

Thailand: Western Media Smears Protest Movement

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Baseless narrative disingenuously portrays Thailand as divided along class, rather than united against regime.

Thailand's embattled regime has long fashioned itself as the champion of the nation's north and northeast rural poor – and its opponents, essentially the rest of the nation – as aloft elitists which also inexplicably includes hardworking middle class, and much of the nation's central and south, including laborers and farmers. It is a myth that [the regime's extensive Western backers](#) are also helping perpetuate, but is one that is easily dispelled with irrefutable hard statistics and common sense.



Image: Even a cursory examination [of the anti-regime protesters](#) reveals immense diversity in both its constitution and its grievances against the regime – from labor unions, Buddhist sects, business owners both big and small, to ordinary workers from both labor and middle classes. Reuters' hit piece is designed to disingenuously malign the protesters, portraying them all as spoiled rich snobs. Of course, with hundreds of thousands of protesters turning

up at mass rallies, even at face value one should spot the deception.

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The latest attempt by the West to use its large media machine to perpetuate the “class divide” myth in Thailand comes to us by Reuters in their story, “[High society hits the streets as prominent Thais join protests](#),” which begins:

Chitpas Bhirombhakdi is heiress to a \$2.6 billion family fortune and, according to high-society magazine Thailand Tatler, one of Bangkok’s “most eligible young ladies”. She can also handle tear gas and ride a tractor.

On December 2, as anti-government demonstrations in Bangkok turned violent, the 27-year-old climbed aboard a front-loader brought in by protesters to break down police barricades.

Chitpas, whose family owns the Boon Rawd Brewery that makes Singha Beer, had dismounted the machine long before police pelted it with rubber bullets and gas canisters. But her gung-ho act showed how members of Thailand’s most celebrated families are discarding all past pretence of neutrality to hit the streets in the hope of toppling Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra.

Along with their wealth and privilege, these elite protesters share a declarative love of Thailand’s aging King Bhumibol Adulyadej and an abhorrence for Yingluck and her brother Thaksin, a billionaire ex-prime minister ousted by a 2006 military coup, whom they accuse of corruption and abuse of power.

For many in Bangkok’s high society, anti-government rallies have supplemented - if not quite replaced - customary haunts in posh hotels and restaurants, although only a dwindling hardcore of less privileged protesters sleeps rough on the street.

The biased tone of the story almost reaches out and touches readers, begging to be believed. Throughout the article Reuters’ Andrew RC Marshall cites a total of 6 anecdotal tales of wealthy protest participants in an attempt paint the entire movement as elitist, but cites absolutely no statistics or evidence to give readers an honest idea of [the actual makeup of the opposition](#).

After imbuing readers with the perception that protesters are merely elitist snobs, it goes on further to portray them as condescending as well. Quoting entrepreneur Petch Osathanugrah, Reuters states:

His opinion of the mainly rural Thais who voted for Yingluck is unsparing but typical. They are ill-educated, easily swayed and greedy, he said, and their willingness to sell their vote to Thaksin-backed politicians renders elections pointless.

However, Reuters’ cherry-picked representation is not only dishonest as a demographic representation of the protesters, but also dishonest in portraying the actual grievances of the protesters. The attempt to portray them as fascistic for rejecting elections is also a gross, intentional misrepresentation as we will soon see.

Demographically speaking, even by the most conservative estimates, December 9, 2013’s

anti-regime rally drew at least 150,000 protesters (though actual numbers reached near a million). These six anecdotal cases then constitute a meager .004% of even 150,000, and it is doubtful indeed that there are many more “billionaire heiresses” amongst the hundreds of thousands that continuously turn up for mass mobilizations.

Considering that Reuters spent no time qualifying the narrative they’ve attempted to foist upon unsuspecting readers one might wonder what the truth of the matter actually is. What do honest, objective numbers and analysis actually say?

