NARUEMON THABCHUMPON AND DUNCAN MCCARGO

Urbanized Villagers in the 2010 Thai Redshirt Protests

Not Just Poor Farmers?

ABSTRACT

This article argues that a more nuanced understanding is needed of the social composition of the redshirt protests in Bangkok from March-May 2010. Based on extensive interviews and survey research, the paper argues that many redshirts were "urbanized villagers" with lower middle class income levels and aspirations.

KEYWORDS: Thailand, protests, villagers, social movements, Thaksin

Between March 14 and May 19, 2010, some central areas of Bangkok were paralyzed by mass demonstrations organized by the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), better known as the "redshirts."[1] A total of 92 people died in violent clashes associated with the demonstrations, many of them unarmed civilians shot by the military;[2] another 1,489 were injured.[3]

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1. Thai government estimates put the maximum number of demonstrators at between 52,000 and 80,000 on March 14 (INN News, March 14, 2010, quoting the Operations Center of the Royal Thai Police), while the BBC suggested there were around 100,000 ("Red Protesters Demand PM Resigns," BBC News, March 14, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8566588.stm>, accessed March 14, 2011). By contrast, the organizers claimed this was the largest demonstration in Thai history, exceeding the May 1992 protests that numbered at least 200,000.

2. Official figures from the Ministry of Public Health's Emergency Medical Institute of Thailand, <http://www.emit.go.th>, corroborated by those of the Peace and Justice Center. See <http://www.peaceandjusticenetwork.org/?p=167>, accessed March 14, 2011.

3. For the best analysis of the protests, see Human Rights Watch, "Descent into Chaos: Thailand's 2010 Red Shirt Protests and the Government Crackdown," May 3, 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/05/03/descent-chaos-0>, accessed September 18, 2011. See also International Crisis Group (ICG), "Bridging Thailand's Deep Divide," *Asia Report*, no. 192 (July 5, 2010). On the wider political context, see Michael K. Connors, "Thailand's Emergency State: Struggles and Transformations," in Daljit Singh, ed., *Southeast Asian Affairs 2011* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies [ISEAS], 2011), pp. 287–305.

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Negotiations for a peaceful settlement leading to an early election broke down after an initial agreement between the government and protest leaders in early May. Violence peaked at two junctures: on April 10, when 26 people were killed, mainly in the Phan Fah area, and from May 14–19, when another 54 perished.

The protests ended when demonstrators were forcibly cleared by the military from the Rachaprasong area—using tactics that violated international law—and culminated in dozens of arson attacks by pro-UDD elements on buildings around the Thai capital. Tim Forsyth has argued that the demonstrations combined elements of mass popular protest with "carefully managed street theater" orchestrated by an opportunistic leadership.[4] This article examines the social composition of the 2010 redshirt movement. It sets out to offer preliminary answers to four crucial questions: Who were the redshirts? What was the social composition of the movement? How was it organized? And why did the redshirts stage the 2010 protests?

Since Thaksin Shinawatra became prime minister in 2001, Thailand has been caught up in intense political contestation between two rival power networks. One is centered on the monarchy, the military, the bureaucracy, and the Democrat Party; another is led by Thaksin and a series of political parties,[5] and informally backed by the police. The business community has been divided between these two networks. Thaksin was dominant until the September 19, 2006, military coup that removed him from office. The monarchy-centered network was then in the ascendant until December 2007, when rival forces won the first post-coup election.

After returning to Thailand in February 2008, Thaksin went into self-imposed exile that August to avoid serving an anticipated jail term for corruption-related offenses. During most of 2008, a pro-Thaksin government held office, only to be judicially ousted in December of that year when a backroom political deal made Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva prime minister without benefit of an election. Thaksin supporters regarded Abhisit's premiership as illegitimate and repeatedly pressed him to dissolve Parliament and call fresh elections.

4. Tim Forsyth, "Thailand's Red Shirt Protests: Popular Movement or Dangerous Street Theatre?" *Social Movement Studies* 9:4 (November 2010), p. 461.

5. Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais), 1998–2007; Palang Prachachon (People Power), July 2007-December 2008; latterly, Pheu Thai (For Thai).

The UDD was formed partly in response to the anti-Thaksin movement known as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD).[6] Supporters of the royalist PAD, donning their trademark yellow shirts, staged anti-Thaksin demonstrations in the early months of 2006. Their protests resumed during the pro-Thaksin governments of 2008; PAD followers occupied Government House (the office of the prime minister) from August to November, and forced the closure of Bangkok's airports in late November and early December. The UDD staged relatively small counter-demonstrations to the PAD in late 2008.[7] Nevertheless, at this juncture the UDD was a small-scale organization with strength in only a handful of provinces (mainly Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Udon Thani, and Ubon Ratchathani), and had no capacity to initiate a large and sustained demonstration.[8] The first major redshirt protests took place during four days of alarming violence from April 11–14, 2009. Protesters began by halting the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) summit in Pattaya in April 2009. There was an attack on Prime Minister Abhisit's car at the Interior Ministry, and a series of other incidents in the capital.[9] These were met by a harsh military crackdown. For almost a year, the redshirts lay low, regrouped, and expanded their numbers, before reemerging in the wake of a controversial February 2010 court decision confiscating the bulk of Thaksin's assets.

WHO WERE THE REDSHIRTS?

Understanding the leadership structure of the UDD is no simple matter (for an overview, see Figure 1). The most prominent leaders were the "trio" of Veera Musikaphong (a veteran politician, former Democrat Party secretary-general, and deputy interior minister in the 1980s); Jatuporn Phromphan, a Pheu Thai Party member of Parliament (MP); and former

6. For a discussion of the PAD, see Duncan McCargo, "Thai Politics as Reality TV," *Journal of Asian Studies* 68:1 (February 2009), pp. 7–19.

7. Incipient violent tendencies were evident during this period. Historian Somsak Jeamteerasakul, generally seen as sympathetic to the redshirts, commented at a Thammasat University seminar on August 9, 2010, that the movement had a strong tendency toward using violence. See his web postings on the topic at <http://www.tumblerblog.com/2010/06/somsak-jeamteerasakul-on-red-shirts-and-thaksin/>, accessed August 24, 2010.

8. DM (Duncan McCargo] interview with Jaran Dithapichai, November 28, 2008, London.

9. For an excellent analysis of this episode, see Michael Montesano, "Contextualizing the Pattaya Summit Debacle: Four April Days, Four Thai Pathologies," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 31:2 (August 2009), pp. 217–48.

FIGURE 1. Leadership Structure of UDD, 2010

SOURCE: By the authors.

government spokesman Nattawut Saikua. Despite the image of the UDD as a group based in North and Northeast Thailand, all three members of the trio were southerners. In contrast to these professional politicians, some other leading figures in the UDD had an academic or social-activist orientation: Jaran Dithapichai was a former university lecturer and human rights commissioner; Waeng Tojirakan was a medical doctor and ex-leader of the May 1992 pro-democracy movement; Wisa Khantap was a singer, artist, and political campaigner; and Woraphon Phrommikabut is a lecturer and former dean of the Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology at Thammasat University in Bangkok. Some from this group traced their

political involvement back to the "Octobrist" student activism of the 1970s.

