

# Profile of the Protestors

A Survey of Pro and Anti-Government  
Demonstrators in Bangkok on November 30, 2013

DECEMBER 2013



**The Asia Foundation**

Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities



## The Asia Foundation

### **PROFILE OF THE PROTESTORS** *A Survey of Pro and Anti-Government* *Demonstrators in Bangkok on November 30, 2013* **December 2013**

#### **Introduction**

The Asia Foundation (the Foundation) observed the political tensions that gripped Bangkok in late November and early December 2013 with concern. The tensions erupted in the context of two legislative reform initiatives pursued by the Pheu Thai government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra: first, a 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—which was approved by the Lower House and rejected by the Senate; and second, an effort to amend the Constitution to change the composition of the Senate from a mix of elected and appointed members to a fully-elected body—a proposal that was rejected by the Constitutional Court on the basis of technical irregularities.

When the government indicated that it would not be bound by the court decision, 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 People's Democratic Reform Committee (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 be composed of neutral, respected leaders and that would replace the elected government for an undefined period of time. In response to the PDRC demonstrations, several thousand members of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD, or the "Red Shirts" as they are commonly known) gathered at Ratchamangkla National Stadium in the last week of November in a peaceful show of support for the Pheu Thai government. They remained in the stadium for several days before quietly dispersing.

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 Foundation took the opportunity to conduct a rapid perception survey of PDRC and red shirt activists who were involved in mass anti-government demonstrations and government support gatherings, respectively, in Bangkok. The survey was undertaken as an opportunity to learn about the demographic composition of the respective gatherings and to probe the perspectives of political activists on issues that were explored in the 2010 survey and as well as issues related to the current tensions. A short questionnaire—comprising 24 questions in total, nine of which explored demographic profile—was developed by Foundation program staff, with a small team of survey supervisors and enumerators trained and enumerators deployed to administer the survey on Saturday, November 30, 2013.

The original survey methodology aimed to interview 250 respondents in the two political activist groups: 250 PDRC demonstrators in each of the five rally locations around Bangkok;

and 250 red shirts assembled in Ratchamangkla National Stadium. Over the course of the day on November 30, as the intensity of the political gatherings increased, the security situation at the PDRC rally sites and the neighborhood surrounding Ratchamangkla Stadium deteriorated. The security situation prompted supervisors to suspend or cancel data collection in certain areas to ensure the safety of the enumerators. As a result of security concerns, enumerators were only able to complete 315 of the 500 interviews planned: 161 at Ratchamangkla Stadium and 154 at four of the five anti-government rally sites (Ratchadamnoen Road, the Government Complex at Cheang Wattana, the Department of Special Investigations, and the Ministry of Finance).

Since the red shirt assembly filled Ratchamangkla Stadium, the size of the gathering was estimated at 60,000, corresponding to the capacity of the stadium. Available estimates for crowd size at the various PDRC rally sites on November 30 are few in number, and those that do exist vary significantly. Based on available estimates and an examination of photographic images of the rallies taken on that day, an assembly of 6,000 demonstrators in each of the four sampled PDRC sites would be a reasonable estimate. These estimates of the number of people in the respective political gatherings are adequate for sampling design purposes, since the intended sample size was small. A sample of 250 for each gathering, when randomly chosen, is effective in estimating the population parameters, since the population size is relatively large and individuals in the crowd are unknown.

