

# Profile of the “Bangkok Shutdown” Protestors



## A Survey of Anti-Government PDRC Demonstrators in Bangkok

JANUARY 2014



**The Asia Foundation**

Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities





## The Asia Foundation

### PROFILE OF THE “BANGKOK SHUTDOWN” PROTESTORS

#### *A Survey of Anti-Government PDRC Demonstrators in Bangkok*

January 2014

## INTRODUCTION

### *Background*

This report highlights the findings of a survey undertaken by The Asia Foundation of the anti-government People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) demonstrators in Bangkok, which was conducted on January 13-14, 2014, following the launch of PDRC’s “Bangkok Shutdown” campaign. The aim of the short survey—a follow-up to the Foundation’s November 2013 survey of the PDRC and Red-Shirt supporters in Bangkok<sup>1</sup>—was two-fold: (1) to learn about the demographic composition of the latest PDRC gatherings; and (2) to probe the perspectives of PDRC activists on a series of questions related to the current tensions, the February 2, 2014, election, and related issues.

The Asia Foundation has continued to observe with concern the political tensions that have gripped Bangkok since late November 2013. The tensions erupted in the context of two failed legislative reform actions pursued by the Pheu Thai government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra: the blanket amnesty bill that would have paved the way for former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to return to Thailand from self-exile with his criminal convictions dropped; and a constitutional amendment that was intended to change the composition of the Senate from a mix of elected and appointed members to a fully-elected body, which was rejected by the Constitutional Court on the basis of technical irregularities. In response to these government initiatives, an escalating anti-government protest movement led by former Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban mobilized tens of thousands of demonstrators under the banner of the PDRC, which declared its intention to unseat the Pheu Thai government, remove the Shinawatra family from politics, and press for the appointment of an imprecisely defined, extra-constitutional “People’s Council” that would seemingly be composed of neutral, respected leaders and replace electoral democracy for an undefined period of time while reforms were completed.

Following the government’s announcement of a snap election held on February 2, 2014, PDRC announced a “Bangkok Shutdown” campaign that commenced on January 13, 2014, through which thousands of anti-government demonstrators have occupied seven key intersections in Bangkok, blocked the flow of traffic, and erected stages and other infrastructure to support the protests activities. The shutdown aimed to embarrass the government and to press for Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra to resign and postpone the February 2 election until reforms are completed. Mr. Suthep declared that the shutdown would continue until the prime minister steps down, while Ms. Yingluck declared that she would stand firm and that the election would proceed as scheduled.

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<sup>1</sup>Given the Foundation’s experience conducting national public perception surveys on the state of democracy in Thailand in 2009 and 2010, and similar research in other countries, the opportunity was taken to conduct a rapid perception survey on November 30, 2013. The respondents included PDRC activists who were involved in the mass anti-government demonstrations and members of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD, or the “Red Shirts” as they are commonly known) who gathered at Ratchamangla National Stadium in a peaceful show of support for the Pheu Thai government. The November survey findings were well received and extensively reported and referenced in the domestic and international media and in other analyses of political developments.

Against this backdrop, the Foundation conducted a second survey of the PDRC demonstrators on January 13-14, 2014. Like the earlier survey, it included a combination of questions that aimed to establish a demographic profile of the demonstrators and other questions on topical, timely issues. Since the Red Shirts have limited their pro-government support initiatives to select small-scale activities and statements in their regional strongholds, the opportunity did not present itself to survey both groups concurrently.

### ***Methodology***

The methodology used for this survey was comparable to the first survey conducted on November 30, 2013. A short questionnaire was developed by Foundation program staff, with a small team of survey supervisors and 14 enumerators (two per location) deployed to administer the survey. The survey employed a purposive sampling methodology and aimed to interview 350 respondents (50 per location) in all seven of the PDRC rally locations around Bangkok, including the Silom Road-Lumpini Park intersection, Ratchaprasong intersection, Pathumwan intersection, Phetchaburi-Asoke intersection, Victory Monument, Ladprao intersection, and the Government Complex at Chaeng Wattana.

The methodology applied was designed to be representative of the protest group, with a good coverage of locations. Enumerators were instructed to plan a serpentine path through the entire physical area of the demonstrations to account for the fact that groups of protestors travelling from various locations might be concentrated in one area. Taking into account the final sample size achieved for the PDRC protesters, the margin of error is approximately 10 percent.

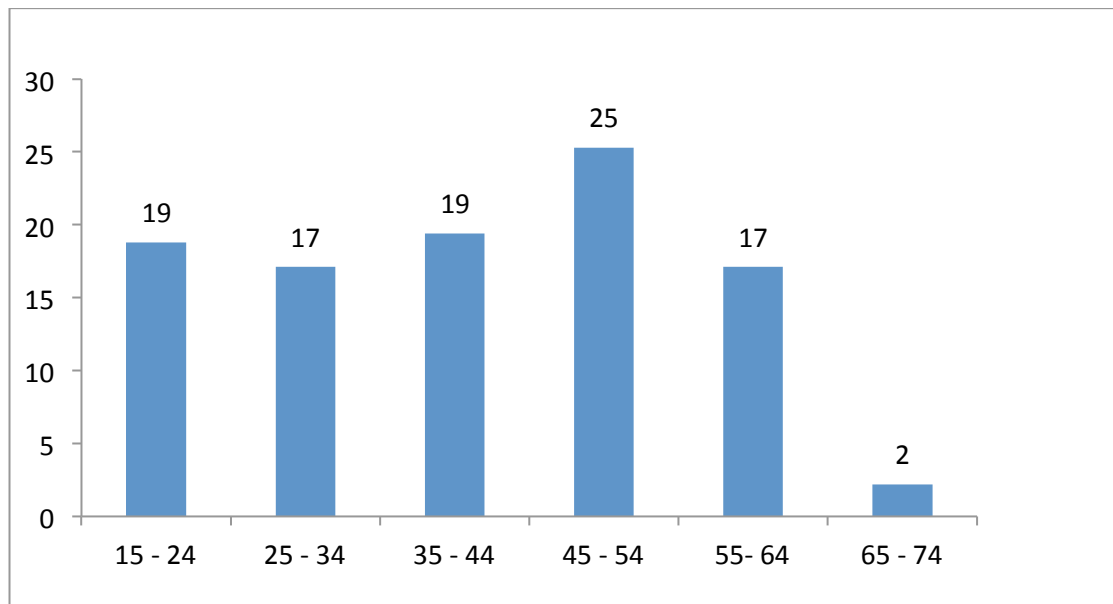
As indicated in the data presentation and analysis that follows, a few questions generated multiple responses, which results in total percentage figures larger than 100 percent when all responses are tallied. In some questions, the rounding off of data to whole numbers results in a few cases in which the tallied results equal slightly more or less than 100 percent.

*Methodological Caveat:* The survey sample represents one extreme of public sentiment, since the vast majority of crowds at the PDRC demonstration sites consisted of people who were sufficiently motivated to devote time and energy in support of a specific political cause. Accordingly, the findings should not be viewed as representative of the public at large. While all possible steps were taken within the parameters of available time to enhance the rigor of the survey, the sample size achieved was modest and the margin of error in any finding commensurately large. Despite these limitations, the fast estimates obtained may be considered as *indicative* of the true values, consistent with the aim of this rapid survey.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the sample size and methodology, it is hoped that the findings of this rapid survey will contribute to a further understanding of the demographics of the anti-government political activists who have mounted the Bangkok Shutdown campaign under the banner of PDRC and of respondent perspectives on certain issues.

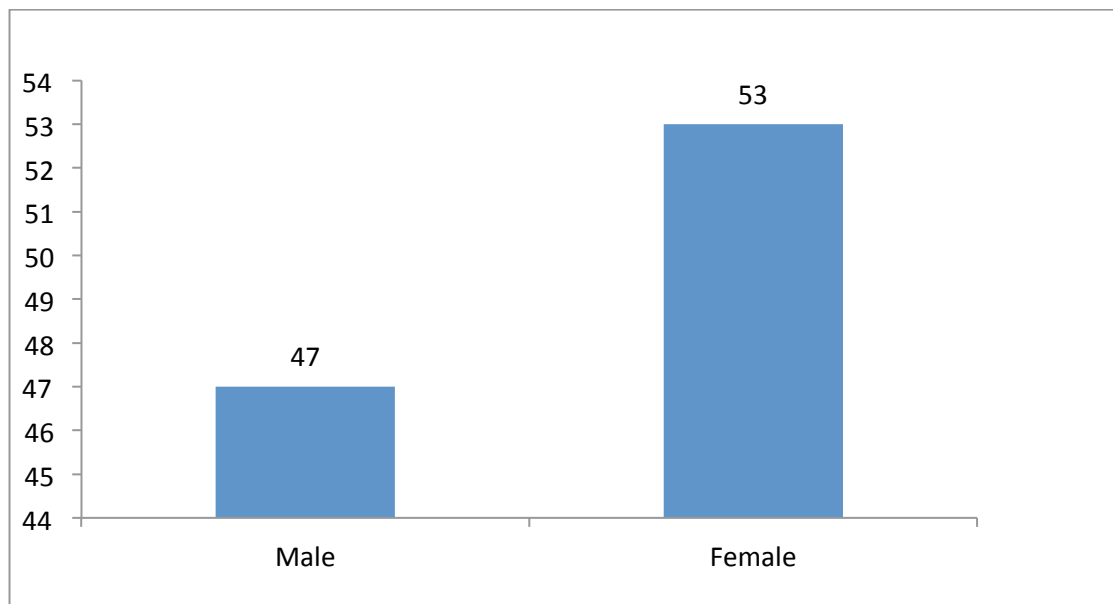
## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Age of Respondents