Other second-tier leaders were essentially populist agitators: former pop singer and May 1992 activist Arisman Phongruangrong; popular community radio host Kwanchai Phraiphana; former Thai Rak Thai MP from the city of Nakorn Ratchasima (popularly known by its nickname, Khorat) Suphorn Atthawong (a.k.a. Rambo Isan); and comedy actor Yosawarit Chooklom (a.k.a. Jaeng Dokjik). Apart from Jatuporn, most of these leaders were supportive of a negotiated settlement in May 2010, but a deal was blocked by three hard-line elements. These comprised the following:

- members of Thaksin's own family (including his sister Yingluck Shinawatra, elected prime minister in August 2011);
- a group known as "Red Siam," accused by the authorities of republican leanings, with strong ties to Thaksin and officially led by self-exiled former Prime Minister's Office Minister Jakkrapop Penkair. It was fronted by ex-CPT (Communist Party of Thailand) member Surachai Danatthananusorn; and
- another faction loyal to the maverick army General Khattiya Sawasdipol (best known as Seh Daeng).[10] Seh Daeng was the chief trainer of a key element in the UDD security team called "King Taksin's warriors" (nakrop prachao Tak).[11] He was widely seen as the leader of a shadowy group of "men in black," allegedly responsible for grenade launcher attacks on both military and civilian targets.[12]

According to UDD leaders, the movement had learned its lessons from the failed 2009 demonstrations; during the 2010 rallies, it adopted the motto of three don'ts: "Don't 'strike the sky' (literally, *ti fa*, meaning don't attack the country's traditional institutions); don't engage in verbal attacks (*da tho*); and

10. Seh Daeng died on May 17, 2010, of injuries inflicted by a sniper's bullet four days earlier. For a posthumous, partisan account of his life and career, see *Lap Luang Seh Daeng* [Secrets and camouflage of Seh Daeng] (Bangkok: Bangkok Books, 2010).

11. King Taksin (1734–82) was the only king of the Thonburi Kingdom, admired for his role in liberating Siam (Thailand) from Burmese occupation after the second fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, and in the subsequent unification of Siam. He was executed and succeeded by King Rama I. Taksin was an ethnic Chinese who was ousted by the Chakri Dynasty, and many supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra have drawn parallels between the two men.

12. For a controversial piece on the "men in black" by two foreign correspondents, see Kenneth Todd Ruiz and Olivier Sarbil, "Unmasked: Thailand's Men in Black," *Asia Times Online,* May 29, 2010, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/LE29Ae02.html>, accessed August 24, 2010.

don't agitate using violence (*kokhwamrunraeng*)."[13] In practice, however, these principles were not consistently followed during the protests. Although as early as March 2010 some UDD leaders publicly distanced the wider movement from Red Siam and Seh Daeng, the maverick cavalry officer enjoyed a cult of personality among many ordinary UDD members and members of the movement's security teams, who saw him as a symbol of masculinity, daring, and resistance to authority.

The UDD brought together people with a wide range of backgrounds, ranging from former communists to liberals to rightist hard-liners. The lack of clear lines of command and accountability among the various core leaders of the UDD undermined the effectiveness of the movement. In a revealing published interview, Thida Thawornset, the wife of Dr. Waeng, who later became head of the UDD, explained that attitudes to violence deeply divided the redshirt leadership.[14] Although most leaders were committed to mainstream political activity, a minority (such as Seh Daeng's group) supported the use of weapons and talked of an armed struggle. The mainstream leadership had asked the violent elements to leave the protests, but they refused. Thida blamed the hard-liners for sabotaging negotiations.

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

13. NT (Naruemon Thabchumpon) interview with UDD leader, March 20, 2010, in Bangkok.

14. "Thida Thawornset, Kunsuenokkhuk" [Advisor outside prison], interview by Chairit Yonpiam, *Post Today*, July 14, 2010, at <http://www.posttoday.com>, accessed August 24, 2010.

15. Prawase Wasi, "Thotsalak khwamrunraeng—apiwat prachatipathai" [Removing violence—nurturing democracy], *Prachathai* (Independent Ordinary People), April 12, 2010, <http://prachatai.com/journal/2010/04/28910>, accessed August 24, 2010.

violent extremists; and (5) the poor and their sympathizers, from both urban and rural areas.

Prawase was entirely correct to highlight the diverse nature of the redshirt movement, and there is ample evidence that Thaksin, idealists, and extremists were all involved. However, Prawase's second and fifth categories were more problematic. Were the ordinary redshirts a broadly homogeneous group of people, united by their poverty? This article will suggest that "hired" protesters and "poor" protesters form essentially the same group, but were not really hired, and not really poor. Rather, they mainly comprised loosely organized networks drawn from an emerging class of "urbanized villagers" that straddled both urban and rural society, and who had been mobilized by pro-Thaksin politicians and other actors.

In the international media—and in the popular discourse of middle class Bangkokians—the redshirts were presented as "poor farmers," supporters of the ousted Thaksin who had been brought into the capital from rural areas, notably the North and Northeast. A typical summary went as follows: "The Red Shirts, who want Mr. Abhisit to resign . . . are an increasingly broad movement, but at their core are poor farmers from the northern provinces."[16] They were widely portrayed as acting on the basis of class and economic grievances, by commentators who conflated them with the "Assembly of the Poor" social activists, primarily from the Northeast, who had staged several mass Bangkok protests in the 1990s. This impressionistic view of the redshirt movement gained considerable popular currency.

Drawing on firsthand interviews and participant observation research, this article sets out to offer a more nuanced and critical view of the redshirt movement than has hitherto appeared in English. The empirical content is mainly based on field research conducted between March 12 and May 20, 2010, during the demonstration period in Bangkok. A total of 400 questionnaire surveys were conducted at the demonstration sites at Pan Fah and Rachaprasong, while 57 interviews were conducted with informants, both in Bangkok and their home provinces. Key informants included 15 UDD leaders and members from the Central region, as well as 42 members from nine provinces: Nakhon Pathom, Nontaburi, Samut Prakan, Ayuthaya, Nakhon Sawan, Chiang Mai, Lamphoon, Mukdahan, and Ubon Ratchathani. Provincial informants were identified through a "snowballing" process, starting with existing contacts at

16. "Rogue Thai General Dies as Redshirts Given New Deadline," *The Times* (London), May 17, 2010.

the central level. These informants do not provide a complete picture of the movement, and there is ample scope for further study; nevertheless, their responses offer important insights.

WHAT WAS THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE MOVEMENT?

