theory, creating programs to involve young people in election processes should reduce the risk of their taking part in political violence. High school and other students have traditionally been involved in assisting at polling stations during Thai elections, but did not in February 2014. Those P-NET and ANFREL members who observed recalled seeing very few students at work. This differed from previous elections, several interviewees reported, for which students were trained to check voter lists at polling stations and were even present during vote counting.

On October 24, 2013, Pheu Thai Party established a Pheu Thai Youth Institute to solicit and exchange ideas from young people between fifteen and thirty on political issues and agendas. Prime Minister Yingluck, Thaksin's son Phanthongthae, and former Thaksin-era minister and party secretary Phumitham Wetchayachai comprised the institute's advisory board.[88] The institute set up a Facebook page, inviting youth to share their views in an effort to attract young people to politics and nurture a future generation of politicians. In December 2013, the Council of University Presidents of Thailand proposed a project to involve students in studying and observing the coming February 2 election and any forthcoming political reform project.[89] It is unclear whether this proposed project was ever implemented. Both PDRC rallies and pro-election candle-lighting ceremonies were held on a number of university and college campuses around Thailand.

Whereas in previous elections, schools had often staged activities in support of the voting process, doing so proved more difficult in 2014. One school director who tried to organize a street rally in support of the election found himself facing a mass protest from three hundred students demanding his removal.[90] Although attempts were made to engage the young generation in politics, these programs were neither systematic nor geographically widespread (fuzzy set score: 0.25).

Assessing Prevention

Thailand's February 2014 elections are not readily comparable with previous national polls, given that the election was boycotted, blockaded, never completed, subject to intense legal challenges and controversy, and soon afterward annulled. As one interviewee explained, "There wasn't really any election." Nevertheless, some conclusions may be drawn from an analysis of this nonelection election. Most of the PEV models were weak or absent. Because two sources attest to thirty fatalities, election violence was deemed significant.

Historical comparison shows that though most PEV models were weaker during the February 2014 election, the associated levels of electoral violence were similar to those in 2005 (see table 3.1). Fatalities were within the normal range, though intimidation and harassment reached unprecedented heights. Only three of eight PEV models were no weaker during the 2014 election: preventive diplomacy, peace messaging, and voter consultation. Preventive diplomacy and voter consultations remained unchanged: the former was unlikely to change given long-standing Thai sensitivities, and the latter has never really existed in Thailand.

- **Peace messaging**. The only PEV model that strengthened was peace messaging. High levels of voter intimidation and the imminent threat of violence prompted many people to create independent peace-messaging

Table 3.1 Prevention in Historical Perspective, Thailand

PEV MODEL	SCORE	2014 ROLE	OVER PAST ELECTIONS
Security-Sector Engagement	0.25	Highly partisan, reluctant to act, weak governance	Weaker
Election Management and administration	0.25	Strong anti-election sentiments, mismanagement	Weaker
Preventive Diplomacy	0.50	Some international behind-the-scenes mediation but limited effectiveness and reach	No Change
Peace Messaging	0.50	Adhoc groups with various peace messages but contested credibility	Stronger
Civic and Voter Education	0	NA	Weaker
Monitoring and Mapping	0.25	Geographically limited and not systematic	Weaker*
Voter Consultations	0	NA	No Change
Youth Programming	0.25	Little involvement of youth	Weaker

*Weaker overall, despite some strengths.
Source: Author's compilation

groups, especially after the start of the Bangkok Shutdown campaign. Even though it may have been too late for these groups to have a real impact on the increasingly violent situation, an interviewee explained, they created awareness and spread their peace messages across the nation through social media channels, attracting support further afield. Although the strongest PEV element during the election was peace messaging, even it was not consistent across the country and failed to counter a pervasive belief—especially among the Bangkok middle classes and southern Democrats—that disrupting the polls was perfectly reasonable, or even public-spirited.

- **Election management and administration**. Weak election management was at the core of the troubles afflicting Thailand's abortive February 2014 election. The failure of the Election Commission to demonstrate a strong commitment to holding the polls, and to defend the relevant mechanisms and processes, helped encourage a climate in which the election was seen as peripheral to the country's larger political problems. Some of the disruption could have been averted had the EC been more committed to resisting PDRC efforts at generating confusion. Instead, the EC's willingness constantly to raise the possibility of postponements played into the hands of those who did not want to the election to take place successfully, encouraging anti-election groups to commit increasingly aggressive acts of intimidation. On this occasion, the military assistance seen in previous elections was not forthcoming—partly because the EC never requested it. Another alternative would have been to ask P-NET, other NGOs, or even universities to provide volunteers—but again, the EC failed to make any such request. A stronger and less partisan EC would thus have been able to ensure that the election was more likely to go ahead, and even to avert the prospect of violence.
- **Security-sector engagement**. More constructive participation by the security forces could have helped ensure a smoother electoral process, especially if the military and police had been able to prevent the intimidation of prospective candidates from registering in the upper south. The politicization of the military, and army commander General Prayut's categorical refusal to rule out a coup, encouraged the PDRC to disrupt the election. PDRC leader Suthep made open calls for the military to take sides, and in the wake of the coup it became clear that collusion between the protesters and the army had been extensive.