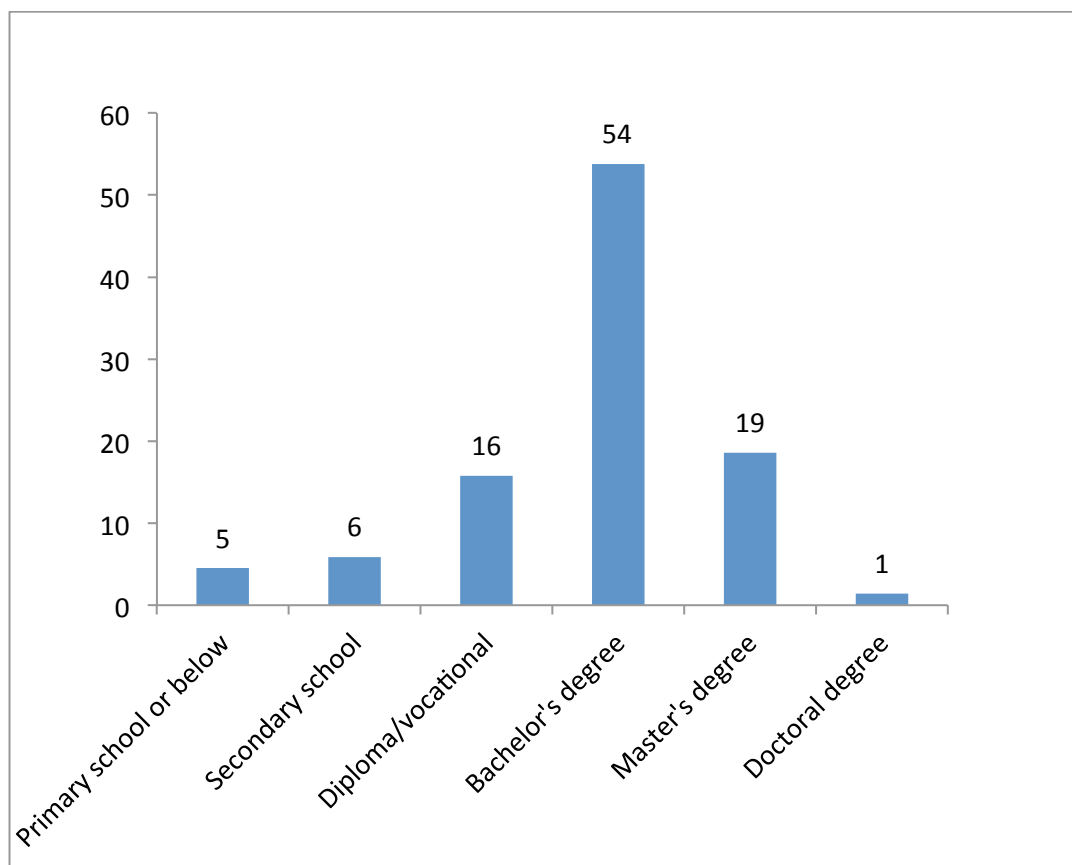
The age group represented in largest number among respondents were those 45 to 54 years of age (25 percent), followed by those aged 35 to 44 (19 percent), 15 to 24 (19 percent), and 25 to 34 and 55 to 64 (17 percent, respectively).

### Gender



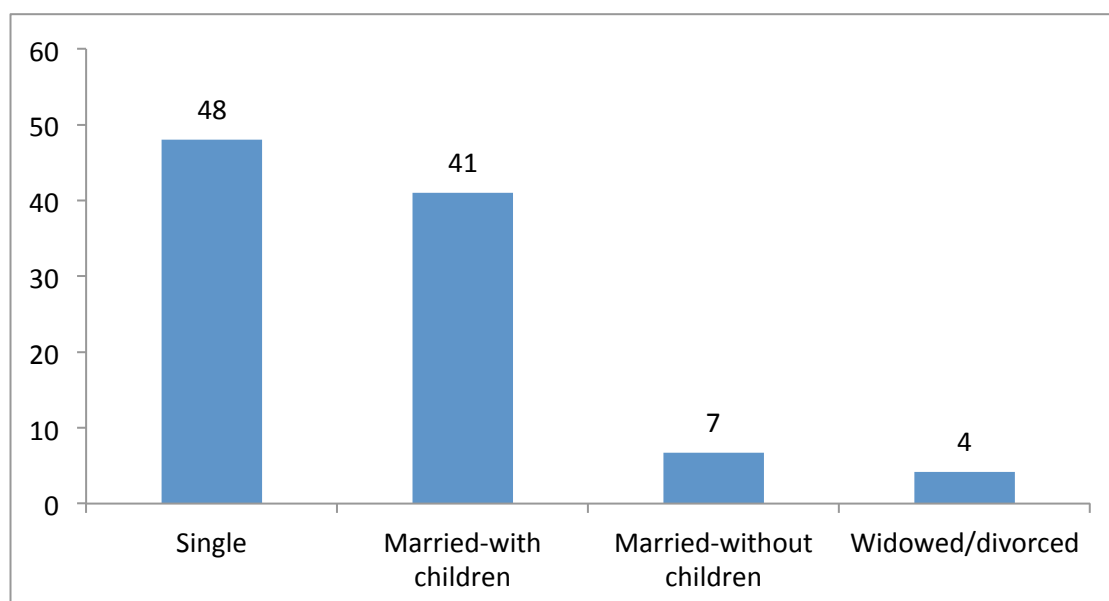
Among respondents, female demonstrators (53 percent) slightly outnumbered their male counterparts (47 percent).

## Highest Education



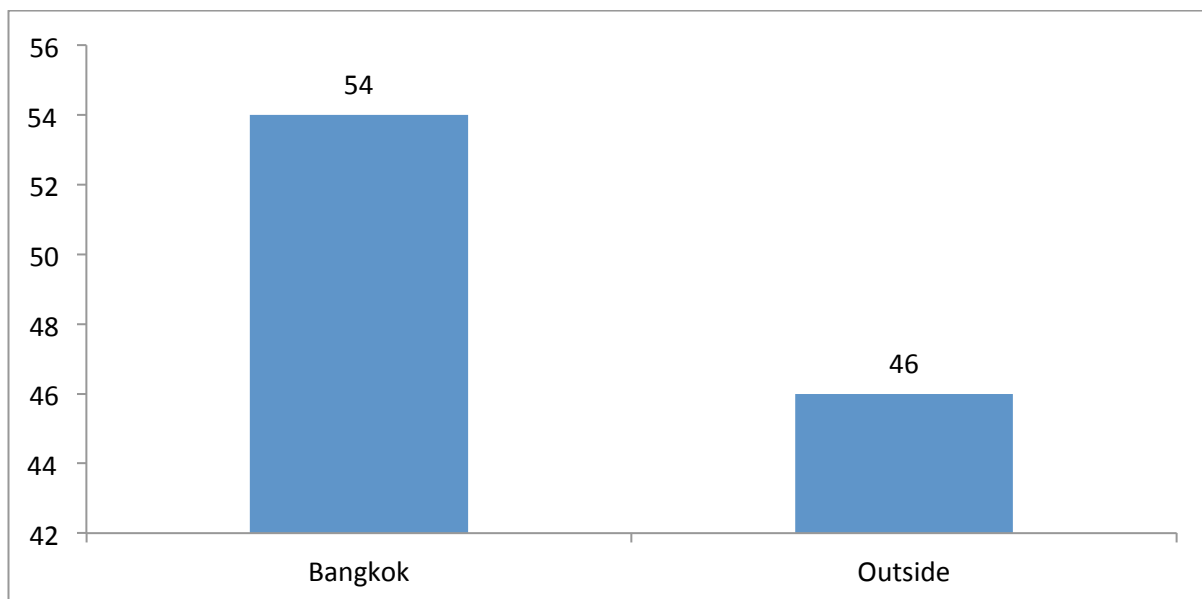
Nearly three-quarters of respondents (74 percent) were university graduates, with 54 percent holding undergraduate (bachelor) degrees, 19 percent graduate degrees, and 1 percent doctoral degrees. Only 11 percent of respondents held secondary degrees or lower.

## Marital Status



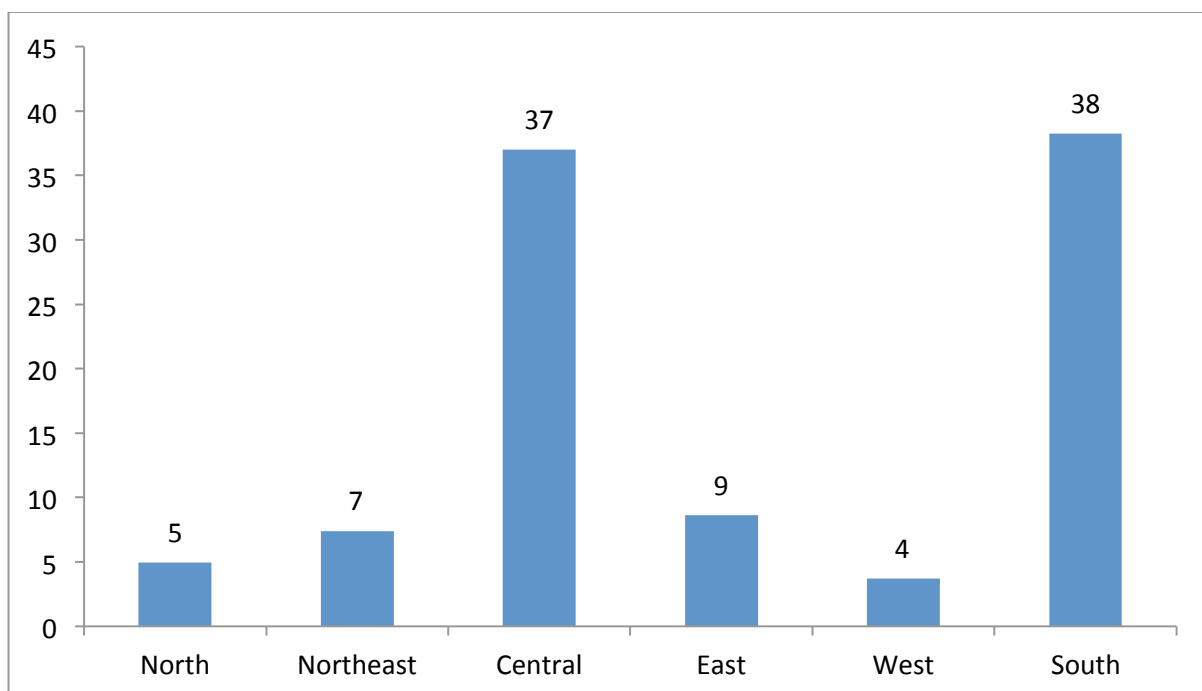
The largest percentage of respondents (48 percent) were single, followed by 41 percent married with children.

## Geographic Residence



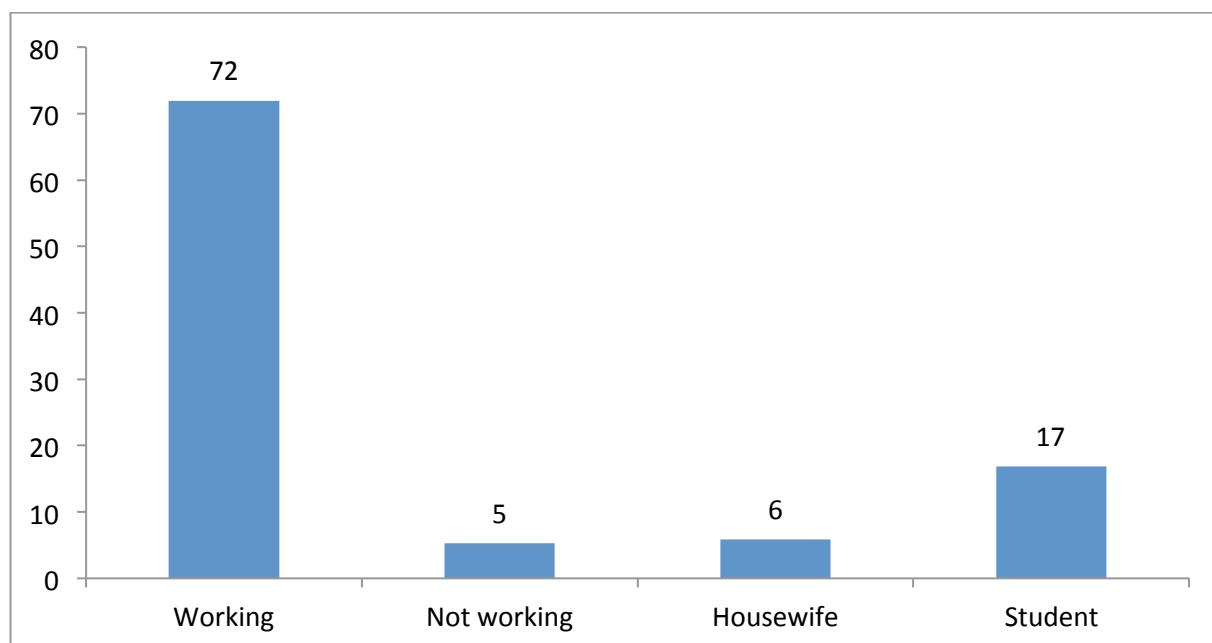
Fifty-four percent of respondents lived in Bangkok, with the other 46 percent hailing from communities and regions outside the capital.