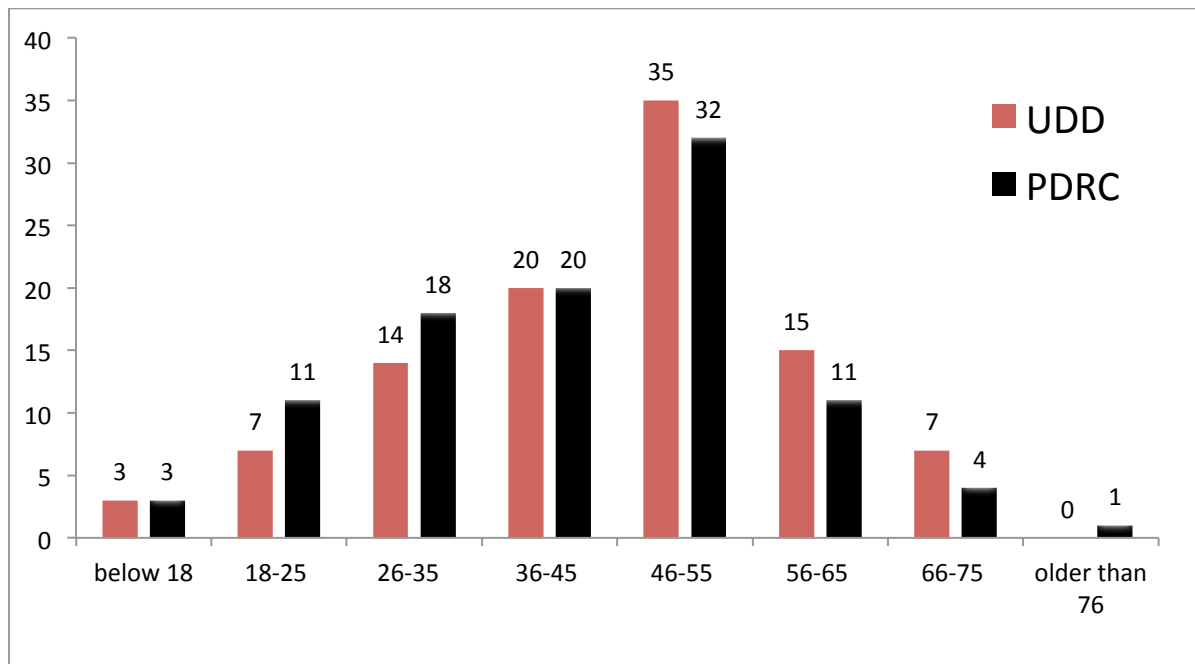
The methodology applied was designed to maximize the randomness of the sample. Enumerators were instructed to plan a serpentine path through the entire physical area of the demonstrations to account for the fact that groups of protestors travelling from various locations might be concentrated in one area. To further randomize the sample and avoid selection bias, enumerators followed a skip pattern (every 20 people) to select individual respondents at Ratchamangkla Stadium and in the four PDRC sites. Taking into account the final sample size achieved for the PDRC and red shirt gatherings, the margin of error for both samples is approximately 8% at a confidence level of 95%.

As indicated in presentation and analysis that follows, in the case of a few questions the enumerators recorded multiple responses, which results in total percentage figures larger than 100% 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 101% rather than 100%.

*Methodological Caveat:* The survey sample represents the extremes of public sentiment, since the vast majority of crowds in the two different gatherings consisted of people who were sufficiently motivated to devote time and energy in support of their respective political causes. 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 an understanding of the demographics of the political activists in the respective groups and of respondent perspectives on certain issues.

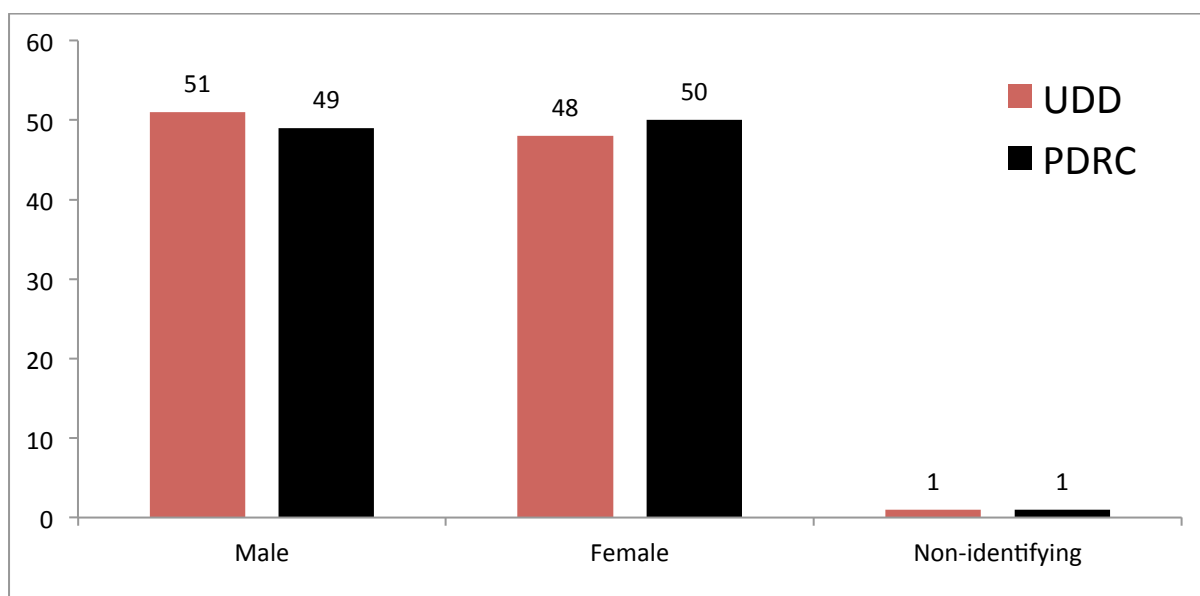
## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Age of the Respective Respondent Groups