  The appointment of Labor Minister Chalerm Yubamrung to head the CMPO and oversee election and national security during the PDRC protests was an unfortunate choice; the outspoken former police officer's combination of bluster and incompetence boded ill for the future of the administration he was allegedly trying to secure. In the end, the failure of the Royal Thai Army—the only security agency with the legitimacy to secure support from antigovernment protesters—to robustly defend the election process was the crucial factor in fueling violence and intimidation.

- **Preventive diplomacy**. Although the international community did express concern about the situation in Thailand, major actors such as the UN, EU, and United States saw little prospect of preventive diplomacy measures' successfully reducing the unfolding conflict. This belief was closely linked to the view that the election might not take place, that it was unlikely to produce a complete result, that it was very likely to be annulled—and that even if it were successful, it would do nothing to affect the intense polarization that characterized Thai politics.

  Given the shortcomings of preventive diplomacy, international interest was scant in supporting monitoring efforts, voter education, or youth campaigns—especially given that many of the local NGOs that would normally take the lead in such activities were themselves tacitly supporting a boycott. The relative absence of these models was also a direct result of the studied inaction of the Election Commission, which generally provided both funding and administrative leadership for such activities, and a security sector that remained unwilling to intervene in support of the polling. All three sides thus colluded in a shared desire to thwart the 2014 election, which was crucial in creating the conditions for violence. As this study shows, a previously competent election management body and elements of civil society can mobilize in support of violence-inducing anti-election activities that are made possible by a passive security sector. In the end, even the stronger prevention models—peace messaging and preventive diplomacy—were unable to offset these negative interaction effects.
- **Levels of violence**. In spite of the many shortcomings of the PEV models, Thailand's 2014 election did not involve exceptional mass violence: the number of fatalities was in line with previous elections. No one expected this election to be decisive in determining the outcome of the ongoing power struggle. High levels of violence—fifty or more fatalities—have only occurred in clashes directly arising from extended street protests. The decision of the PDRC to end their protests at the beginning of March helped deescalate the standoff to some degree. Throughout the election process, tensions were extremely high, and an atmosphere of intimidation was disturbingly palpable. At the same time, however, the stakes were lower than might have appeared. Ultimately, the conflict was likely to be resolved in the courts, by a military coup, or by a further round of street demonstrations—not at the ballot box.
- **Contextual vulnerabilities**. In the end, levels of violence were primarily a function of contextual vulnerabilities at the time of the election. The incomplete nature of Thailand's democratic consolidation meant that those seeking to influence the country's political direction could do so by attempting to provoke disorder, and so facilitate conditions for a military coup. Given the acute levels of political polarization, fueled by the two-party system, regional inequalities, and a weak civil society, a violent election was likely—but an election was unlikely to be the way for power to change

hands. Contextual vulnerabilities during the 2014 election thus made the historically stronger PEV models more susceptible to partisan interests and abuse of power than ever before. From a counterfactual perspective, conscious efforts to strengthen rather than weaken the applied prevention would have helped mitigate at least some of the effects on the 2014 election.

Conclusion

To date, Benedict Anderson has been proved wrong in what he wrote in 1990:

> This reality, or rather the part of it with which I am here concerned, is that in the 1980s political killing in Siam has assumed a completely unprecedented character, one which is, oddly enough, probably a positive omen for the future. For it seems tied to the eclipse of a longstanding tradition of military-bureaucratic dictatorship and its supersession by a stable, bourgeois parliamentary political system.[91]

The reality that unfolded was rather different. First, the military dictators were not eclipsed, but instead staged three further seizures of power over the next twenty-five years. Second, the parliamentary political system has proved profoundly unstable and incapable of decisively superseding traditions of dictatorship. Third, political murders continue to assume new and more ominous forms, none of them in the least positive.

But what also emerged was a relatively robust set of prevention instruments: in particular, an Election Commission that was technically quite competent (if never entirely independent), regular rounds of civic and voter education, and youth programs. Despite their professional shortcomings and high levels of politicization, neither the military nor the police had a track record of serious meddling in the election process. PollWatch, P-NET, and ANFREL, for all their limitations, did invaluable supporting work to monitor elections, assisted to some extent by international funders and embassies. The numbers of election-related murders remained relatively low.

In 2014, mechanisms that had worked passably well in elections since September 1992 failed. This resulted in unprecedented levels of electoral disruption, voter intimidation, and fear. Fortunately, larger-scale fatalities did not ensue as a result of the shambolic election process, largely for negative reasons: no one believed that the election would be a game changer. This conclusion reflects the specific politics of the Thai case, in which changes of government in recent years have resulted just as frequently from military coups and judicial interventions as from electoral outcomes. The purpose of disrupting the February election was to usher in a new political order in which electoral politics would be downgraded and a more conservative, authoritarian mode of governance would be institutionalized. This process has been under way since the May 22, 2014, military coup, with consequences that are so far impossible to predict.