Just as the media tended to construct a narrative about the redshirts emphasizing their status as poor farmers and underdogs from the provinces, so the redshirts themselves offered alternative narratives of their movement as part of an emerging set of new forces. This section explores redshirt narratives about their own social composition, while recognizing that without much more extensive surveys and samples, such narratives are bound to be incomplete. Many of those interviewed were redshirt organizers at the sub-district level. In terms of occupation, the redshirt protesters interviewed often engaged in seasonal, market-oriented farming such as commercial flower growing or lotus production.[17] They owned on average around 15 rai (six acres) of land,[18] a modest but respectable holding by Thai standards: they were not landless peasants struggling to find ways of subsisting. While informants did commonly refer to themselves as farmers, this was misleading: most were in business, and actually had various sources of income. Five of those interviewed had small businesses repairing electrical appliances and TVs. Three were small-scale construction contractors, with perhaps four or five workers, typically engaged in building projects funded by local government bodies (such as Tambon [i.e., sub-district level] administrative organizations [TAOs]); seven were themselves elected local politicians, generally members of TAOs or municipalities. Eleven interviewees were community radio presenters who had built up their own local followings. Many of these contractors, local politicians, and radio presenters served both as community organizers and as vote canvassers (*hua khanaen*) for those higher up the political food chain such as members of provincial administrative organizations (PAOs) or of the national Parliament. In other words, they had the task of mobilizing groups of supporters to back selected candidates at election times, a role that gave them considerable bargaining power. Five of those interviewed were former members of the now-defunct CPT

17. Unless otherwise indicated, detailed information in this and the following two sections derives from NT's interviews with 57 redshirt activists, April and May 2010.

18. One rai equals 1,600 square meters, and 2.5 rai equals one acre.

(Communist Party of Thailand), but they formed only a small minority within the redshirts as a whole.

At least 30 out of the 42 provincial interviewees had built up their businesses using loans from Thaksin-era projects, notably small and medium enterprise (SME) funds administered by the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Bank[19] and the Village Development Fund (VDF). Virtually all had been beneficiaries of the VDF, which had provided one million baht's (about US$32,000) worth of loans[20] to ordinary rural dwellers at the very low interest rate of 6%.[21] All had accessed the 30 baht health care scheme (a universal progam with the aim of ensuring equitable health care, accessed via a flat user fee of about US$1 per consultation). The benefits they had derived from these programs helped make them feel strongly pro-Thaksin. Most informants were in debt, but all provincial interviewees drove pick-up trucks, the vehicle of choice for rural Thais. Some were retired low-ranking government officials (clerical and ancillary staff at around the C-3 level). Many of the redshirts received additional income from stints of short-term migrant labor, or from remittances sent by relatives working in Taiwan or even Los Angeles. There were very few teachers or health workers in the redshirt movement: these more solidly middle class professions tended to be PAD-oriented.

The core strength of the redshirt movement derives from peri-urban areas, from suburbs of urban areas, and from TAOs rather than municipalities. The provinces represented by our informants all contained major urban areas, and were predominantly in the North and Northeast, although they included Thailand's Central region and the eastern seaboard. Redshirt strongholds corresponded closely to the areas placed under the 2005 emergency laws on April 7 and May 13 and 19, 2010, by the Abhisit government.[22] Informants claimed that up to 80% of the populations of three provinces,

19. The "SME Bank" was created by the Thaksin government in 2002, based on the former Small Industry Finance Corporation.

20. The current exchange rate is roughly 30 baht to the dollar.

21. For a detailed study of the VDF, see Antika Preeyanon, "The Village Fund Project and Changes in the Dynamics of Local Power in Rural Thailand," Ph.D. diss., University of Leeds, 2008.

22. Provinces and districts covered by the emergency decree on April 7 were the following: Bangkok, Nonthaburi, Samut Prakan (Muang, Bang Phli, Phra Pradang, Phra Samut Chedi, Bang Boh, and Bang Sao Thong); Pathum Thani (Thanyaburi, Lad Lumkaew, Sam Kok, Lam Luk Ka, and Khlong Luang); Nakhon Pathom (Phutthamonthon) and Ayutthaya (Wang Noi, Bang Pa-in, Bang Sai, and Lat Bua Luang). For lists of areas covered later by announcements from the Center for Resolution of the Emergency Situation (CRES) on May 13, 2010, and May 19, 2010, see

Chiang Mai (Thaksin's home town), Udon Thani, and Khon Kaen were redshirt sympathizers. In a number of areas, redshirt leaders had joined pro-Thaksin parties, become local politicians, or won elected office. Despite their popular image as non-metropolitans, large numbers of redshirt supporters actually lived in Bangkok or in surrounding provinces, and many areas of the capital city were strong redshirt zones. However, closer scrutiny revealed that the majority of Bangkokian redshirts surveyed were migrants from other parts of Thailand who resided most of the year in the capital but still voted in their home provinces.[23] The discrepancy between where people actually live and where they have their formal household registration means that official Thai provincial population statistics are highly misleading. For example, there are supposedly only around 6.27 million people in Bangkok proper,[24] but the real figure may be double this.

The protesters were not particularly youthful. Our survey of 400 protesters found that most were in their forties and fifties, and two-thirds were over 40 (see Table 1). In terms of educational level, 34.8% had only a primary education and 32.7% had attended high school or junior vocational college. A total of 8.5% had diploma-level education and 24% held bachelor's degrees or higher. While not well-off, most were not especially poor (see Table 2); 42% had incomes in excess of 10,000 baht ($334) per month (25.6% between 10,000 and 30,000 baht [$1,000]), and 16.4% above 30,000. By contrast, 31.7% said their incomes were 5,000 baht ($167) a month or less, and 26.3% received between 5,000 and 10,000 baht per month.

Those interviewed could easily remember when electricity and television had reached their villages and brought enormous social changes, often as recently as the 1980s. They located themselves within a narrative about the benefits of economic development. They did not see themselves as poor: they had hopes for the future, and believed social mobility would increase if the

<http://www.capothai.org/capothai/emergency-declare-17-provinces-13-may-10> and <www.capothai.org/prakas-ph-r-k-chukchein>, accessed September 2, 2010.

23. This conclusion was supported by a survey of 400 participants in the UDD demonstrations conducted at the Pan Fah site in central Bangkok between March 15 and April 5, 2010. This was a purposive survey conducted by Naruemon Thabchumpon and Prapart Pintobtang, working from questionnaires at 80 tents (representing different provinces and regions of the country), with five interviews per tent. Of those interviewed, 17.7% came from Bangkok and the five surrounding provinces, 22.3% were legally resident in the provinces but lived and worked in the Bangkok area, and 60% were legally and actually resident outside greater Bangkok.

24. Statistics from the Bureau of Registration Administration, Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior, <http://bora.dopa.go.th>, accessed December 31, 2008.