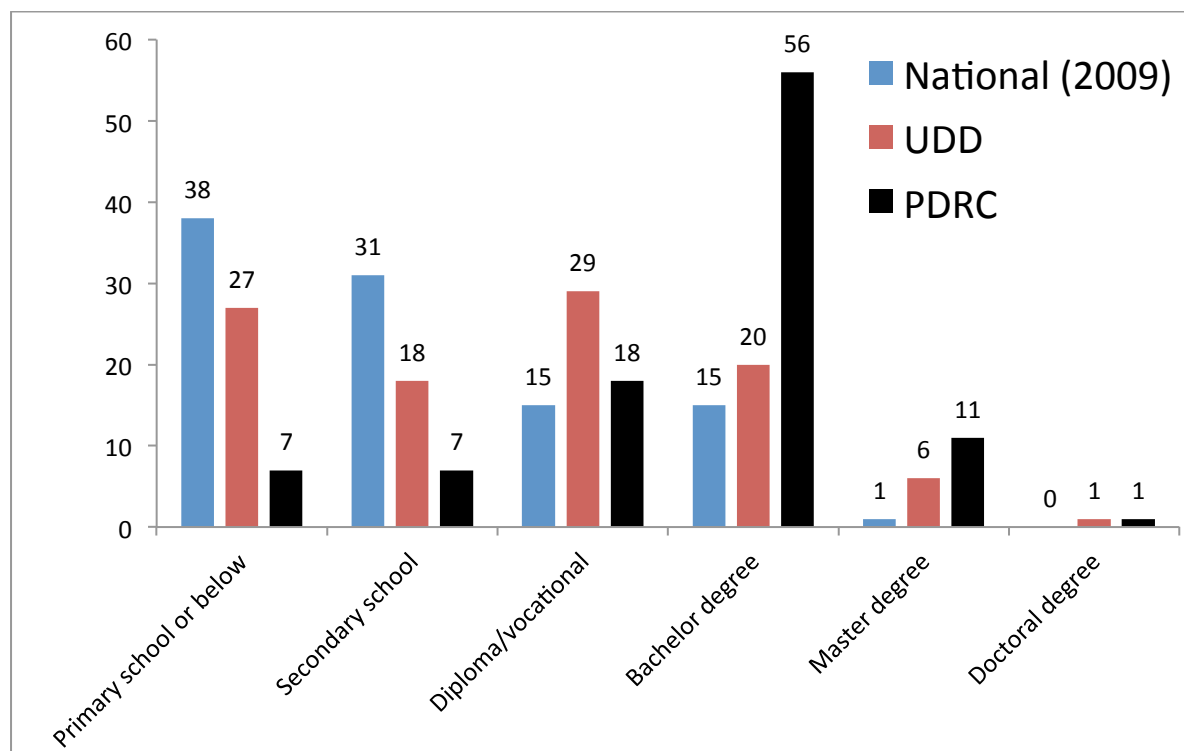
The range of ages represented within the respective respondent groups is similar, with the average age of 46 for red shirt respondents and 43 for PDRC respondents. With just 12% of the total respondents aged 25 or younger, it appears that neither group represents a youth or student movement. Seventy-seven percent of red shirt respondents and 68% of PDRC respondents are over 35, while approximately one-third of each respondent group is between 46 and 55 (35% red shirts and 32% PDRC).

