Thailand: The People Have Spoken – No Confidence in Regime or System

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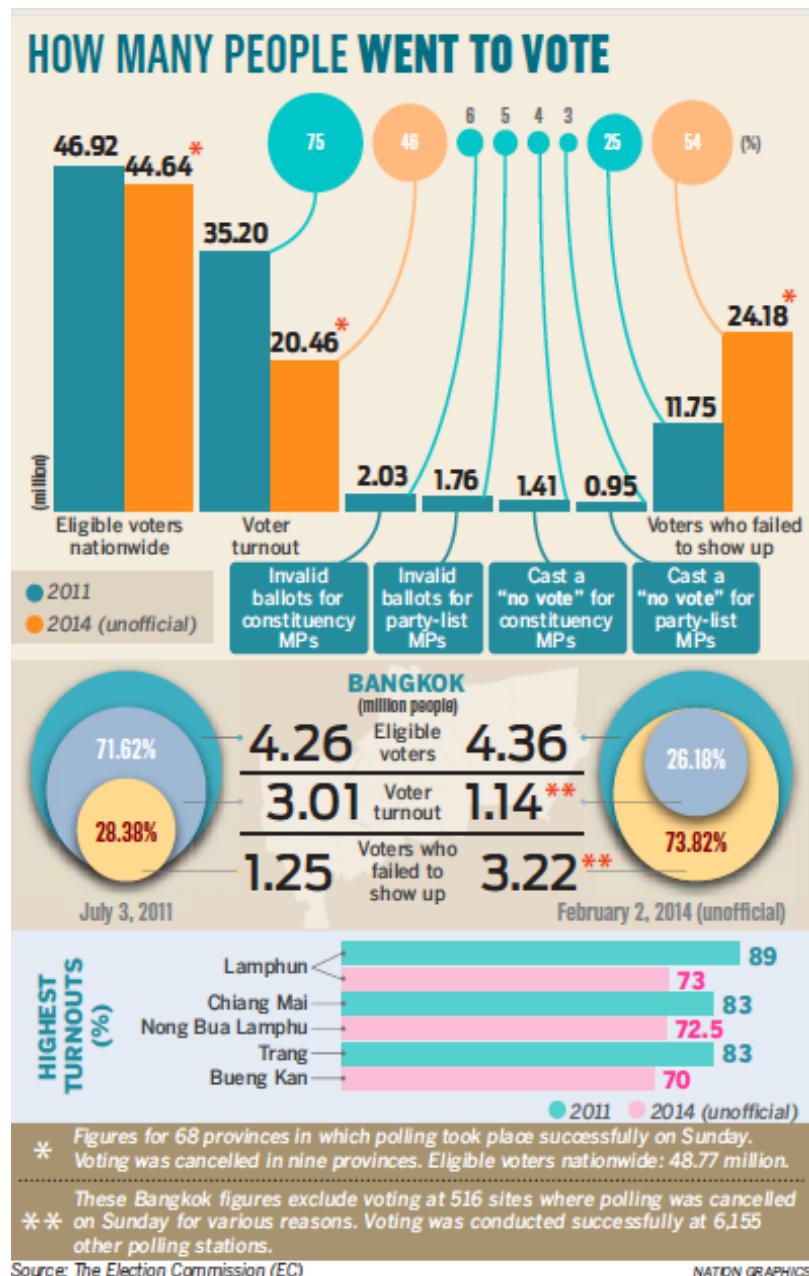*With a regime and system rendered illegitimate with a sweeping boycott of sham elections – Thailand must find alternatives to patching itself together beyond the broken ballot box.*

Thailand's February 2, 2014 elections produced the worst ever voter turnout in Thai history with a humiliating 46% coming out to cast their ballots. Of this paltry number, many chose to deface their ballots or cast "no vote" in protest of both the process and the regime overseeing it.

The elections were highly controversial, with all major opposition parties boycotting them and the only major party on the ballot being openly run by an accused mass murderer, convicted criminal, and fugitive, Thaksin Shinawatra, who is currently hiding abroad from a two year jail sentence, multiple arrest warrants, and a long list of pending legal cases.