## Geographic Region (Non-Bangkok Residents)



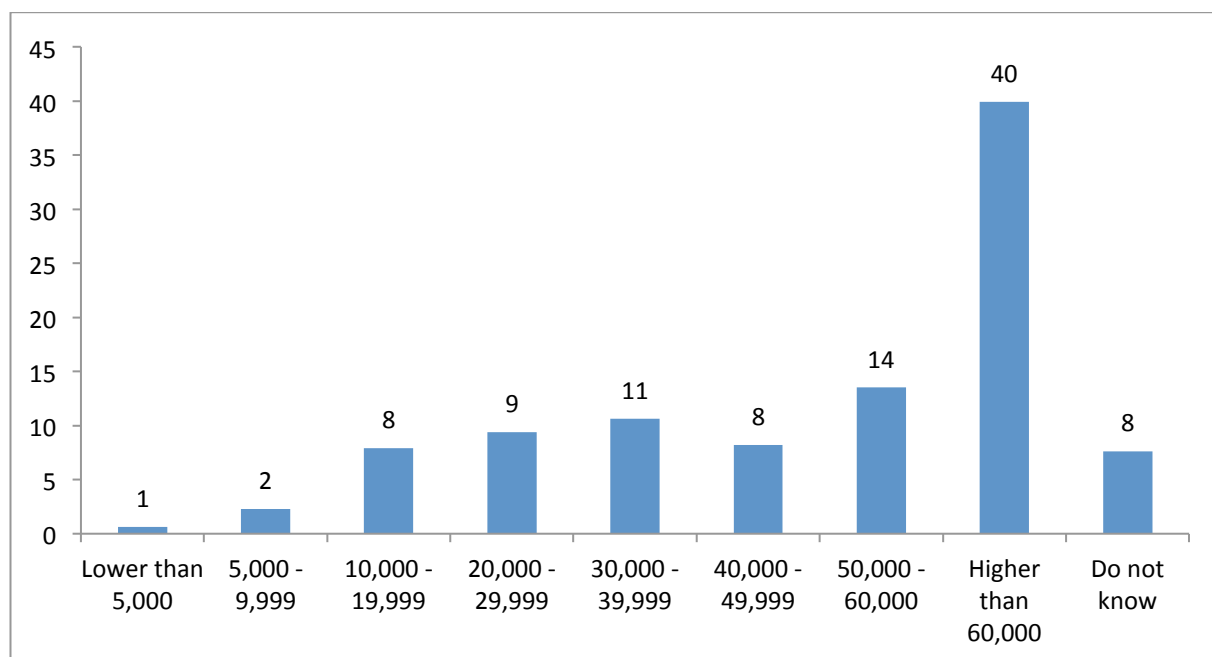
Among respondents who were not residents of Bangkok, 38 percent hailed from the South, while 37 percent were from the Central Region. The other regions of the country were represented in smaller number (4 percent West; 5 percent North, 7 percent Northeast, and 9 percent East).

## Employment Status



Seventy-two percent of respondents were employed, while 6 percent were housewives and 17 percent students. Just 5 percent were not employed. Respondents were also asked to provide their specific occupation. While the margin of error rendered results for certain occupations statistically irrelevant, 17 percent were sales or office workers, while 16 percent, respectively, were small business owners or government workers and 13 percent were independent business owners. Eight percent of employed respondents were farmers or tenant farm laborers, while just one percent were non-skilled laborers.

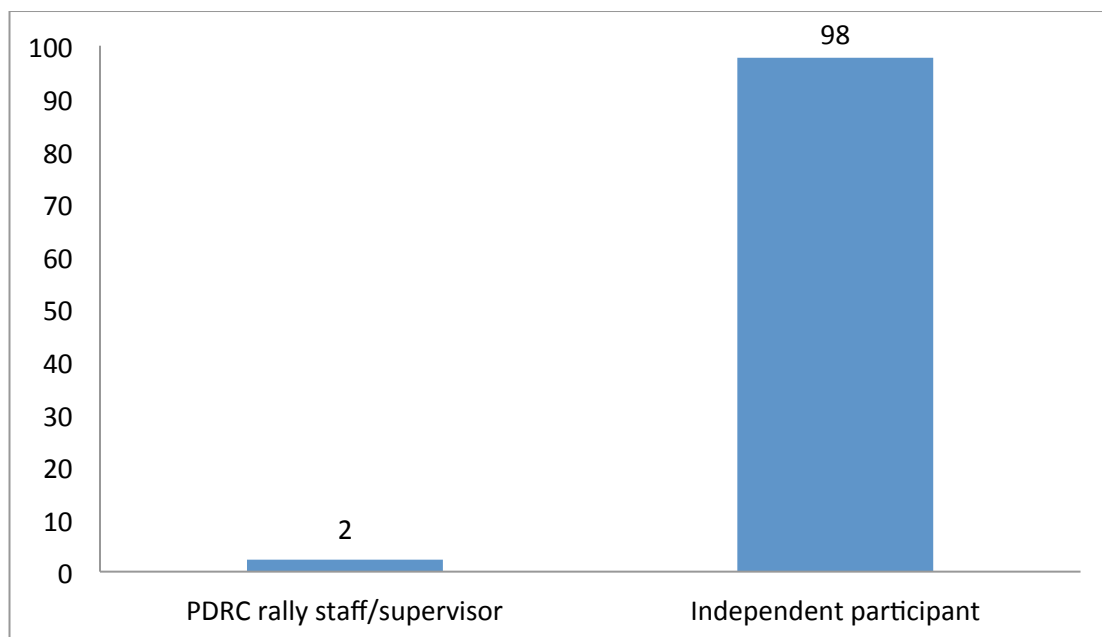
## Monthly Household Income



The largest percentage of respondents (40 percent) had incomes higher than 60,000 baht (+\$1,930) per month, while 50 percent earned between 10,000 baht (\$320) and 60,000 baht (\$1,930). Just 3 percent of respondents had incomes of less than 10,000 baht (-\$320) per month.

## PARTICIPATION IN DEMONSTRATIONS

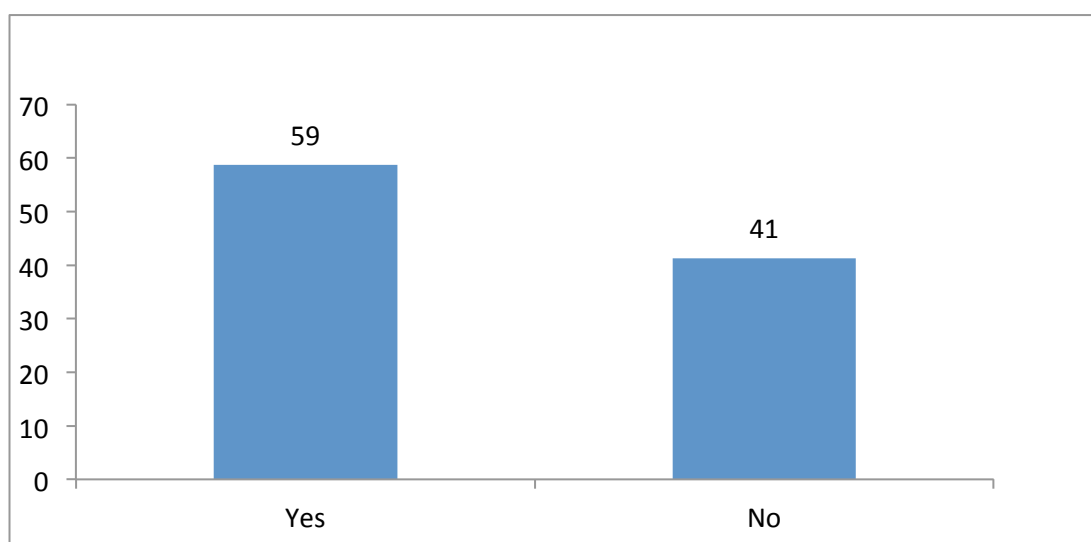
### Status of Respondents



The vast majority (98 percent) of respondents surveyed participated in the PDRC-organized Bangkok Shutdown campaign in an independent personal capacity, with just 2 percent engaged as PDRC rally staff or supervisors.

### Financial Contributions

*Do you pay membership fees or dues or voluntary contributions to a common pool of funds to support the activities of the group?*

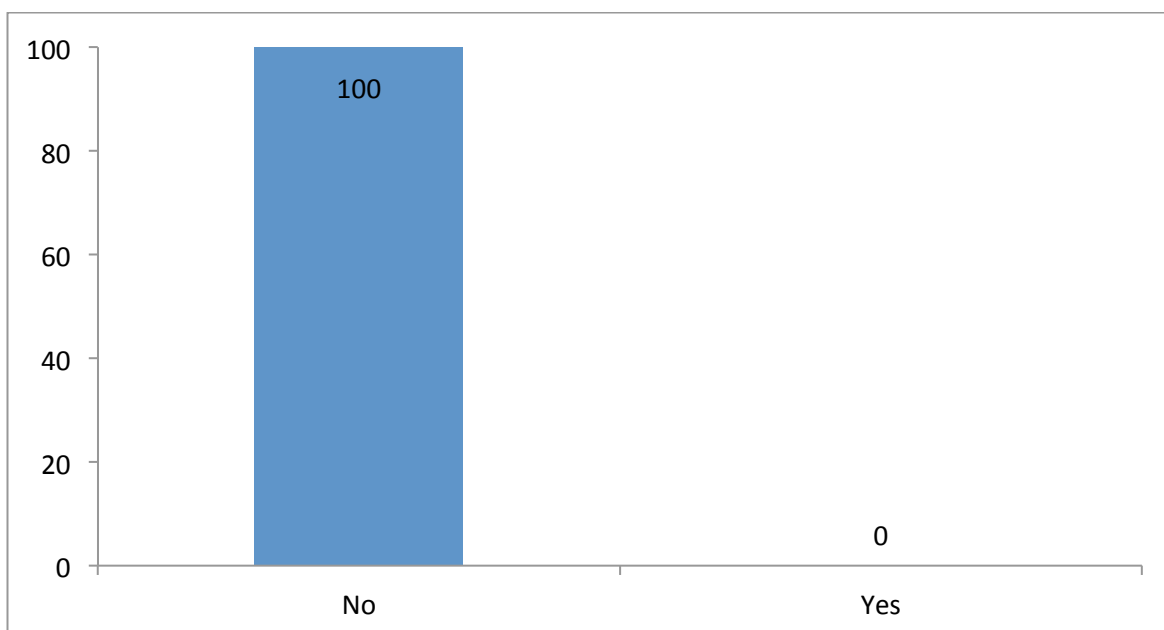


Fifty-nine percent of respondents reported that they pay membership fee or dues or voluntary contributions to a common pool of funds to support the activities of the anti-government protest groups, versus 41 percent of respondents who do not.