Altough it is impossible to prove that stronger PEV models would have curtailed violence further, more systematic monitoring and mapping, and a firm commitment by the security forces to prevent voter intimidation would certainly have increased the chances of a more peaceful polling process.

Notes

1. This chapter draws on fieldwork during the 2014 election and on telephone interviews during January and February 2015. A number of internal official documents were supplied anonymously, not by interviewees. We would like to thank all our interview informants, Prajak Kongkirati, and the Erawan Emergency Center for their generous help, and Jittip Mongkolnchaiarunya for research assistance in Thailand.
2. Authors' figure based on data supplied by the Erawan Emergency Center, January 19, 2015, supplemented by news reports. Prajak Kongkirati also suggests a total of thirty killed, though he uses a different dataset and a slightly different period. See "Krasunpheun khwanrabuet kanpata muanchon lae khuhaleuktang: khwamkatyaeng lae khwam runraeng nai kanleuktang tua pai wan thi 2 kumphaphan 2557" [Bullets, smoke bombs, mass clashes and polling: Conflict and violence in the February 2, 2014, general election], unpublished paper, January 2015. ICG gives a figure of twenty-eight killed. See "A Coup Ordained? Thailand's Prospects for Stability," Asia Report no. 263 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, December 3, 2014), p. 1. *Thai Rath* newspaper offered an alternative figure of twenty-five on May 20, 2014, "St. triam thim pheat fao rawang wang lang prakat 'kotaiya kansuk'" [Ministry of Public Health prepares a team of doctors to be on standby after the martial law has been declared], www.thairath.co.th/content/424050. Both figures are based on a period from November 30, 2013, to May 15, 2014.
3. Benedict Anderson, "Murder and Progress in Modern Siam," *New Left Review* 181 (1990): 33–48.
4. Prajak Kongkirati, "Bosses, Bullets and Ballots: Electoral Violence and Democracy in Thailand, 1975–2011" (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2013), p. 21.
5. Election violence is based on numbers of fatalities in line with this volume's comparative framework.
6. Kongkirati, "Bosses, Bullets and Ballots," p. 175.
7. Ibid., pp. 160–61; see also Paul Chambers, "Consolidation of Thaksinocracy and Crisis of Democracy: Thailand's 2005 General Elections," in *Between Consolidation and Crisis*, ed. Aurel Croissant and Beate Martin (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), p. 290.
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11. Prajak Kongkirati, "Thailand in no(transition): The anti-election movement, the 2014 military coup and democratic breakdown," *Southeast Asia Research Centre* working paper no. 168 (Hong Kong: Southeast Asia Research Centre, August 2015), p. 19.
12. For a detailed account of the Siamese revolution, see Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 115–23.
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15. See Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2009); Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2005).
16. See Naruemon Thabchumpon and Duncan McCargo, "Urbanized Villagers in the 2010 Thai Redshirt Protests: Not just poor farmers?" *Asian Survey* 51, no. 6 (2011): 993–1018.
17. On the 2006 coup, see "Thailand's 'Good Coup': The Fall of Thaksin, the Military and Democracy," ed. Michael Connors and Kevin Hewison, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008); and Pavin Chachavalpongpun, ed., *"Good Coup" Gone Bad* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2014).

18. Strictly speaking, several of the protests (and associated rally sites) were not directly organized by the PDRC, but were linked to other anti-Thaksin groups.
19. PDRC supporters were reportedly generally better off and better educated than the average Thai. See "Profile of the Protestors: A Survey of Pro and Anti-Government Demonstrators in Bangkok on November 30, 2013" (Washington, DC: Asia Foundation, December 2013), www.asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/FinalSurveyReportDecember20.pdf; "Profile of the 'Bangkok Shutdown' Protestors: A Survey of Anti-Government PDRC Demonstrators in Bangkok" (Washington, DC: Asia Foundation, January 2014), www.asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/THPDRCSurveyReport.pdf.
20. EC claims that 440,000 were unable to vote were contradicted by their data: the real figure was much higher. See ANFREL, "Briefing on the Thai Election of 2 February 2014," unpublished document (Bangkok: ANFREL, February 3, 2014).
21. See "Shoot out at Laksi," ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, February 11, 2014, http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/news-events/all-stories/shoot-out-laksi#.VKxDLSvF98E; Kocha Olarn, "Trapped in a gunfight: CNN producer's harrowing account of Thai election violence," CNN, February 3, 2014, www.cnn.com/2014/02/03/world/asia/thai-protests-gunfight-kocha/.
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24. ICG, "A Coup Ordained?" p. 15.
25. See, for example, Thin Lei Win, "The din of misogyny at Bangkok protests," Thomson Reuters, January 17, 2014, www.trust.org/item/20140117102903-gcbzr/.
26. See Duncan McCargo, "Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand," *Pacific Review* 18, no. 4 (2005): 499–519.
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54. See Norris, Martínez i Coma, and Grömping, "The Year in Elections, 2014," 26. In addition to election mismanagement, the PDRC movement's intimidation campaign was another important factor that contributed to the failure of the February election.
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PART II

Prevention Success or Local Resilience?