TABLE 1. Age of Protesters

Age	*Number*	*Percentage*
20 or less	18	4.5
21–30	43	10.8
31–40	68	17.1
41–50	101	25.1
51–60	112	28.0
61 or more	58	14.5
Total	400	100.0

SOURCE: Survey of 400 redshirt protesters, March-April 2010.

TABLE 2. Monthly Income of Protesters (in Baht)

Monthly Income	*Number*	*Percentage*
1. 5,000 or less	128	31.7
2. 5,001–10,000	105	26.3
3. 10,001–30,000	103	25.6
4. 30,001 or more	66	16.4
Total	400	100.0

SOURCE: Ibid. to Table 1.

bureaucratic system changed. They admired Thaksin's "CEO" style of working and argued that under his leadership local bureaucrats were less rule-bound and more efficient, helpful, and smiling. Seven key informants from Ubon, Chiang Mai, and Nakhon Pathom believed that their children would have a brighter future than they had had. They recalled the Chatichai Choonavan period (1988–91) as a time of strong economic growth, which declined during the Chuan eras (1992–95, 1997–2001) and then revived under Thaksin.

Interview informants reported that they had access to local politicians. Many admitted to taking money from these politicians, but denied selling their votes—rather, they thought of the payments as "tokens of generosity" (*sin nam jai*). They insisted that they would vote for pro-Thaksin candidates whether they were paid or not. Many of them liked the multi-member MP constituency system, which allowed them to cast more than one vote: they could allocate one to a local figure, one to the party they liked, and another

for someone in their kinship network. Some informants admitted that while they supported pro-Thaksin parties in 2007 in the party-list vote, they selected constituency candidates from a range of parties based on local knowledge and connections.[25]

For many informants, however, the most important elections were those at the TAO level, which allowed them to have a direct influence over the people in charge of their immediate locality. Two interviewees were unhappy about the lifting of term limits for TAO heads, and especially about post-coup changes allowing village headmen to remain in office until age 60, rather than facing regular reelection.[26] They saw these changes as helping to entrench local power-holders and reducing the bargaining power of the electorate. They wanted to be able to take their concerns and demands directly to TAO leaders, rather than deal with paternalistic and remote Interior Ministry officials such as provincial governors and district officers. Some redshirt informants complained that under the Abhisit government, TAO chiefs now had less power to set budgets and approve their own projects, which had to be signed off by "middlemen" (*pho kha khon klang*) government officials who often demanded kickbacks.

All 42 provincial interview informants had seen their own standing as organizers, canvassers, and brokers grow during the 1990s—when TAOs had been created and elections introduced for village headmen—and seen their economic status rise during the Thaksin era. The post-2006 coup period had seen a decline in their social and economic standing that they were anxious to reverse. These were not poor people, largely excluded from the system: they were a class of emerging stakeholders whose aspirations had been thwarted by changes since the end of the Thaksin period. Three local redshirt leaders, who operated as *hua khanaen* (vote canvassers) mobilizing perhaps 30 or more votes in a particular zone of a village (*khum*), said they were able to engage in bargaining with prospective MPs at election times: certain parliamentary candidates would even come to talk to them directly.[27] This trend illustrated the way canvassers had become increasingly empowered as intermediaries engaged in two-way exchanges between communities and their elected representatives.

25. NT interviews in Nakhon Pathom, April 5, 2010, and Ubon Ratchathani, April 26, 2010.

26. NT interviews in Nakhon Pathom, April 6, 2010.

27. For a detailed analysis of vote canvassing, see Anyarat Chattharakul, "Networks of Vote-Canvassers in Thai Elections: Informal Power and Money Politics," Ph.D. diss., University of Leeds, 2007.

One informant argued that these days redshirt villagers were no longer reliant on farming and harvesting natural resources but were also actively engaged in income generation, primarily in non-farming sectors. Their economic status was now supported by "two legs" of activity.[28] Questions of politics and public policy were thus closely linked to their livelihoods and well-being. They were not against consumerism, in contrast to the lip service paid by yellowshirts to royally promoted and bureaucratically sponsored notions of a "sufficiency economy" paralleled by an NGO (nongovernmental organization)-led discourse of "community culture" and nationalist notions of rediscovering and preserving "Thai-ness."[29] Redshirts had little affinity with the mainstream NGO community in Thailand, which they associated with a set of romantic delusions about delinking the local from the global and returning to a pre-consumerist, non-monetary lifestyle.[30] As one informant put it: "One reason I come to protest is that the villagers are now using pickups [i.e., trucks]; we are not going to back to riding motorbikes."[31]

Three informants felt that Thaksin's support for a consumer society was in line with their quest for a life of greater opportunity.[32] Thaksin's government had built upon socioeconomic changes well underway when he became prime minister but which he sought to consolidate. Because these groups had benefited from a range of government initiatives during the 2001–06 period, abrupt policy reversals after the coup, such as greater central control over SML (small, medium, and large) village funds, hit them hard.

The leading economist Ammar Siamwalla[33] has suggested that this layer of Thai society ought to be called "farm entrepreneurs" rather than farmers (*chao na*): *phujatkan na* (literally, rice field managers), not *chao na*. As a result of economic stimulus schemes by various governments, many urbanized villagers accessed benefits in terms of capital accumulation, especially between 1997 and

28. NT interviews with three provincial activists in Chiang Mai, May 3, 2010.

29. On Thai-ness, see Michael K. Connors, *Democracy and National Identity* (2nd. ed.) (Copenhagen: NIAS [Nordic Institute of Asian Studies] Press, 2007).

30. Nidhi Aeusriwongse has argued that the NGO community had lost touch with the changing realities of Thai society and was attached to an outdated view of rural life. See "Lomwong khao ma: Kui kap Nidhi Aeusriwongse nai wan 'sua daeng' phai" [Gather round in a circle: Talking to Nidhi Aeusriwongse on the day the redshirts lost], interview by Sroikeaw Kammala, June 3, 2010, <http://prachatai.com/journal/2010/6/29994>, accessed August 31, 2010.

31. NT interview with provincial activist, Chiang Mai, May 4, 2010.

32. NT interview with three UDD activists from Central Thailand, April 2, 2010.

33. Informal discussion by NT with Ammar Siamwalla and Porpan Ouiyanont, Bangkok, June 28, 2010.

2006, but these benefits ceased after the coup. During the rallies, many protesters donned T-shirts bearing the word *prai* (literally, slave or serf). *Prai* was used in implicit contrast with the term *amat* (or *amart,* aristocrats) used by the redshirts and by some commentators to refer to elite members of Thai society. These included people linked to the palace or the Democrat Party who possessed privileged access to power.