## Financial Incentives

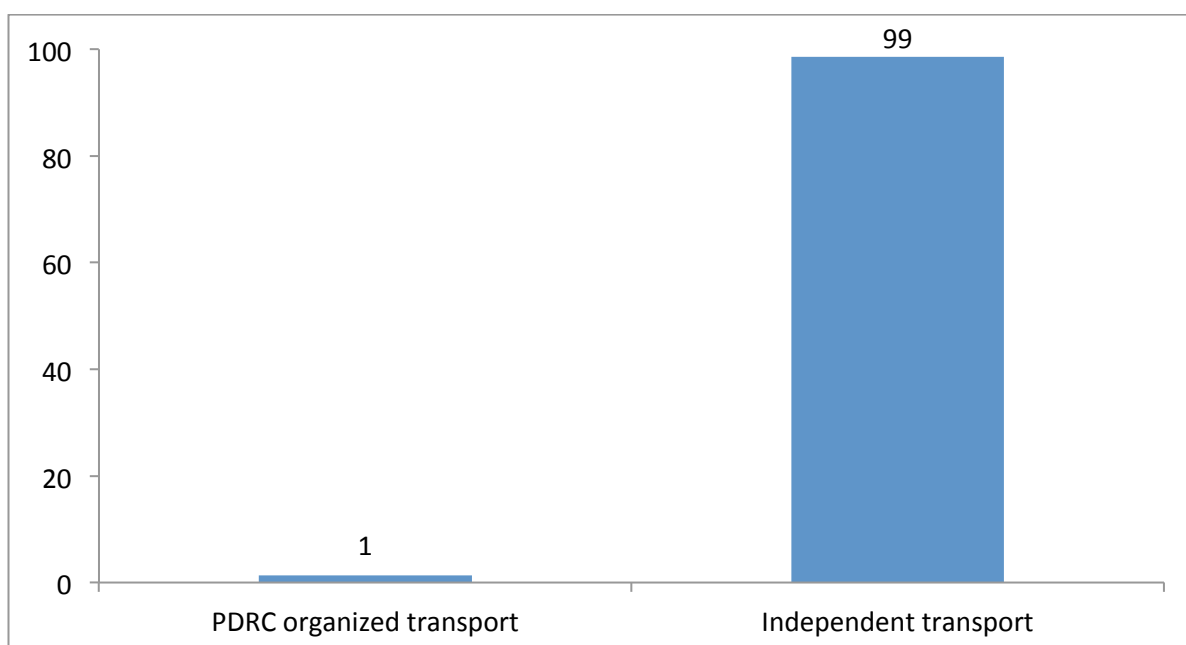
*Did you receive a financial incentive to attend today's rally?*



All respondents claimed that they did not receive financial incentive to participate in the Bangkok Shutdown campaign.

## Mode of Travel to Demonstration Site

*Did the group organize transport or did you come here on your own?*

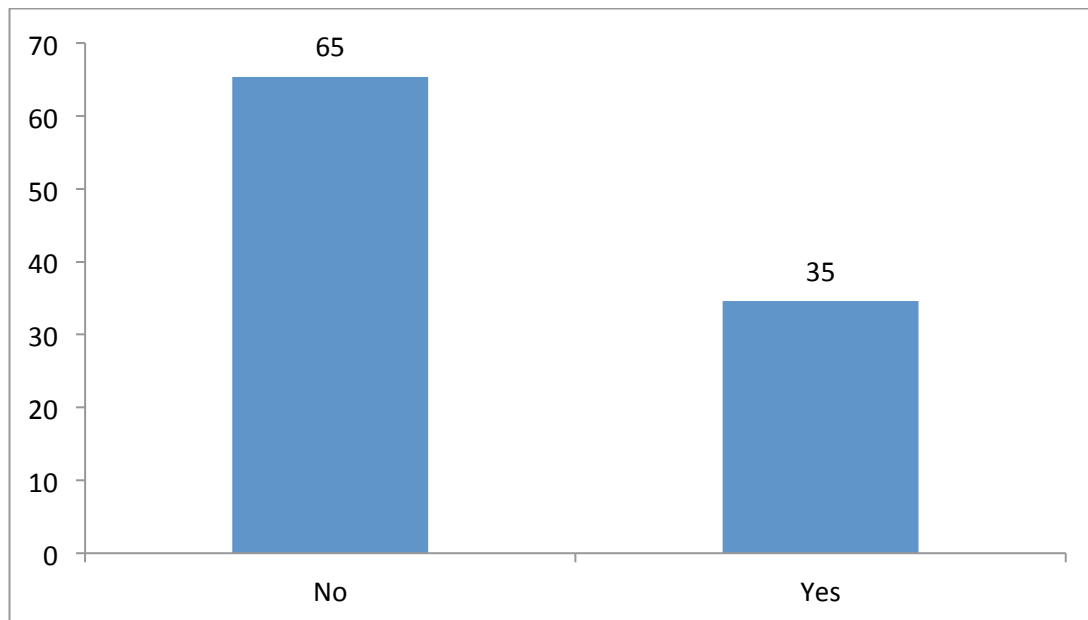


Ninety-nine percent of respondents reported that they made their own way to the demonstration sites, while only 1 percent availed of transportation organized by PDRC.

## PRIOR PARTICIPATION AND PRESENT MOTIVATION

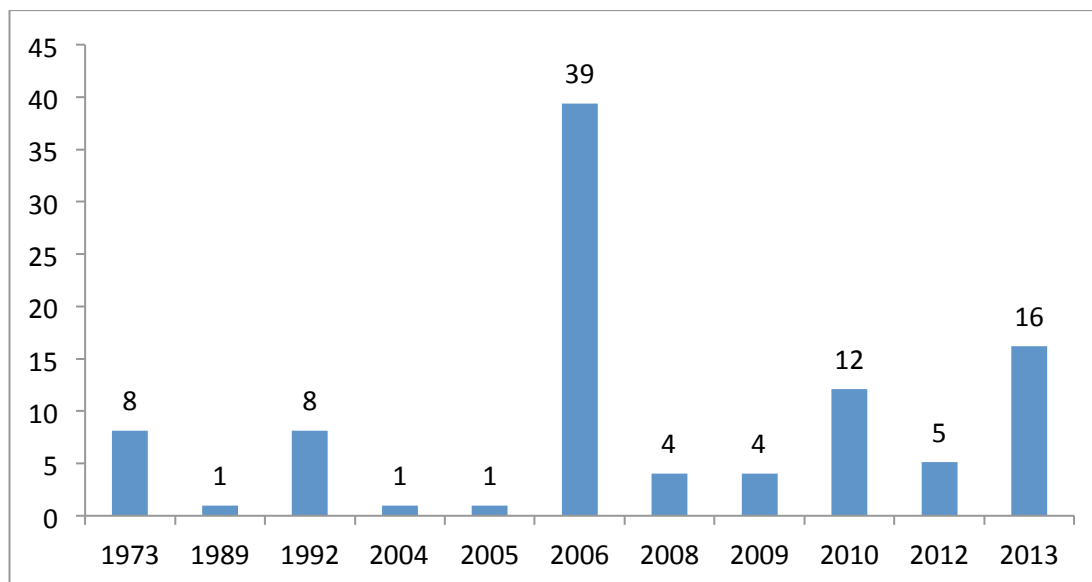
### Past Attendance in Political Demonstrations

*Have you attended any political demonstrations prior to October 2013?*



Thirty-five percent of respondents had attended political demonstrations prior to October 2013 (the start of the present political tensions), while 65 percent had not.

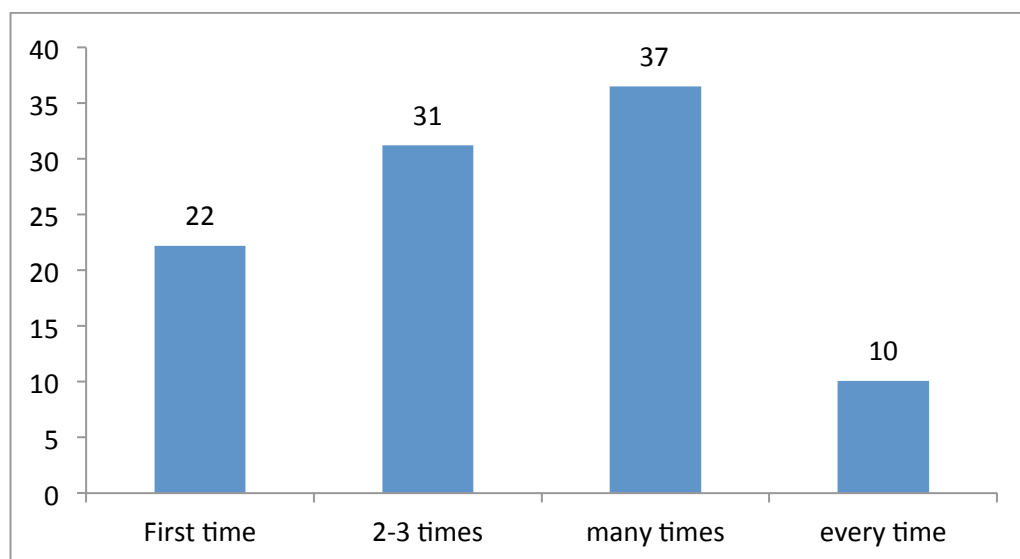
*If yes, when was the last time?*



Among respondents who had attended political demonstrations prior to October 2013, 16 percent last participated in demonstrations in 2013, while 12 percent last participated in 2010, 39 percent in 2006, 8 percent in 1992, and 8 percent in 1973.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The popular uprising of October 14, 1973, a student-led movement centered on Thammasat University, toppled the ruling military dictatorship of Thanom Kittikachorn and ushered in a 3-year period of more open democratic expression

*How many times have you taken part in demonstrations since October 2013?*



Among respondents who had taken part in political demonstrations since October 2013, 22 percent reported that the Bangkok Shutdown campaign was the first political demonstration in which they had participated. Thirty-one percent indicated that they had participated in 2 to 3 demonstrations previously, while 37 percent had participated in *many* demonstration and 10 percent had participated in *all* demonstrations.

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in Thailand. This period came to an abrupt end on October 6, 1976, when students protesting Thanom's return from exile were massacred on the Thammasat University campus and in Sanam Luang.