The elections were carried out with heavy backing from the West, despite the obvious illegitimacy of the process and the nature of the regime. While the West claims it was merely defending the "democratic process," a look into the relationship between dictator Thaksin Shinawatra and the corporate-financier interests of Wall Street and London tell another, more likely story of imposing upon Thailand a proxy regime serving Western, not Thai interests.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WENT TO VOTE

2011 ● | **2014 (unofficial)** ●

	2011	2014
Eligible voters nationwide (million)	46.92	44.64 *
Voter turnout	35.20	20.46 *
Invalid ballots for constituency MPs	2.03	
Invalid ballots for party-list MPs	1.76	
Cast a "no vote" for constituency MPs	1.41	
Cast a "no vote" for party-list MPs	0.95	
Voters who failed to show up	11.75	24.18 *

(%) 75 | 46 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 25 | 54

BANGKOK (million people)

	July 3, 2011		February 2, 2014 (unofficial)
	71.62% / 28.38%		26.18% / 73.82%
Eligible voters	4.26		4.36
Voter turnout	3.01		1.14 **
Voters who failed to show up	1.25		3.22 **

HIGHEST TURNOUTS (%)

Province	2011 ●	2014 (unofficial) ●
Lamphun	89	73
Chiang Mai	83	
Nong Bua Lamphu		72.5
Trang	83	
Bueng Kan		70

* Figures for 68 provinces in which polling took place successfully on Sunday. Voting was cancelled in nine provinces. Eligible voters nationwide: 48.77 million.

** These Bangkok figures exclude voting at 516 sites where polling was cancelled on Sunday for various reasons. Voting was conducted successfully at 6,155 other polling stations.

Source: The Election Commission (EC)   NATION GRAPHICS

Graph: Thailand's Election Commission reported the abysmal voter turnout in 2014, compared with 2011, showing a resounding loss of confidence in both the ruling regime and the "democratic process" it has highjacked to grant itself otherwise nonexistent credibility and legitimacy. The turnouts only tell part of the story, since many who did vote, did so simply to deface their ballots or check "no vote" in an alternative form of protest against the regime. (Graphic via The Nation).

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Of the election turnout, Thai PBS reported in their article, "EC says latest voter turnout is 46.79%," that:

> The Election Commission (EC) today released the latest voter turnout for February 2 general election at 46.79%, with turnout of "vote-no" standing at 16.57%.
>
> The turnout was counted from 68 provinces, excluding nine southern provinces where voting could not be held, and some constituencies of Rayong and

Bangkok.

Of the 68 provinces where voting was held, EC said there are a total of 43,024,042 eligible voters.

It said 20,129,976 voters or 46.79%, cast their votes. Of all the ballots they casted, 71.38% was valid, and 12.05% was void.

It said of all the valid ballots, 16.57% voters casted "vote-no".

With over half of all eligible voters choosing to not even vote, and with so many defacing their ballots or choosing the "no vote" option, the ruling regime of Thaksin Shinawatra has clearly lost millions of votes since 2011. It should be noted that turnout percentages are determined based on polling stations uninterrupted by protests – though areas where voting was disrupted are expected to produce results even less favorable for the regime if and when voting occurs.

It is clear that the regime has lost the confidence and support of the vast majority of the Thai population and is now without a mandate to rule the country. Furthermore, Thais appear to have lost confidence in the so-called "democratic process" the regime has hijacked in order to create the illusion of a mandate and legitimacy.

Despite this, the regime's Western backers continue to promote the myth that merely because "elections" took place, whatever government is formed afterward possesses unquestionable legitimacy. And with this "legitimacy," Thaksin Shinawatra and his political party are attempting to arrest an opposition that clearly commanded the majority of Thai opinion on February 2.

In Bangkok Post's article, "[Arrest warrants for PDRC leaders, CMPO to suspend transactions](#)," it reported:

> The Criminal Court on Wednesday approved the Department of Special Investigation's (DSI) request for arrest warrants for 19 leading members of the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) for alleged violation of the emergency decree.

To compound the regime's authoritarian posture, it should be noted that the emergency decree was announced in response to [a terror campaign the regime itself openly carried out](#) against the opposition. It included almost nightly drive-by shootings at rally sites and opposition leaders' homes, as well as brazen broad daylight grenade attacks that left one dead and scores seriously maimed.

While the regime and the West will continue framing the elections as a renewed mandate for Thaksin Shinawatra's illegal, illegitimate administration of Thailand, and the opposition as ostentatiously opposing the will of the rural "majority," the reality is that this rural majority joined the opposition on February 2 in boycotting the polls and are literally joining the protesters in Bangkok in response to [the regime's collapsed rice-buying scheme](#).

Waiting for the Inevitable

The illusion of Thaksin Shinawatra's popularity has been shattered and the barriers of fear imposed upon the Thai people by his "red shirt" enforcers have crumbled into ruins. With

wrecking-ball abandon, his regime has gutted Thailand's rice industry, skewed the economy, shaken confidence both domestically and abroad, and is still awaiting the fallout from other disastrous vote-buying schemes that are in the process of collapsing.

What the protesters have been unable to do themselves, the regime itself will accomplish in the final stages of its grip on power.