The phrase was a critical commentary on inequalities of social class and political power, rather than economic status per se. Asked about the term *prai,* informants responded that it meant grassroots people, farmers, the lower middle class, low ranking government officers, secondary and middle school graduates, sticky-rice eaters,[34] small-traders, semi-skilled self-employed workers, people selling food from their pickup trucks, or traders selling fresh goods at weekend markets. Very few redshirts had their own shop-houses. All interviewees from Chiang Mai, Nakhon Sawan, Ayuthaya, and Patum Thani insisted that they did not see themselves as part of a marginal ethnic group. They all lived in lowland areas, not upland areas, and their lives were not marginal: they had access to irrigation, roads, and electricity. They were not rich, just poorer than the yellowshirts. Three informants running small businesses declared that they believed in globalization and were not against the capitalist system.[35]

A number of academics have commented on the emergence of a politically active lower middle class in Thailand over the past couple of decades. Leading historian and public intellectual Nidhi Aeusriwongse, in a long interview in May 2010, argued that while the elite were implicated in recent rounds of political mobilization, most of those taking part came from the middle and lower echelons of the middle classes.[36] He pointed out that most Thais are no longer farmers, and that the majority now live in urban areas. The redshirts draw support from people who have made the transition from subsistence farming to market economy by combining farm production, small business, and sale of their labor.

34. Glutinous sticky rice is favored by many people in North and Northeast Thailand, while people from Central and South Thailand usually prefer steamed rice.

35. NT interviews with three activists from Ubon and Nakhon Sawan in Bangkok, April 16, 2010.

36. Nidhi Aeusriwongse "Lomwong khao ma: Kui kap Nidhi Aeusriwongse nai wan 'sua daeng' phai."

Another approach was adopted in a recent study led by former Thammasat University political science dean and politician Anek Laothamatas.[37] Anek's study was based on a survey of 5,381 informants from all regions of the country, selected to include informants from high growth, average growth, and low growth provinces. Anek argued that Thailand was gripped by a deep divide between haves and have-nots. His survey found that just over half (50.5%) of respondents regarded themselves as "poor" (*yakjon*), compared with 32.1% who were "middling" (*panklang*), and only 2% who viewed their economic status as "good" (*di*).[38] Echoing Huntington's classic 1960s arguments, Anek had famously asserted in the 1990s that Thailand was torn between two democracies, the town versus the country.[39] This influential notion gained considerable popular and academic currency and was widely used as a shorthand explanation for the 2010 redshirt protests.

But in his 2010 study, Anek acknowledged that an arbitrary distinction between town and country was too crude. Taking account of the rise of the lower middle class noted by Nidhi, Anek now asserted that "[y]ellow comprises the urban and the urban in the countryside; red comprises the rural and the countryside within the urban."[40] One problem with Anek's analysis, even in the 2010 study, was that rural and urban dwellers cannot readily be classified based on whether or not they live in a municipality.[41] Because the boundaries of many municipalities bear little relation to current patterns of urbanization and development, there is no easy way to identify or categorize the peri-urban areas where many redshirts reside. Similarly, when classifying the population into class and occupational groups, Anek draws a distinction between "farmers and laborers" (21.9% of his informants) and "self-employed and private sector employees" (31.6%),[42] although many of the emerging

37. Anek Laothamatas, "Raigansarup chabab phuboriahn: Khrongkanwijai ruang wikhro jutkanjat khong phrathet thai phua fai wikhritkan sangkhom, sethhakit, lae kanmuangsobson" [Executive summary: A draft research project on the analysis of the country's momentum for going beyond socio-economic and political crises], unpublished research report, 2010.

38. Ibid., Table 2, p. 84.

39. For a short English version, see Anek Laothamatas, "A Tale of Two Democracies: Conflicting Perceptions of Elections and Democracy in Thailand," in *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia*, ed. Robert H. Taylor (Washington, D.C. and New York, respectively: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 201–23.

40. Anek, *Raigansarup chabab phuboriahn*, p. 122.

41. Ibid., Table 10, p. 88.

42. Ibid., p. 86.

lower middle class derive their income from both farming and small trading.

Nidhi's arguments were backed by a 2010 Chiang Mai University (CMU) study that describes Thailand as a "post-peasant" society.[43] That is, most of the population is now modern and market-oriented; the much-vaunted distinction between urban and rural has become very blurred because many "rural" people actually work in urban areas and share similar outlooks to those living in large towns.[44] The CMU team was critical of Anek's work, disputing the idea that so many Thais could be viewed as "poor." The researchers argued that most yellowshirt supporters came from the lower/middle echelon of the middle class, while redshirt supporters were generally from the lowest echelon of the middle class. Ironically, yellowshirts interviewed by the CMU team were more likely to describe themselves as poor than redshirts were. This newly emerged lower middle class comprised people who were not poor in terms of either income or assets but were chronically insecure.[45] They formed part of the irregular, informal economy rather than the formal one, and derived most of their income from petty trading and remittances.[46] As such, they tended to be quite vulnerable and anxious.

Many redshirts straddled the boundaries between urban and rural locations, and between farming and non-farming activity, much more thoroughly than most previous studies have recognized. Prapart Pintobtang aptly described the redshirts as a movement of the "toproots" rather than the grassroots; he argued that Thai villagers had increasingly become active citizens rather than relatively passive recipients of state and private initiatives.[47] Nevertheless, this self-presentation as an emerging social force based in the lower echelons of the middle classes reflected a counter-narrative deliberately advanced by our mid-level redshirt informants in order to challenge the paternalistic designation of

43. Apichat Sathitniramay, Nithi Pawakapan, Yukti Mukdawijitra, Prapas Pintobdaeng, Naruemon Thabchumpon, and Wanwiphang Manachotphong, "Raingan buang ton khrongkanwijai kanplianplaeng dan setthakit lae sangkom khong chanchon mai" [Inception report: Research project on economic and social change of new social classes], presented to the Institute for Public Policy, Chiang Mai University, June 15, 2010, p. 64.

44. Ibid., pp. 31–32.

45. Ibid., p. 45.

46. Ibid., p. 38.

47. Prapart Pintoptang, "The Uprising of 'Toproots': Political Perspectives of the Redshirt Movement," paper submitted to the International Seminar on "Rural-Urban Tensions, Violence, and Conflict Transformation: Thailand in Global Comparative Perspective," August 26–27, 2010, Chulalongkorn University.

"poor farmers" often favored by the Bangkok media and implicit in the royalist rhetoric of the sufficiency economy.

HOW WERE THE REDSHIRTS ORGANIZED?

Without denying the agency of the protesters themselves, it is also important to recognize that the redshirts were highly susceptible to politicization and mobilization by community leaders, often linked to pro-Thaksin politicians. The redshirt movement was a loosely structured network organization rather than a hierarchical one. Members expanded the network by reaching out to friends, relatives, and people in their own villages and communities. Six interviewees explained that in provinces such as Ubon and Chiang Mai, their outreach had expanded through direct contacts, "like Amway."[48] Whereas there used to be only five redshirt groups in Chiang Mai, this had increased to 24 by the time of the 2010 demonstrations, comprising around 40,000 people. Each cell was autonomous, each leader found their own members, and each network sent its own representatives to demonstrations.