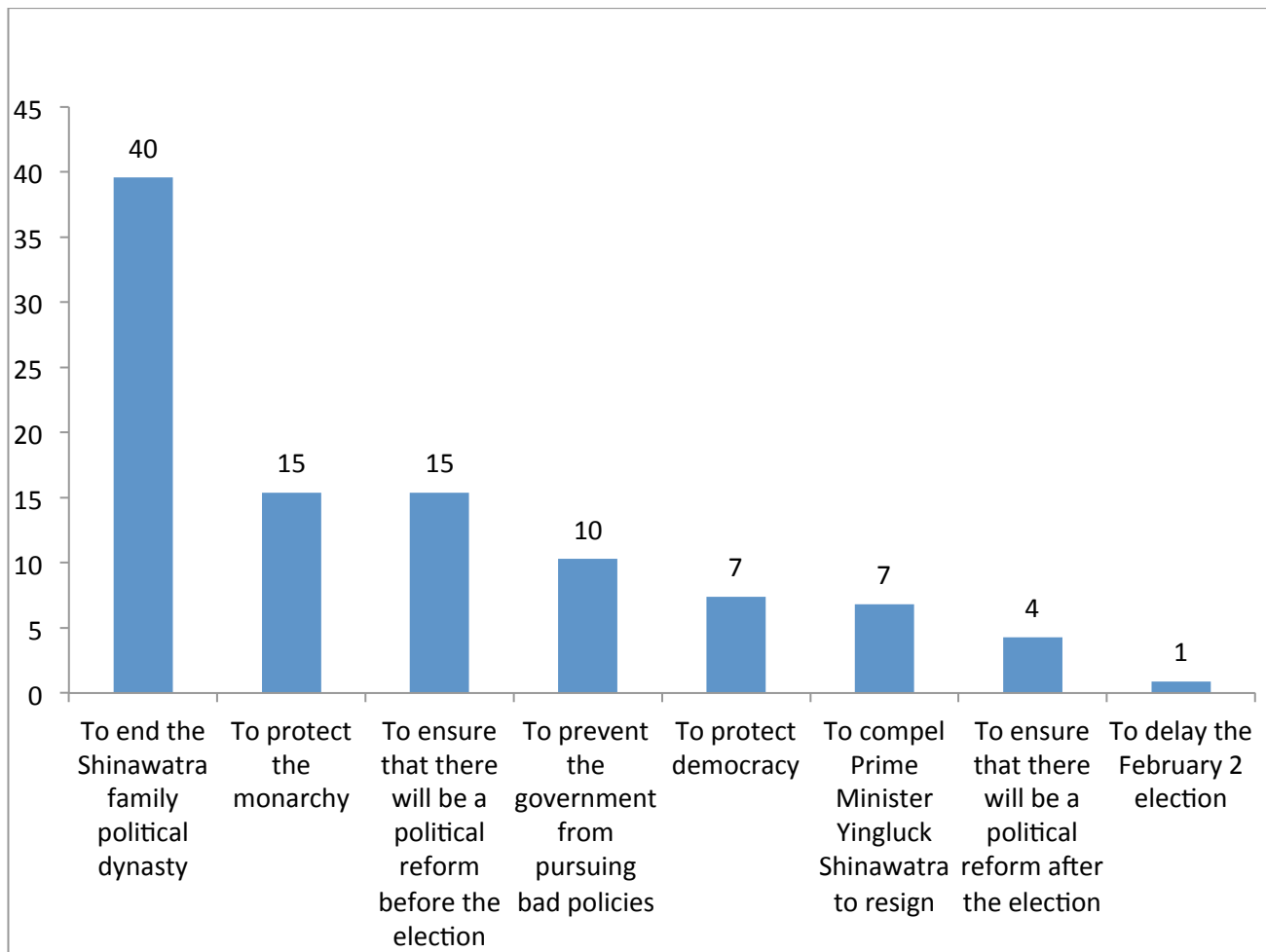
The Black May protests of 1992 against the appointment of General Suchinda Khraprayun as Prime Minister and the continuing predominance of the military in Thai politics culminated in a violent crackdown by security forces, with scores killed and hundreds injured.

In 2006, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) mounted huge protests against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, accusing him of corruption and abuse of power. These demonstrations ultimately culminated in a military coup that ousted Thaksin.

In 2010, a two-month standoff between anti-government protestors and the Democrat party-led government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva escalated into violent confrontations between protestors and the military and culminated in a military crackdown on protestors that left 92 dead. In response, protestors set fire to a number of downtown buildings, including two large shopping centers and the Stock Exchange.

## Motivation in Attending Political Demonstration

What issue motivated you to attend today's demonstration?

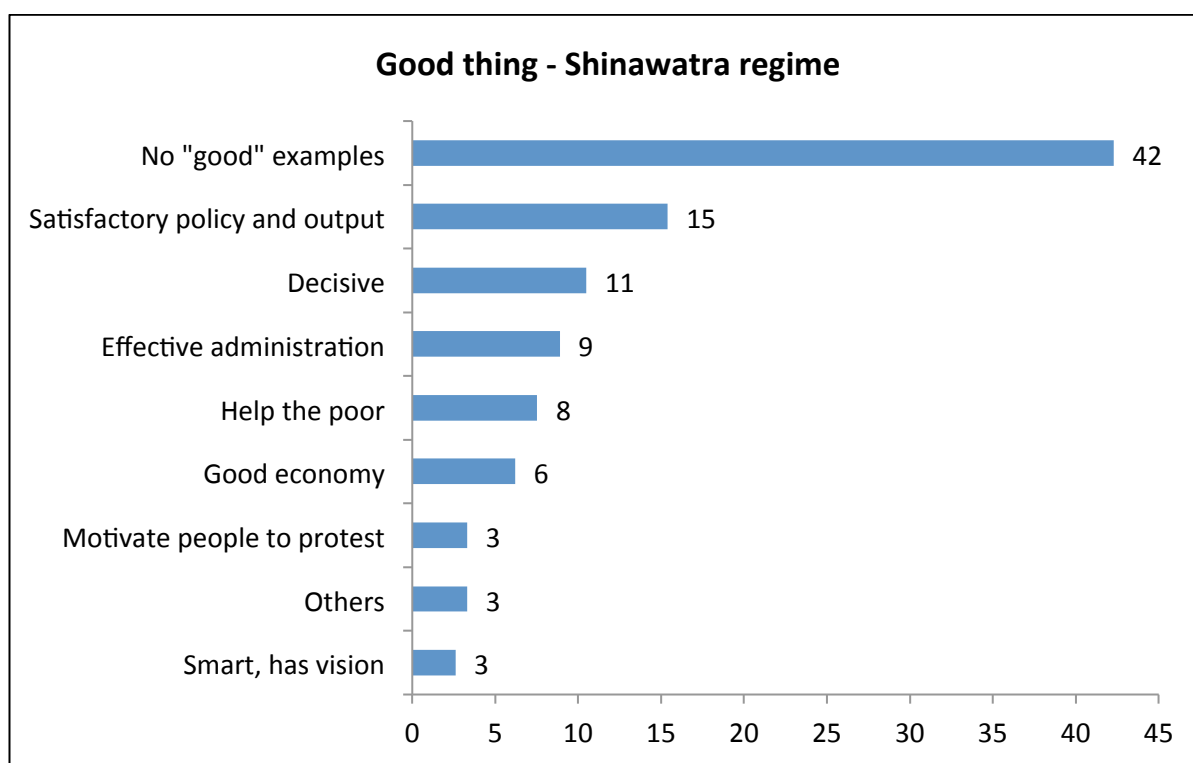


Forty percent of respondents indicated that their participation in the Bangkok Shutdown campaign was motivated by the aim of *ending the political dynasty of the Shinawatra family*, while 15 percent, respectively, reported that they were motivated by *protecting the monarchy* or *ensuring that political reform measures would be taken prior to the parliamentary election held on February 2, 2014*. Ten percent were motivated by *preventing the government from pursuing bad policies*, while 7 percent reported that they were motivated by the *need to protect democracy*. Four percent were motivated by *ensuring that political reform would follow the February 2<sup>nd</sup> election*, while one percent aimed to *delay the February 2 election*.

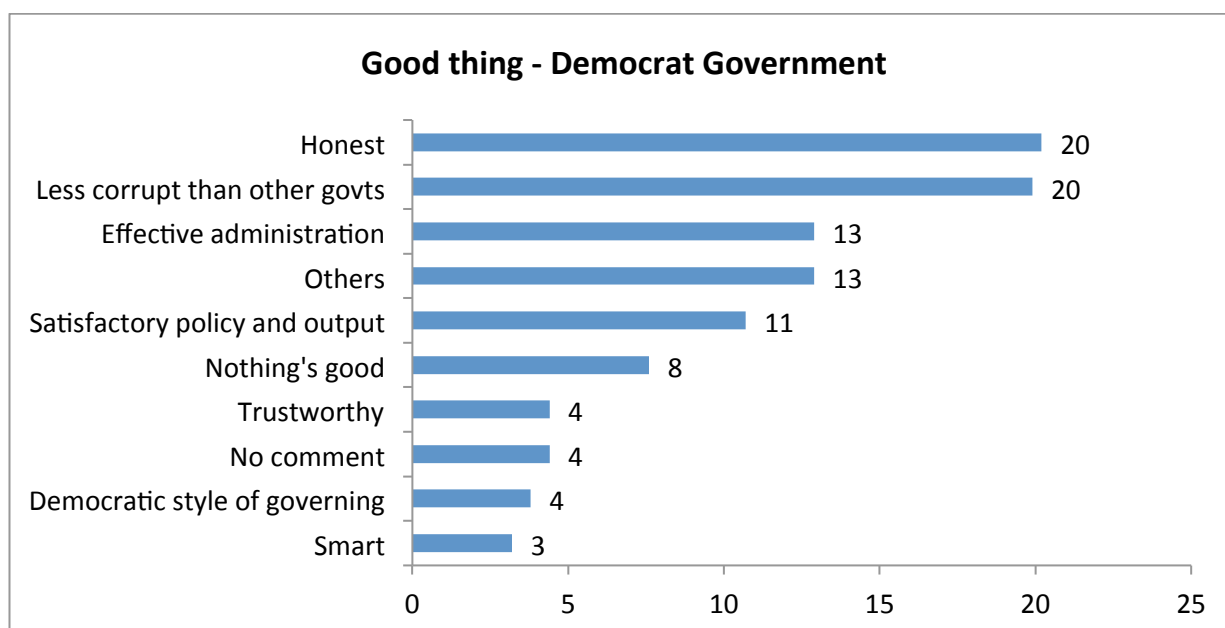
## PERSPECTIVES ON PRIOR POLITICAL REGIMES

### Positive and Negative Elements of Past Political Regimes

*When you think about the Shinawatra regime and the previous Democrat government, what is the first “good” and “bad” thing that comes to mind?*