However, people need not wait to begin picking up the pieces the regime's corrupt, incompetent ministries have left after their ruinous decade in power. While a new government will inevitably replace the Shinawatra regime, the lessons of the past decade should inform the Thai people that the answers to their solutions lay not at the ballot box, but in their own hands. While Thailand's education system, agricultural industry, banking system, infrastructure, and other essential services provided by the government cannot be easily replaced, they *can* be augmented by local activism, local institutions, and local collaboration to make up for shortcomings that may or may never be addressed adequately.

Protesters who have been meeting and organizing to attend mass rallies, supporting the alternative media in their efforts to counter the regime and its Western backers' propaganda, and volunteering at the rallies themselves can begin expanding their activities toward tangible solutions and enumerated, specific principles of reform.

It All Begins With Education and Ends With Real Activism

The "fee tablet PC" scam by the government was a bad idea even if it was implemented efficiently. The problem with the Thai education system was never a lack of tablet PCs, but a lack of resources to match qualified teachers and practical curriculum to appropriately sized classes.

A real solution could include a Thai-version of [OpenCourseWare](#) where curriculum is available for free on the Internet in a centralized repository including both free .PDF textbooks and video lectures on YouTube, along with resources to help educators and potential educators impart the curriculum upon students. This can be done in parallel with the existing education system and offered in after-school programs. It can be lucrative and beneficial to both educators and students within their village or district.

Concepts like "[hackerspaces](#)" and "[DIYbio labs](#)" can give high school and university students practical hands-on experience to augment their theoretical studies across the street from their classrooms. These local institutions can also serve as SME kickstarters, while the technological and human resources they are able to pool can be applied directly to local problems by the local people themselves. (see more on "[How to Start a Hackerspace](#)")

This can include anything from improving or [augmenting local IT infrastructure](#), to developing [cheap and easy-to-replicate technology to assist farmers](#) in both increasing their efficiency and diversifying their economic activity. Local institutions like hackerspaces that combine education, technological research and development, and a venue for meeting and organizing for a wide variety of pragmatic purposes, can also serve as a nexus for disaster response – another area in which the current regime has consistently and tragically failed.

An example of a political movement turned pragmatic was Occupy Wall Street, which in the face of Hurricane Sandy, [became "Occupy Sandy](#)." It turned its political networks into pragmatic disaster relief networks, and illustrated their political struggle with Wall Street

and the proxy regime it controls in Washington, could be outmatched by its pragmatic response to that regime's failure in the face of adversity.

The Occupy Sandy movement proved that the US government's failure was not because the odds were insurmountable, but because the government simply did not care. The lesson is that the only people who care about us, are ourselves, our friends and family, and our community. To solve our own problems, we must find the solutions within and among ourselves.

The "Occupy Bangkok" campaign can easily be flipped, just as Occupy Wall Street was in New York City, to begin addressing the many problems left by Shinawatra regime through pragmatic means. Before the regime crumbles, and while people are in "activist mode," groups can begin forming around a simple table with notebooks or computers to begin sharing knowledge and exploring models that can be both profitable in monetary and social terms. These could include:

> Hackerspaces: A space – perhaps a shophouse – with tables for people to gather and collaborate on practical projects such as IT, hardware, robotics, electronics, fabrication, woodworking, etc. Most hackerspaces fund themselves through a combination of monthly dues from memberships and through classes organized to teach skills or discuss concepts. The space is very flexible, and can even be used for local meetings, after-school tutoring, and social events.

> Farmers' Markets: With the disastrous rice-buying scam collapsed in corruption, scandal, and bankruptcy, farmers across the country are left with empty hands and a wrecked rice industry. Should these farmers possess the skills to produce organic fruits, vegetables, and livestock, and should urbanites both in provincial cities and in the capital create markets for them, an additional source of sustainable revenue can be offered while deeply entrenching a healthier, local agricultural industry across the nation.

> For example, organic farmers' markets could be created across Bangkok, who independently or cooperatively promote their locations, operating hours, and the farmers they network with. Tours to the farms producing the food can also become a part of the new economy, with new media writing about the health benefits of organic farming versus industrial big-agri.

An industry of the people, by the people, for the people is the only true way to achieve real, sustainable, and meaningful "wealth distribution." The technology and resources already exist to make this a reality – a reality already unfolding among dissatisfied Americans seeking an exit out from under the Fortune 500's corporate-financier monopolies. The legal and regulatory barriers these monopolies are using to stem the exodus of consumers into producers do not exist in practice in Thailand.

For Thais, the only barrier may be a lack of understanding that the solution is right before us. Understanding it, however, allows us to take the current momentum of the political surge against Thaksin Shinawatra and the corrupt system he represents, both in Thailand and globally, and turning it into a pragmatic and lasting movement that will finally allow us to make good on the promises perpetually made and broken by self-serving politicians.

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