### Gender



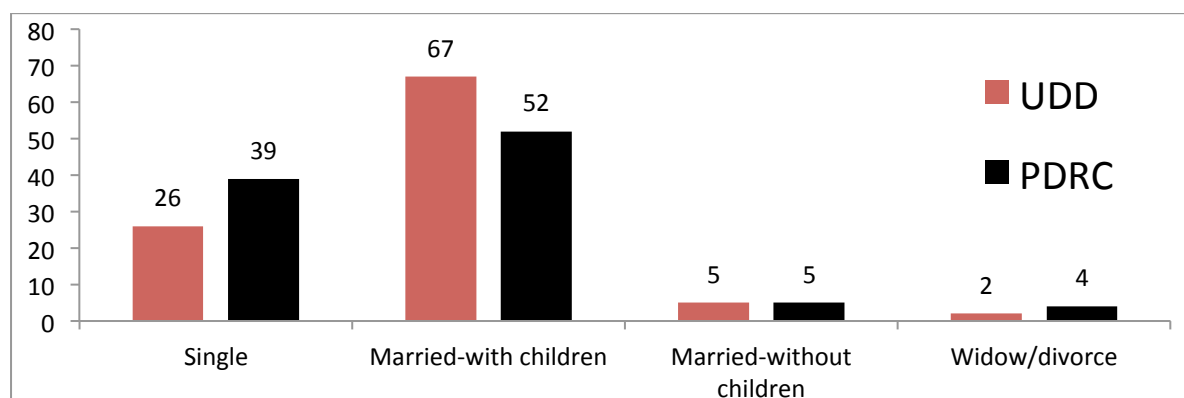
The percentage of male and female respondents is virtually equal for both respondent groups.

## Highest Education



A significant difference in education levels was observed between the two respondent groups, with 68% of PDRC respondents holding bachelor or advanced degrees, while the comparable figure for red shirt respondents is just 27%. Both groups are better educated than the national average in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