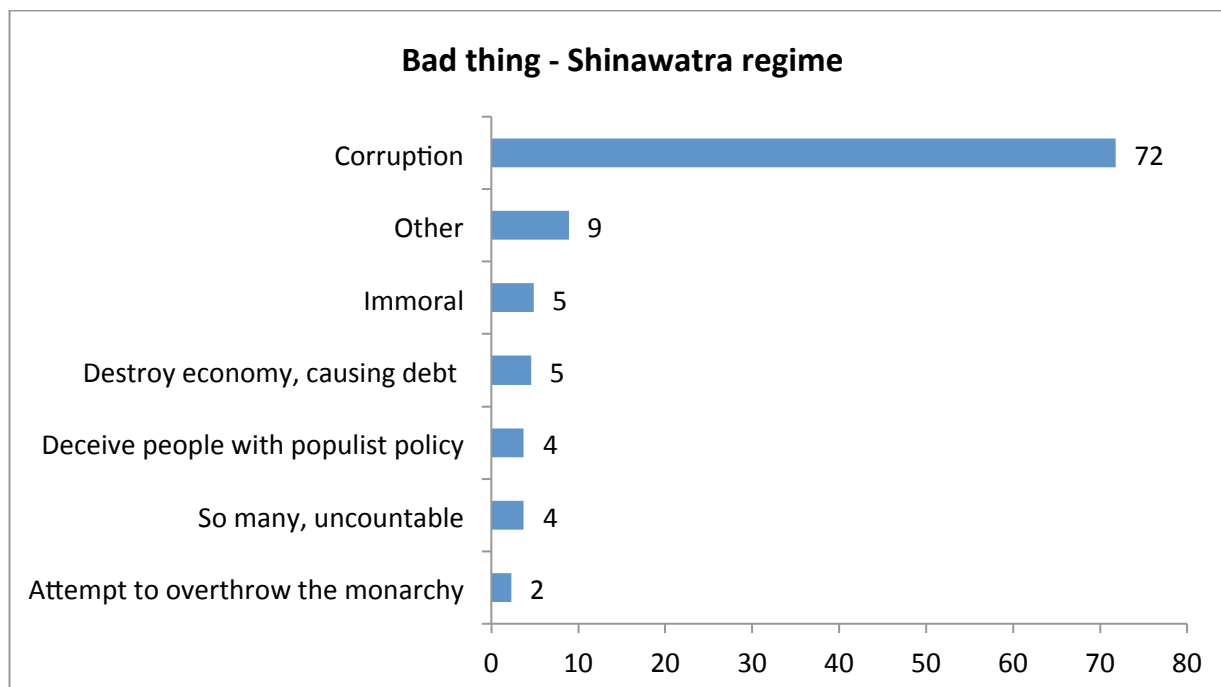
While 42 percent of respondents reported that they could not cite an example of something “good” associated with the Shinawatra regime, 58 percent could cite at least one positive example. Fifteen percent cited the satisfactory policy and other outputs of the Shinawatra regime, while 11 percent and 9 percent, respectively, cited decisive leadership and effective administration.



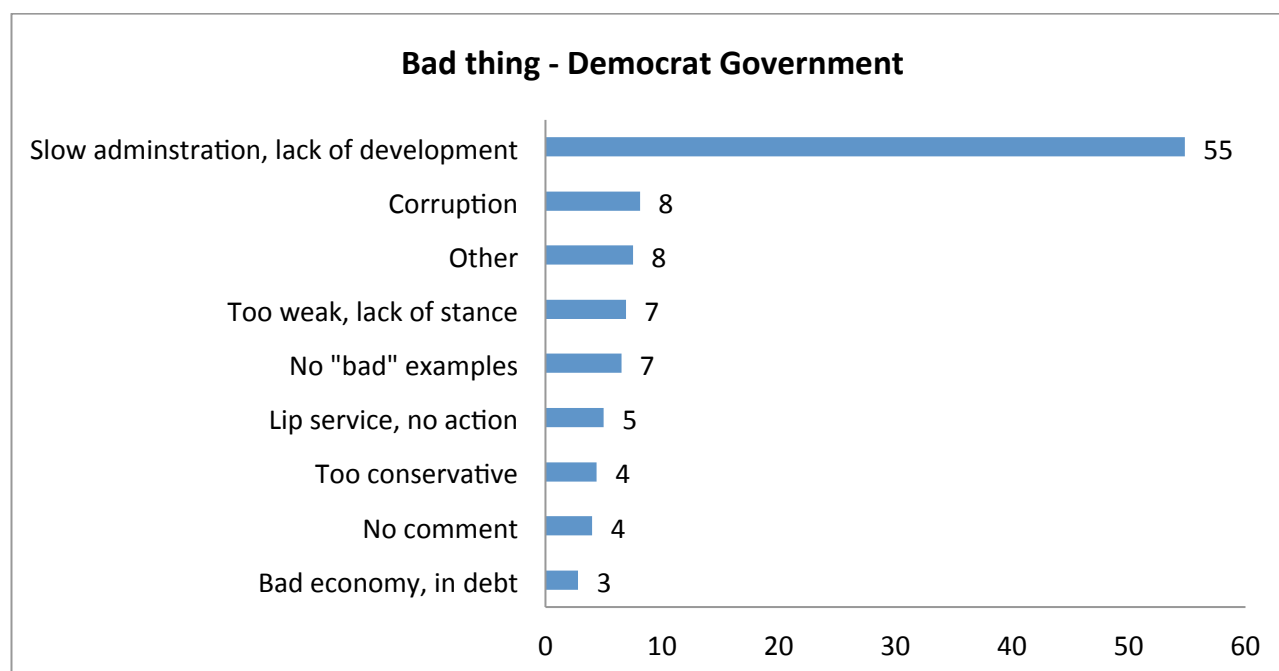
In reflecting on the previous Democrat administration (2008 to 2011), respondents cited honesty (20 percent), less corruption than other governments (20 percent), effective administration (13



percent—versus 9 percent in the case of respondent reflections on the Shinawatra regime), and satisfactory policy and other governance outputs (11 percent—versus 13 percent in the case of respondent reflection on the Shinawatra regime). However, 8 percent said there was nothing good and an additional 4 percent had no comment.



In reflecting on the negative aspects of the Shinawatra regime, 72 percent of respondents cited corruption, while 5 percent cited immoral behavior.

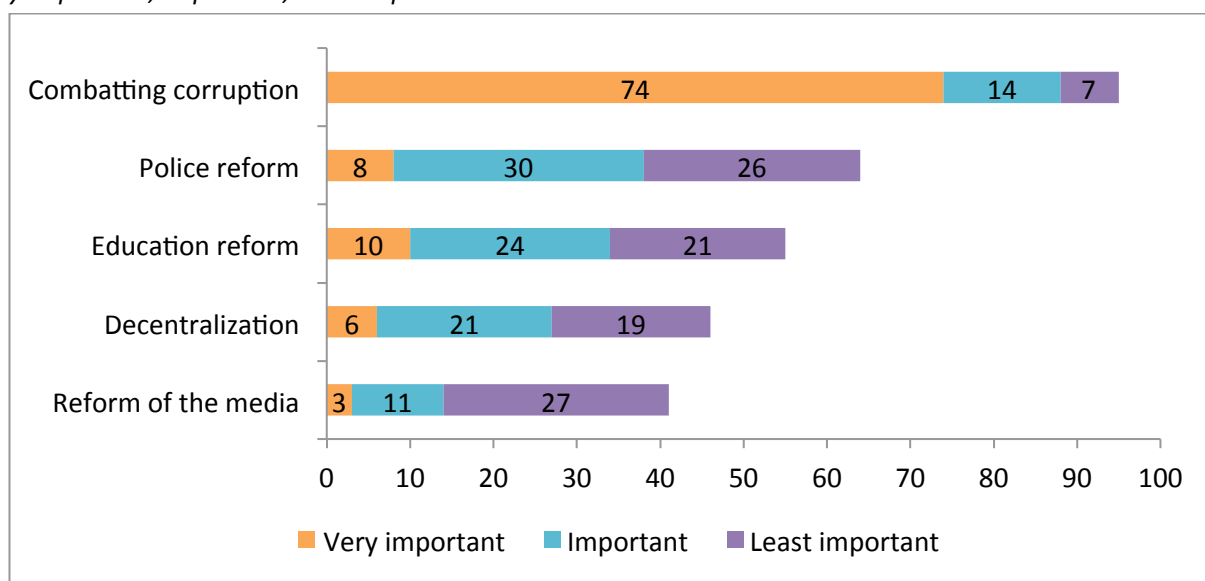


With respect to negative aspects of the previous Democrat administration, the largest percentage of respondents cited the impact of slow administration on national development (55 percent). They also cited corruption (8 percent) and weakness in assuming a bold stance on key issues (7 percent).

## PDRC REFORM AGENDA

### Prioritizing Issues in the Proposed PDRC Reform Agenda

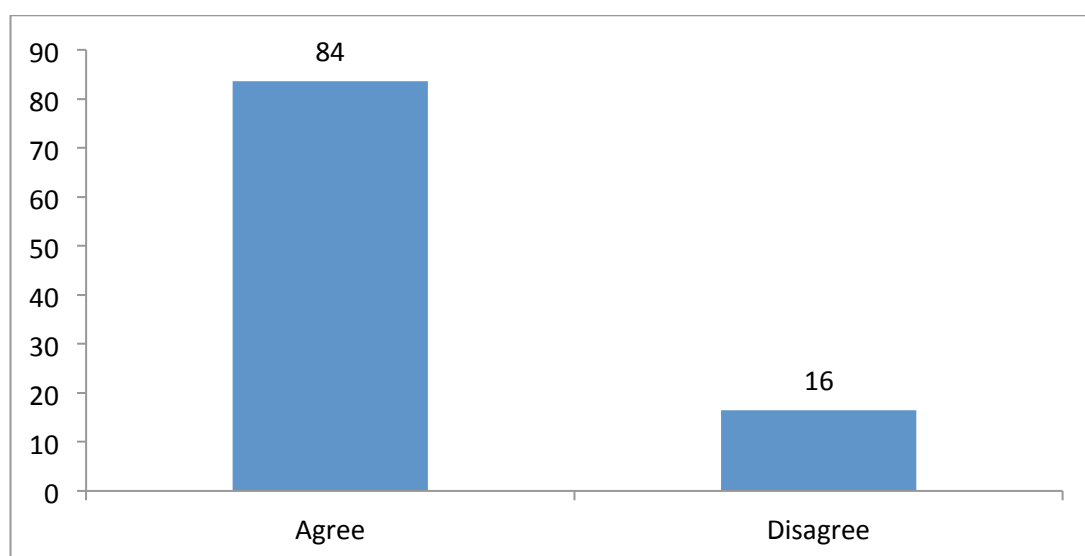
Among the issues included in the reform agenda proposed by PDRC, how do you rank them in importance—very important; important; least important.



Among issues in the five-point reform agenda proposed by PDRC, combatting corruption ranked first in priority, with 74 percent of respondents ranking it first, 14 percent second, and 7 percent third. It was followed by police reform, with 8 percent of respondents ranking it first, 30 percent second, and 26 percent third. Education reform and decentralization ranked third and fourth in priority, with media reform ranked last.