This point was confirmed by UDD leaders from each of the nine provinces studied. Leaders organized pickups full of protesters to join demonstrations in rotation. The networks contacted each other and built connections through meeting at UDD "political schools," two- or three-day-long courses taught by leading figures including Jaran, Waeng, and Jatuporn, and said to have been attended by at least 16,700 participants.[49] According to four key informants, UDD political schools originally lasted from Friday to Monday morning before being reduced to weekend courses.[50] Class schedules began with a lecture in the morning; participants were then divided into groups to conduct SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analyses. Each group worked out its own strategy and action plan, and then the most interesting plans would be selected for presentation to the whole class. Those people who passed through the schools did not always simply join existing groups—some set up their own.

48. The U.S. consumer goods company Amway markets products through networks of personal connections rather than formal retail outlets. Amway has been very successful in Thailand.

49. ICG, *Bridging Thailand's Deep Divide*, p. 14, quoting an interview with a Pheu Thai MP.

50. NT focus group interview with UDD provincial leaders, a community radio disc jockey (DJ), and members of sub-district councils, Chiang Mai, April 6, 2010.

UDD political school alumni were key contacts during the 2010 rally. But although many of the schools took turns to join the national rallies, few of their active members played focal roles at the provincial level. The UDD school was thus a hub for recruitment and expansion of the movement but did not provide large numbers of demonstrators in May 2010. These were mobilized primarily through the use of financial resources. Many UDD school alumni attended the March-April 2010 protests at Pan Fah, but more than half of them left the protest site after the April 10 incident and only a small number of hard-liners stuck with the demonstrations following the move to Rachaprasong. In interviews, two key UDD school alumni agreed with Thida's view that violent elements at this point were now hijacking the protests, a view reaffirmed when they heard that Veera had resigned from his position as the UDD chair after negotiations with the government collapsed.[51] While the more "peace-oriented" UDD networks associated with the schools were central to the Pan Fah protests, they lost influence and declined in numbers during the Rachaprasong phase, during which hard-line elements became more dominant.[52]

Redshirt groups communicated through community radio stations, the distribution of CDs, and hard-copy newsletters that people reproduced locally as color photocopies. The networks were organized such that a demonstration outside a provincial hall, say, could be called together at half an hour's notice. All provincial interviewees listened to community radio and had access to mobile phones. Community radio stations commonly broadcast in regional languages such as Isan/Lao (in the Northeast) or Muang (in the North) rather than in Central Thai.[53] Mobile phones were extensively used to link community radio to places where a radio signal was difficult to obtain. They were also regular viewers of the pro-redshirt television station PTV, which modeled itself on the yellowshirt ASTV, as well as the Spring News and Voice TV cable stations.[54] Supporters read their own newspapers such as *Red News* and often also sent mass text messages for quick communication. A few informants had direct access to the Internet, but ultimately, downloaded Internet materials were more commonly circulated on home-produced CDs containing radio voice

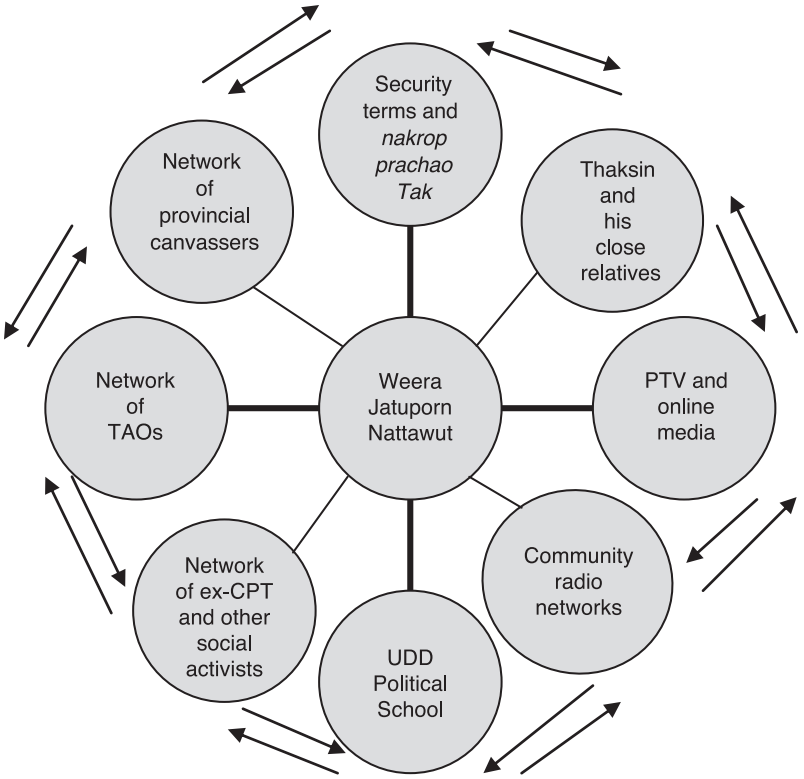
51. NT interviews with UDD provincial leaders, July 22–27, 2010, Bangkok and Chiang Mai.

52. NT interviews with three figures close to the UDD leadership, Bangkok, April 2, 2010.

53. NT interview with two community radio DJs from Ubon and Chiang Mai, April 25, 2010, Bangkok.

54. NT interview with Voice TV presenter, March 13, 2010, Bangkok.

FIGURE 2. Key UDD Networks



SOURCE: By the authors.

clips, video clips, and written text. In practice, the distinction between local redshirt groups and voter networks mobilized by political canvassers was blurred, as was the distinction between canvassers and community radio talk show hosts. For a summary of the networks involved, see Figure 2.

While traditional canvassers made use of geographical territory, radio presenters were able to cover a larger political space and could sometimes become super-canvassers or virtual canvassers, able to influence considerable numbers of voters. Redshirt community radio programs had their own fund-raising projects, packaged as a form of self-help for listeners. They typically featured *luk thung* (a Thai form of country music), *yong* or *khammuang* (northern traditional music), or *mo lam* (traditional northeastern performances). Presenters broadcast voice clips of redshirt leaders but also featured cut-price offers for

products such as soap and shampoo. A typical province in the North or Northeast contained several UDD networks. Each network had its own medium-wave radio station, used for campaign purposes; programing includes music, local folklore, and political commentaries on both local and national issues.[55] Networks ran their own local political education projects and campaigns and organized their own demonstrations. Groups were generally not membership-based but were ad hoc and issue-based.[56]

The UDD emulated strategies first pioneered by the Thai Rak Thai Party during the 2001 election period, organizing workshops to discuss rural issues with community leaders in all parts of the country. But the UDD did not valorize local knowledge or the popular will; its approach was to channel grassroots input into a state-led policy process in which local interests were firmly subordinated to national ones. Although the loose and highly flexible network structure of the redshirts had considerable benefits, allowing the movement to expand organically and opportunistically, the wide gap between national and local perspectives was a potential source of tensions between the leadership and the grassroots.[57]

What about the popular accusation that they were "mobs for hire?" Informants responded in a pragmatic vein: they participated in demonstrations willingly, but if they received payments as well, so much the better.[58] The majority of protesters who took part in the survey came in groups, either with family members (24.5%), as part of a community group or network (39.9%), or as members of an organization (12.1%). The Bangkok demonstration organizers paid out a "gas allowance" of a few thousand baht for every pickup truck, depending on the distance it traveled.[59] A pickup typically contained seven to 10 redshirt supporters. They would stay at the protest for around a week and then go back home, their places taken in turn by other members of the same group.