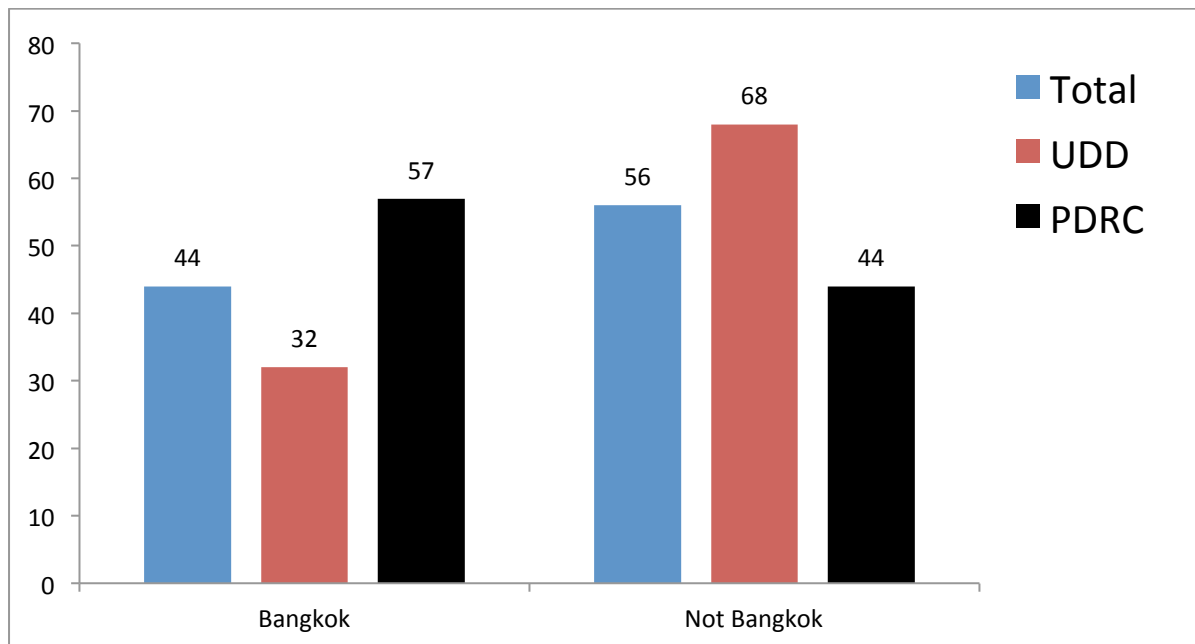
## Marital Status



PDRC respondents are slightly more likely to be single, at 39% percent versus 26% for red shirts, while married PDRC respondents are slightly less likely to have children, at 52% versus 67%.

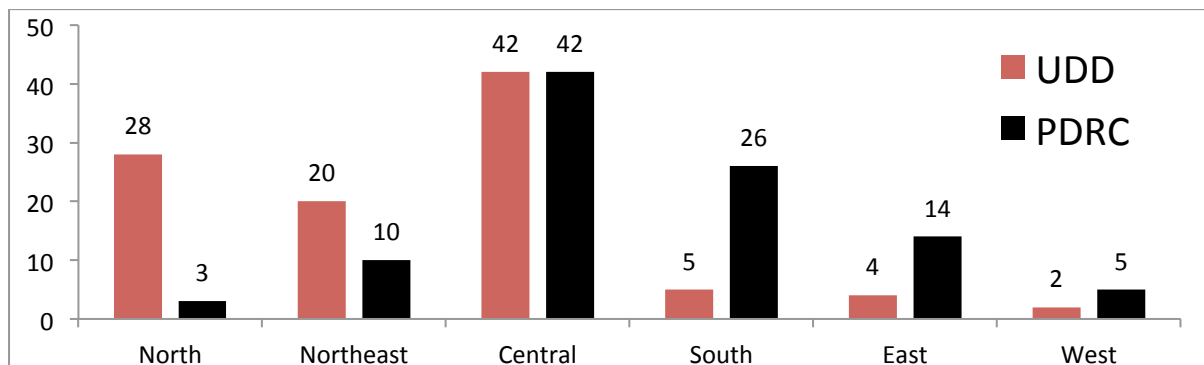
<sup>1</sup> Data from The Asia Foundation's 2009 *Constitutional Reform and Democracy in Thailand* survey is available at: <http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/603>

## Geographic Residence



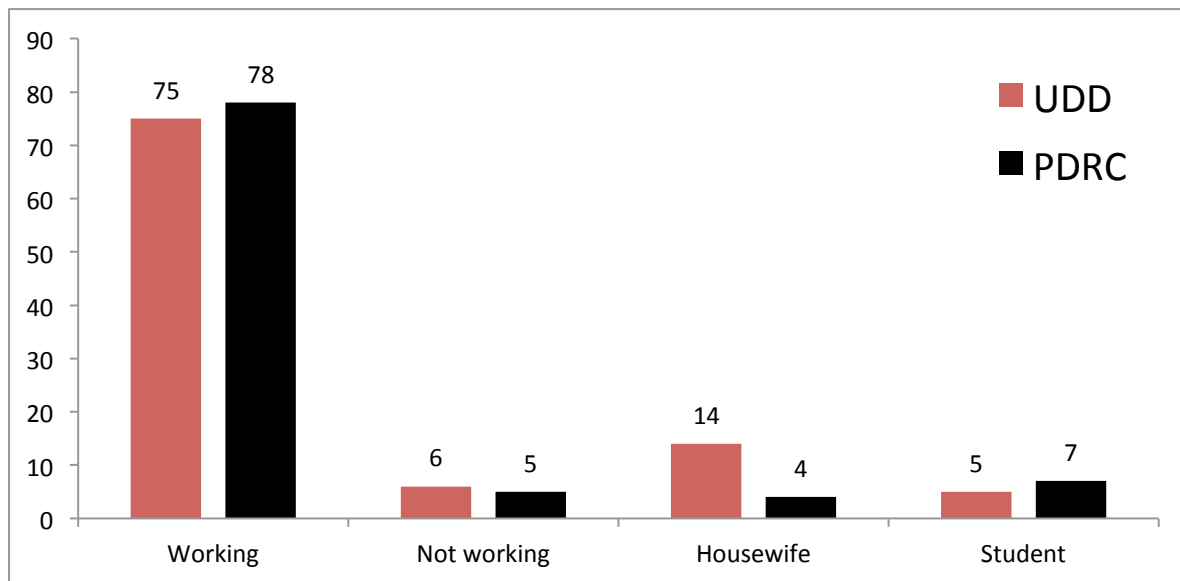
Although contemporary political tensions are often characterized as pitting Bangkok-based elites against members of the non-Bangkok-based agricultural and wage-earning classes, significant variations in geographic residence are observed among respondent groups. Fifty-seven of PDRC respondents are from Bangkok versus 32% for red shirts, while 68% of red shirt respondents are from outside Bangkok versus 44% for PDRC.