### Composition of the PDRC-Proposed People's Council

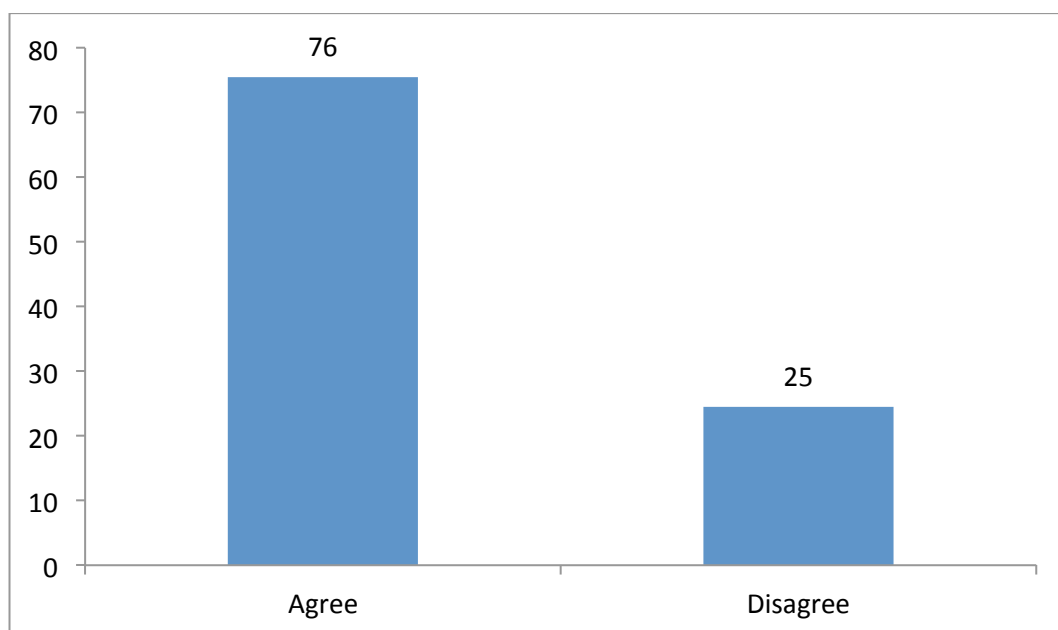
PDRC has called for a "People's Council" to take the place of elected government and preside over a reform process. Some people say that People's Council should include fair representation of all sectors, including those with opposing political views. Do you agree with this statement?



The majority of respondents (84 percent) agreed that the PDRC-proposed People's Council should include fair representation of all sectors, including those with opposing political views.

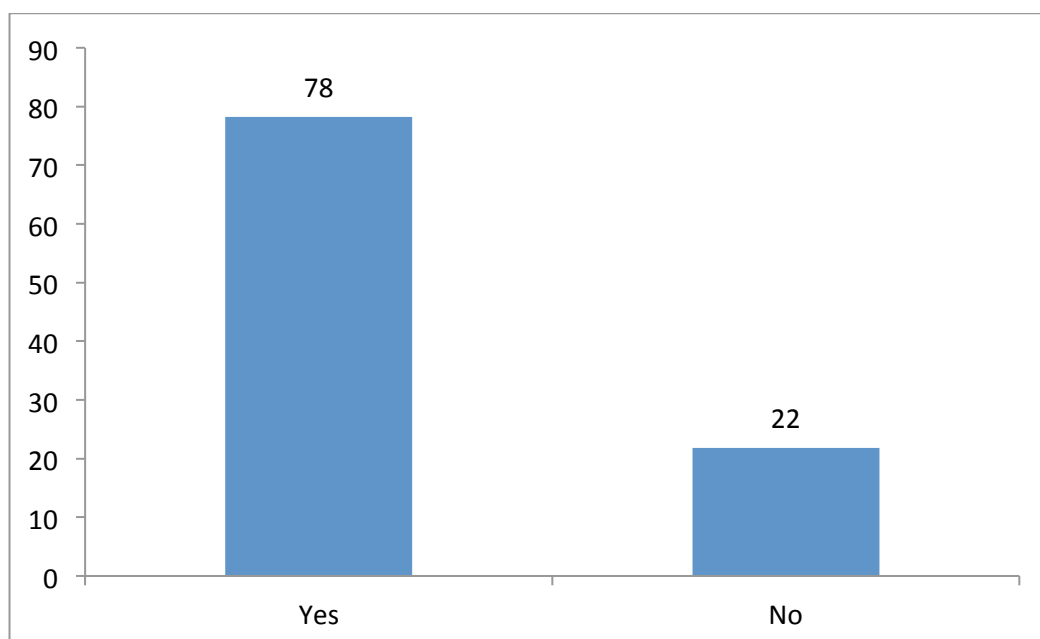
### Formal Commitment to a Reform Mandate

*Some people say that there should be a legislation (such as a Royal Decree) to guarantee that any party winning the next [February 2, 2014] election must be obliged by it to have reform mandate. Do you agree with this statement?*



Three-quarters of respondents (76 percent) agreed that a formal measure should be taken to guarantee that any party winning the [February 2] election would be bound to follow a reform mandate.

*If the winner of the next [February 2, 2014] election was legally required [by royal decree or other formal mechanism] to initiate a national [democratic; political] reform process, would this lead you to abandon the present political demonstrations?*

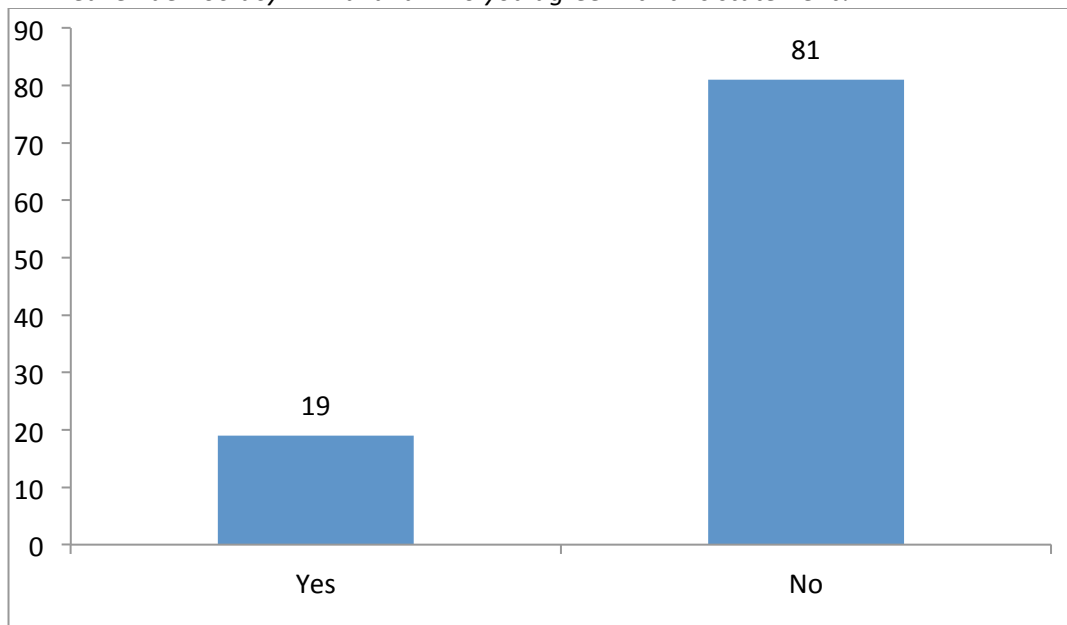


Seventy-eight percent of respondents indicated that a legal obligation on the part of the next elected government to initiate a national reform process would lead respondents to abandon the anti-government demonstration.

## ELECTION

### Election Boycott

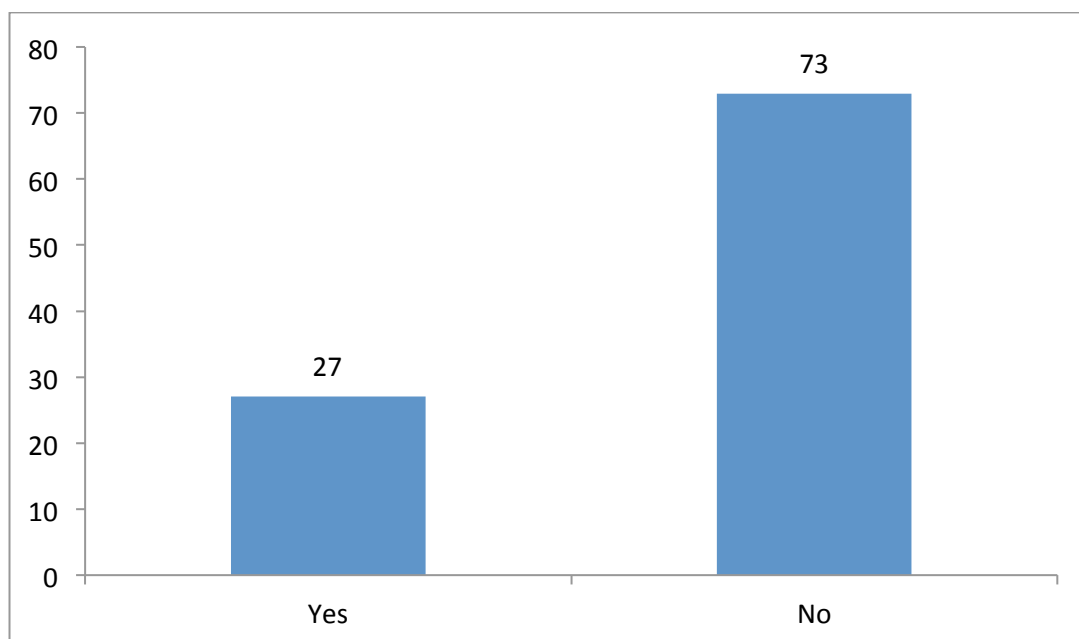
*Some people say “the decision of some main political parties to boycott the [February 2, 2014] general election will weaken democracy in Thailand.” Do you agree with this statement?<sup>3</sup>*



Eighty-one percent of respondents disagreed with the view that democracy in Thailand would be weakened by the decision of some political parties to boycott the [February 2, 2014] general election.

### Authoritarian Intervention

*In your opinion, given the current political situation, is intervention or a coup by the military is justified?*

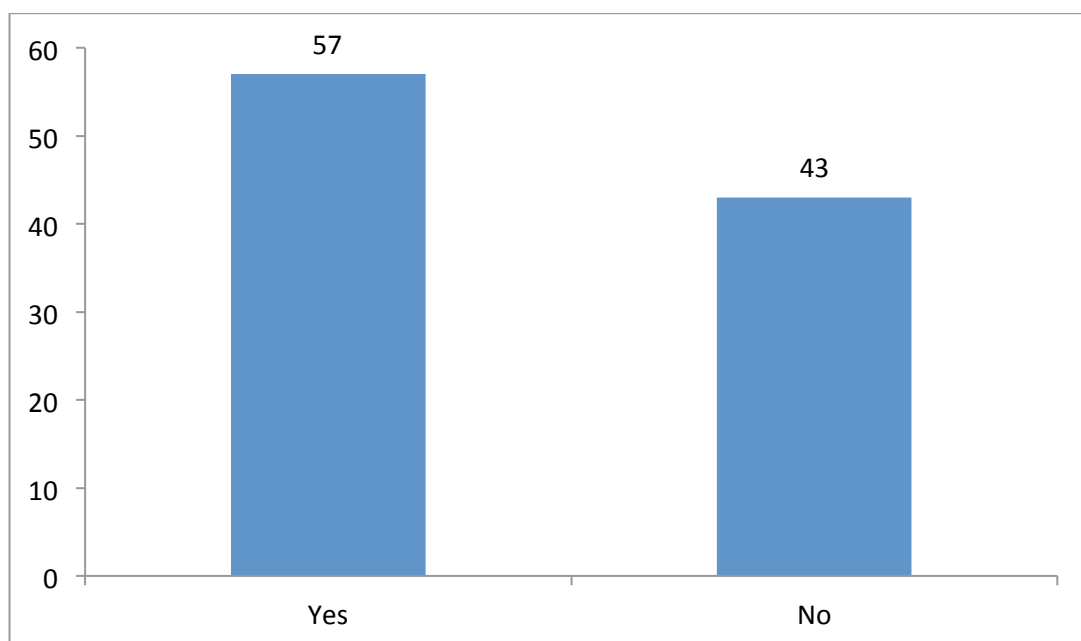


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<sup>3</sup> The Opposition Democrat Party announced its intention to boycott the February 2, 2014 election.