55. NT interviews with four activists from Chiang Mai, Ubon, Mukdahan, and Nakhon Sawan, April 18, 2010, Bangkok.

56. NT interview with UDD activist, April 6, 2010, Chiang Mai.

57. NT interviews with two activists in Ubon and Chiang Mai, April 26 and May 6, 2010, respectively.

58. This view was expressed by all our interview informants from Chiang Mai, Lampang, Ubon, Nakhon Sawan, and Mukdahan. Forsyth reports receiving information that some protesters were paid. See Forsyth, *Thailand's Red Shirt Protests*, p. 464.

59. NT interviews with two activists from Nakhon Pathom and Chiang Mai, April 6, 2010, Bangkok.

This weekly trip model was the most common, because it allowed redshirts to continue with their work and business activities. Very few redshirts attended the entire two-month protest, other than those based around Bangkok, who generally came only in the evenings.[60] Many of these evening participants came primarily to listen to Nattawut, the former government spokesman who after Thaksin himself was the movement's most popular figure, with a personal "fan club" of around 10,000 supporters. Not all redshirt supporters had the time or inclination to attend rallies in the capital in person; some preferred to sponsor others to go in their place, acting as "*papa*" (a term conventionally used for those persons who sponsor Buddhist monks). Sometimes sponsors would club together, providing perhaps 100 or 200 baht ($3.33 to $6.66) each to support a pickup truck full of protesters.[61] Those who took part in the protests usually registered their names with the UDD, partly because of unconfirmed rumors that if pro-Thaksin parties were returned to power, former demonstrators would receive a debt moratorium for their loans from the VDF.

Demonstrators did not spend all their time at their protest sites, and few of them actually slept there. Some reported that during their week in Bangkok they took the opportunity to indulge in sightseeing—including visiting the Wat Phra Kaew (Temple of the Emerald Buddha) within the precincts of the Grand Palace, an ironic leisure activity for supposed anti-monarchists—or to ride on the BTS electric train, a great novelty for provincial Thais.[62] Only five of those interviewed stayed overnight at the rally site; most others stayed with family members or volunteer "host families" in the capital city or checked into cheap hotels in groups, taking turns to shower and sleeping mainly on the floor.

This was a completely different phenomenon from the much more downmarket rallies staged by the Assembly of the Poor during the 1990s, where virtually everybody slept at the demonstration site. Non-residential rallies such as the August-November 2008 PAD rally at Government House were much easier to sustain for long periods: protesters were far less weary than those who literally camped out on the street. Food for the 2010 rallies was

60. NT interviews with two activists from Ubon and Mukdahan, April 28, 2010, Ubon.

61. Both Thaksin and UDD leader Jaran have told other interviewers that the movement was largely financially self-sustaining, based on small donations from supporters. ICG, *Bridging Thailand's Deep Divide,* p. 18.

62. NT interviews with two activists in Pathum Thani and Chiang Mai, April 9 and May 7, 2010, respectively.

provided by the central organizers (*suan klang*) and also at some of the many large tents erected at the protest.[63] Every province taking part had its own encampment: one tent for smaller networks, and several tents for larger provinces such as Ubon and Chiang Mai.[64] Nested at the heart of this national protest was a set of provincial ones. Although some interviewees argued that they joined the protests because of their own political consciousness,[65] money played a vital role in expanding and sustaining the movement. None of the interviewees paid for transportation or food,[66] which was provided by some MPs and by the UDD's political networks. The same sources also covered the core expenses of the protest. According to one interviewee, the central organizers paid for the stage performance, sound system, and cable TV broadcasting, equivalent to around 500,000 baht ($15,000) per day. Some leaders estimated that the 63 days of protracted protests cost a basic two million baht ($60,000) per day, or 126 million baht (just over $4 million dollars) in total.[67]

Attitudes to violence were inconsistent and somewhat ambiguous. A couple of informants stated that they did not consider themselves violent, but were a little bit "tough guy" (*nakleng nit nit*).[68] A common view was that having weapons to protect yourself was not violent so long as you were acting out of sincere conviction.[69] Some informants admitted sympathy with violent actions such as an arson attack on the Ubon provincial hall and three attacks at a school run by the dissident Buddhist sect Santi Asoke, which was aligned with the yellowshirt movement.[70] Asked about their view of the "men in black" who committed acts of violence during the demonstrations, various informants described them as soldiers from factions of the military who supported the redshirts and came to protect them.[71]

63. NT interview with national-level UDD leader, April 2, 2010, Bangkok.

64. NT interviews with UDD leaders from all nine provinces studied, April 3, 2010, Bangkok.

65. NT interviews with three activists from Ubon and Pathum Thani, March 24, 2010, Bangkok.

66. This point was confirmed in NT interviews with four activists from Chiang Mai, Nakhon Pathom, and Ubon, May 6, 2010, Bangkok.

67. Informal discussions by NT with UDD leaders at Pan Fah, March 27, 2010, and at Ratchaprasong, April 29, 2010.

68. NT interviews with two activists from Chiang Mai and Ubon, April 6, and May 3, 2010, Bangkok.

69. NT interview with UDD guard, April 19, 2010, Ratchaprasong, Bangkok.

70. NT interview with two activists from Ubon, April 21, 2010, Bangkok.

71. NT interviews with seven activists, Chiang Mai, May 6, 2010, and Ubon, April 27, 2010.

WHY DID REDSHIRTS STAGE THE 2010 PROTESTS?