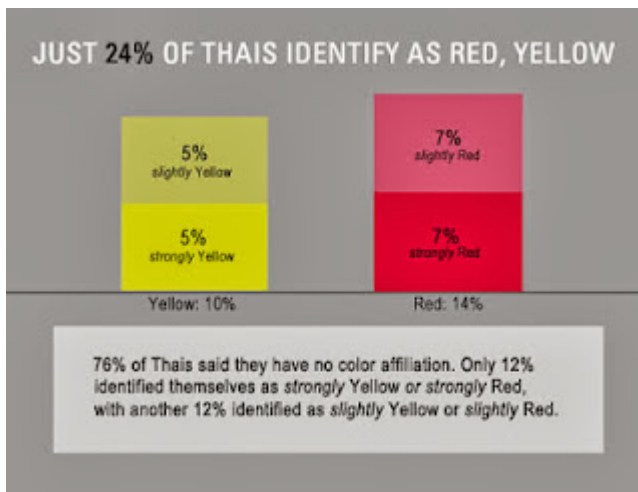
To understand just how far off Reuters and the regime are about their “class divide” myth, one needs to go by actual numbers, tellingly missing from both Reuters’ propaganda, and the regime’s.

Breaking Down the “Class Divide” Myth - By the Numbers

.004%: The number of anecdotal tales told by Reuters to portray the protesters as snobby elitist, compared to the most conservative estimates [of December 9, 2013’s mass rally \(via BBC\)](#).

35%: The number of eligible voters, according to [the Thai Election Commission’s](#) final tally for the 2011 elections, that actually voted for the Shinawatra regime. Were we to believe Reuters, that would mean the other 65% of all eligible voters were billionaire urban aristocrats – an absurdity even at face value.

48%: The percentage out of those that did bother to vote who voted for the regime – meaning Thaksin Shinawatra’s proxy party did not even garner a basic popular majority in the last election.



7%: The number of Thais who identify themselves as “red,” or supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra and his political machine. Another 7% identify themselves as only leaning toward “red,” for a grand total of 14% – this according to the Asia Foundation’s 2010 National Public Perception Survey of the Thai Electorate – [full .pdf here](#)).

26: The number of provinces in which [rice farmers have threatened to block roads](#), joining anti-regime protesters. These are the very Thais that actually did vote for the regime – [but have since been cheated in a vote-buying rice scheme](#) that has now run out of money. They had their promised prices first slashed last summer, and have now not been paid at all since October.

3,000: The approximate number of innocent people mass murdered by the Thaksin Shinawatra regime in 2003 over the course of 90 days in what he called his “war on drugs.” It would later be revealed that nearly half of those killed had nothing at all to even do with the drug trade. Human Rights Watch (HRW) would confirm this in their 2008 report titled, “[Thailand’s ‘war on drugs’](#),” a follow up to the much more extensive 2004 report, “[Not Enough Graves](#).”

The brutal campaign was [wildly popular amongst Thaksin’s supporters](#). The fact that those who do support Thaksin Shinawatra seem not to care or understand basic concepts like “human rights,” “trials,” and the “presumption of innocence until proven guilty,” is in fact what leads some to call the regime’s remaining supporters “ill-educated, easily swayed and greedy” – as Reuters published – and why some may believe that “their willingness to sell their vote to Thaksin-backed politicians [renders elections pointless](#).”

In Conclusion...

The childishly simplistic “class divide” Reuters and others have disingenuously attempted to lay over Thailand’s political landscape in reality does not fit. There is no division, only an attempt by the regime and its Western sponsors to create one. This is to justify the insidious tactics of violence, intimidation, and corruption that has propped the Shinawatra’s up for now nearly a decade, and to portray the anti-regime protesters in a manner that will earn the contempt of Reuters’ unsuspecting international readers.

Reuters did not omit statistics or actual evidence by accident or because it is incompetent, but because it is intentionally deceitful. A professional journalist, or even a careful reader, can easily recognize the weasel words, lack of actual statistics and facts, and the logical fallacies employed by Reuters in its attempt to buttress the crumbling regime and portray the protesters as spoiled, fascistic brats – a narrative peddled by the regime itself and its gaggle of propagandists.

Indeed – the 2003 “war on drugs” which left 3,000 in their graves and the wild popularity this crime against humanity to this day still has amongst Thaksin Shinawatra’s supporters has terrifying implications for Thailand’s future if this despotism is left unchecked and allowed to fester. A “democratically elected” government put into office by an electorate that cannot grasp the basic principles of a democratic society is not democratic at all. It is brutal, exploitative despotism shabbily dressed in the trappings of democracy, defended by shameless foreign propagandists working for equally insidious corporate-financier interests and is an immediate danger to Thailand, its people, and its future.

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