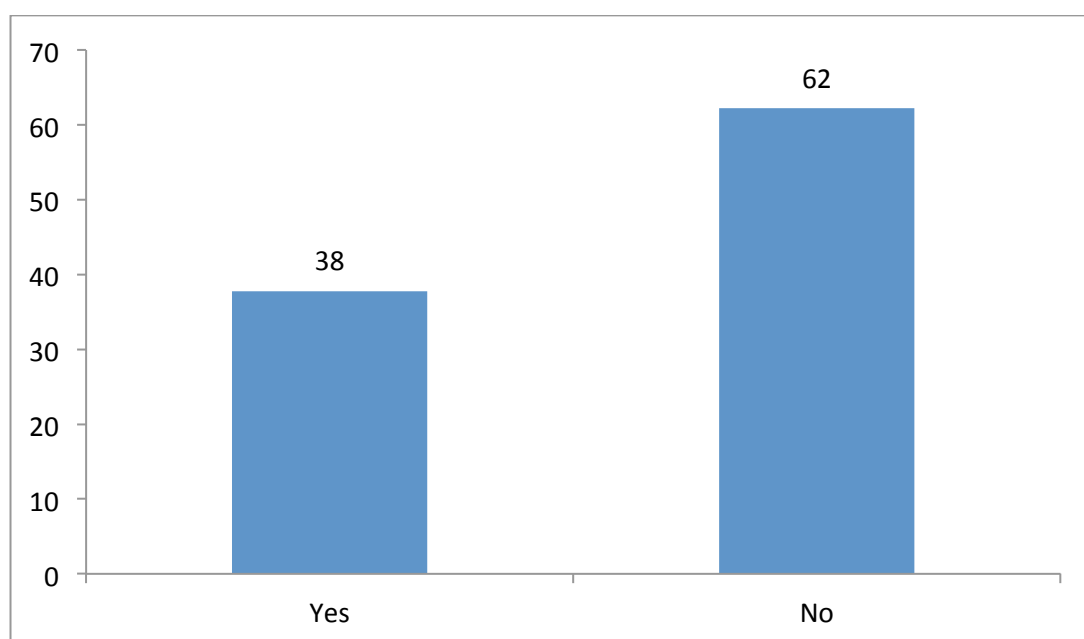
Seventy-three percent of respondents believed that military intervention is not justified in the current political situation, while 27 percent felt that it is.

*If the current political situation was to deteriorate to the point that violence occurs, would military intervention then be justified to prevent further violence?*



Fifty-seven percent of respondents felt that military intervention would be justified if the political situation was to deteriorate to the point that violence occurred, in the interest of containing violence, while 43 percent disagreed.

*Do you think that there are some situations where it is justifiable to use violence in order to achieve political objectives?*

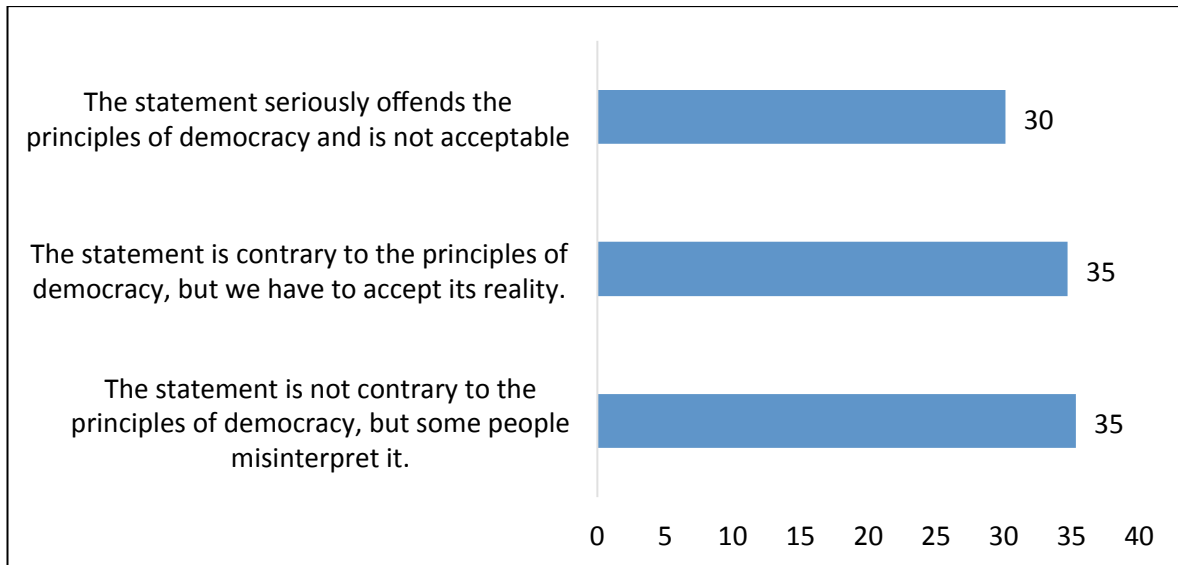


While the majority of respondents (62 percent) rejected the notion that violence can be justified to achieve political objectives, over one-third (38 percent) expressed support for the use of violence in some circumstances.



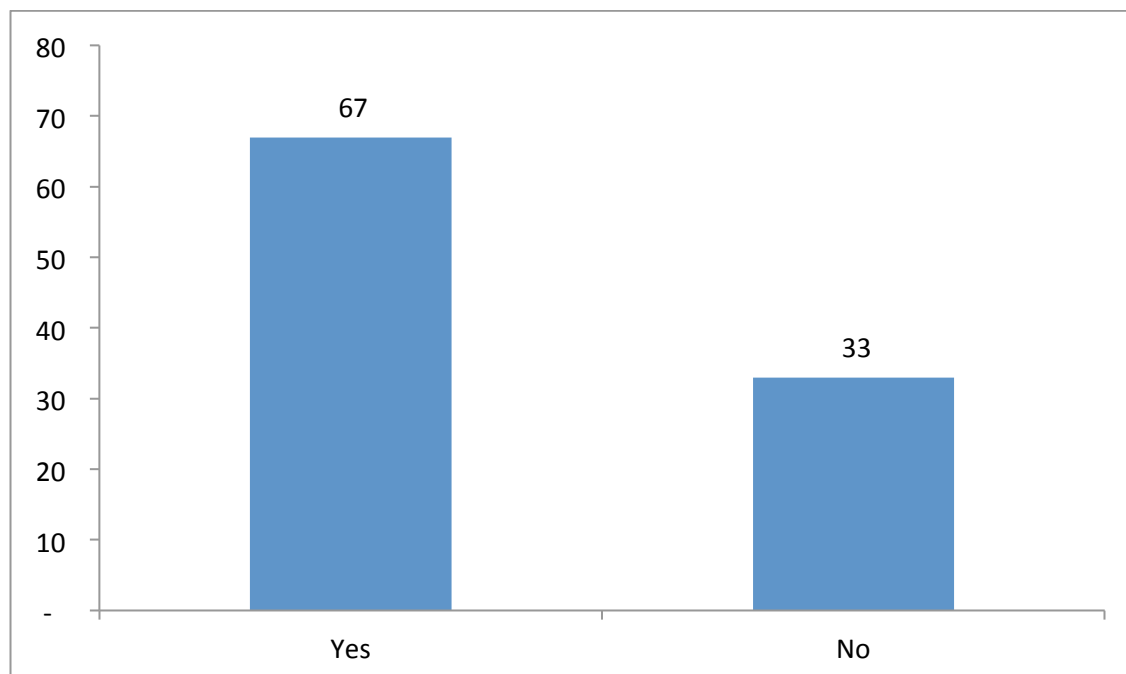
## Equal Voting Rights

*Some Thais have suggested that “Thais are not yet ready for equal voting rights.” Thinking about this statement, which of the following three options is closest to your view?*



Two-thirds (65 percent) of respondents felt that the concept of apportioned voting rights is contrary to the principles of democracy, while one-third (35 percent) felt that this was an acceptable reality. Slightly more than one-third (35 percent) of respondents felt that this was not contradictory to the principles of democracy, but that it is misinterpreted in some quarters.

*A survey of PDRC and Red Shirt demonstrators conducted on November 30, 2013, reported that both sides have similar views when asked “What does Democracy mean to you?” citing principles such as everyone has equal rights and freedoms, sovereignty belongs to the people, everyone does their duty, and no corruption. Considering these similarities, do you believe that you could reach a reasonable compromise solution with those who hold opposing political views in the present environment?*



While two-thirds (67 percent) of respondents felt that they could personally reach a compromise with those who hold opposing views on the nature of democracy in Thailand, a significant minority of one-third (33 percent) did not agree.

### **About The Asia Foundation**

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Informed by six decades of experience and deep local expertise, our programs address critical issues affecting Asia in the 21st century—governance and law, economic development, women's empowerment, environment, and regional cooperation. In addition, our Books for Asia and professional exchange programs are among the ways we encourage Asia's continued development as a peaceful, just, and thriving region of the world. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. In Thailand, the Foundation works in cooperation with partners in government, civil society, academia, and the private sector to promote peaceful conflict resolution, encourage citizen engagement in political processes, support innovative programs that help to build more responsive and transparent systems of governance throughout the country, and advance Thailand's role as a non-traditional development partner.

### **Acknowledgments**

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survey instrument, while Ms. Pichaikul and Ms. Nakseewee supervised the survey enumerators. Chulalongkorn University student Pimpajee Nopsuwan managed the data entry and produced the graphs, while the survey was administered by Tawan Charoengonvijit, Apisit Smakkate, Suppakan Malayaporn, Awirut Preecha, Metee Ploymee, Fatist Okrit, Chanaporn Anurukwongkul, Bulin Jirapongsatorn, Yutthakrit Chalermthai, Kankanok Wichiantanon, Kanapol Sirilertruangchai, Thanungarn Wongnitiaunggul, Panapatch Songsukthawan, and Kankanit Wichiantanon.





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