The primary motivation mentioned by informants was a desire to bring Thaksin back to power through electoral means. All our interviewees were animated by the belief that double standards were being applied to Thaksin and his supporters: when the PAD had rallied in Bangkok, it had not been condemned by the upper echelons of Thai society, but UDD demonstrations had provoked condemnation and repression. The judicial system had favored the PAD, whose leaders had not been arrested, whereas pro-Thaksin parties had been twice dissolved by the courts and Thaksin himself had been treated harshly. During the Thaksin period, government officials had treated interviewees better, but this was now all changing. Those in charge of state agencies were more bureaucratic, and those wanting to use government services had to make more under-the-counter payments. Some Northeastern informants mentioned regionalist sentiments: they wanted to show the government that Isan people were no longer just gas station attendants (*dek pump*) and maids (*khon chai*) but had much more potential.[72]

Informants were strong supporters of more elections at all levels, because once you had elections, you could easily get rid of bad people.[73] Many called for the election of provincial governors and district officers. In response to questions about negative views of electoral politics held by Bangkokians, two Chiang Mai informants declared: "Bangkok people already have a good life, they don't need elections for change, but we do." A corollary of redshirt support for elections was their opposition to military coups and other "anti-democratic" political interventions: some joined the movement after the 2006 coup,[74] others in disgust following the court's dissolution of the Thai Rak Thai Party,[75] and others after the PAD airport seizure, which they saw as the last straw.[76] But the redshirt support for electoral democracy is not twinned with a liberal social outlook. Rak Chiang Mai 51 (Love Chiang Mai 51), a redshirt group, notoriously disrupted a gay pride rally in February 2009. Our informants from this group were all hostile to foreign migrant

72. NT interviews with four activists from Ubon and Mukdahan, April 21, 2010, Ubon.

73. This point was mentioned by seven activists with TAO connections. NT interviews with redshirt activists from Nakhon Pathom, Ubon, Chiang Mai, Samut Prakan, and Nonthaburi, April 5, April 19, May 6, April 18, and April 27, 2010, respectively.

74. NT interview with three activists, May 5, 2010, Chiang Mai.

75. NT interviews with four activists, April 26, 2010, Ubon.

76. NT interview with three activists from Nakhon Pathom and one from Samut Prakan, April 21, 2010, Bangkok.

workers: rather than seeing them as potential political allies, redshirts viewed migrants as a threat and adopted old-fashioned and nationalistic anti-Burmese rhetoric when questioned about the issue.

The informants' ideas of democracy were focused on procedural understandings of electoral politics, rather than radical notions of substantive popular empowerment.[77] Some were linked to local politicians such as TAO heads or Chiang Mai Mayor Pakorn Buranupakorn,[78] who in turn had close ties to national politicians. In the Northeast, many redshirt organizers had direct channels to their local MPs.[79] The hybrid character of the UDD, especially its close relationship with party politicians who aimed to secure state power, raised questions as to how far the redshirts could be seen as a genuinely autonomous social movement. Their focus on toppling the Abhisit government and bringing a particular party—and ultimately a prominent and controversial politician, Thaksin Shinawatra—back to power made it difficult to create a strong and cohesive social movement reflecting local and grassroots concerns. There was a structural tension within the redshirt movement between seemingly independent local groups and instrumental national goals. Asked about Thaksin, three informants acknowledged their admiration and support for him. As one informant asked rhetorically: "What is wrong with me if I love one PM, is that a bad sin if we love a PM who cares a lot about us?"[80] All 42 provincial informants believed that Thaksin cared more about them than other politicians; at the very least, he had made some effort to talk to them, in contrast with Democrat Prime Ministers Chuan Leekpai or Abhisit Vejjajiva, who seemed totally removed from the concerns of ordinary people.

CONCLUSION

In contrast to their popular image as "poor farmers," the redshirt protesters we talked to in 2010 offered a counter-narrative along the following lines. They were geographically and ideologically adrift between the city and the

77. Such views were expressed by 12 provincial informants, NT interviews, April 21, 2010, Bangkok.

78. NT interviews with two informants, May 3, 2010, Chiang Mai.

79. NT interviews with three activists, April 27, 2010, Ubon.

80. NT interview with Nakhon Sawan activist, immediately following the May 19, 2010, crackdown, Wat Pratumwanaram, Bangkok.

countryside, dividing their time and their aspirations between the two.[81] While many had insecure economic circumstances, they were not poor farmers: their income levels were well above those of peasants. If they farmed at all, they did so part-time. They had no interest in eking out an existence at subsistence level but were deeply engaged in a market economy that now penetrated the countryside just as thoroughly as urban areas.[82] A variety of terms have been deployed for this emergent group in Thai society, including "farm entrepreneurs," "post-peasants," "toproots," "middle-income peasants," and "cosmopolitan villagers."[83] On balance, we favor the term "urbanized villagers," a combination of "urban dwellers" and "rural villagers," to connote those who defy the urban-rural divide.

Although political elites were heavily involved in the movement, the redshirts were not a classic top-down structure commanded by Thaksin Shinawatra and his lieutenants. Rather, the UDD was a loose-knit network organization of groups that shared common interests but had very diverse origins and ideological orientations. Many redshirts held illiberal social views. Some elements of the movement had a pronounced tendency toward violence—a divisive issue that split the leadership and alienated certain key networks, especially during the Ratchaprasong phase of the protests. Redshirts were closely tied to local vote canvassers and tended to participate in mass rallies when they were mobilized to do so by local and national politicians. But around half of our informants attended those rallies on a temporary basis, typically a week at a time, rotating with other groups from the same area of the country.

Thailand is now a thoroughly market-oriented society where urbanized villagers are a fast-growing group, one that predominates in many areas. The 2010 redshirts acted in defense of their own political rights, symbolized in Thaksin-era policies they had strongly supported. Although redshirts were well aware of the corruption issues surrounding Thaksin's premiership, they saw his time in office as a unique period during which the Bangkok government had been

81. NT interviews with three activists from Nakhon Pathom and Ubon on April 8 in Nakhon Pathom, and April 27, 2010, in Ubon, respectively.

82. This point was stressed by several of NT's interviewees from the central provinces of Samut Prakan, Nonthaburi, and Pathum Thani, May 8, 2010, Bangkok.

83. The terms "middle-income peasant" and "cosmopolitan villager" were proposed in presentations at the AAS/ICAS (Association for Asian Studies/International Convention of Asia Scholars) Joint Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA, March 30-April 3, 2011, by Andrew Walker and Charles F. Keyes, respectively.

genuinely responsive to their needs and concerns. To a very large extent, this remained a pro-Thaksin rather than a "post-Thaksin" movement.[84] The continuing Thaksin focus was reflected in the conduct and outcome of the July 3, 2011, general election. Fought by Pheu Thai using the slogan "Thaksin kit, Pheu Thai tham" (Thaksin Thinks, Pheu Thai Does), the party's victory made Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra prime minister.

Though inevitably partisan and incomplete, the image of the 2010 redshirt movement offered by our informants as an emerging force on the margins of the middle classes is much more nuanced and persuasive than most previous characterizations of the movement. We do not claim to offer a fully representative picture, but believe we have important insights to contribute. Ultimately, the redshirt protests were concerned with politics rather than the economy or culture. Redshirt frustrations with the system centered on their sense of inequality, but their sense of inequality primarily concerned access to political resources. Our 57 interview informants were not revolutionaries, and were not seeking to overthrow or even radically to overhaul the prevailing political order. Rather, these urbanized villagers aspired to social mobility under the existing system. Our informants were primarily demanding political justice, a problem for those who sought to reduce redshirt concerns to a set of socioeconomic grievances.

84. While some national level UDD leaders publicly supported a "post-Thaksin" line, 40 of our 42 provincial informants remained firmly "pro-Thaksin."