## Geographic Region (Non-Bangkok Respondents)



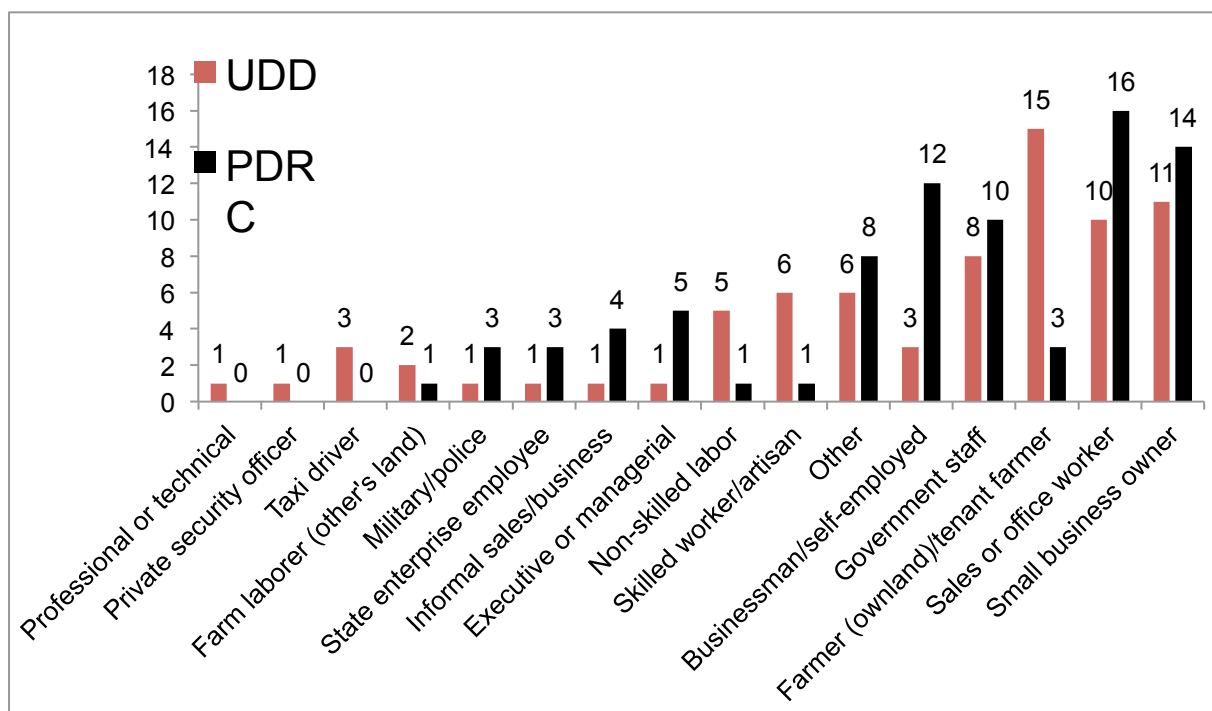
Among respondents from regions outside Bangkok, approximately 48% of red shirt respondents come from the North and Northeast, with an additional 42% from the Central region, while approximately 45% of PDRC respondents are from the South, East, or West, with another 42% from the Central region. Excluding Central Thailand, the geographic origins are quite consistent with conventional understanding of the geographic bases of political affiliation, with approximately 80% of red shirt respondents from the North and Northeast, and about 75% of PDRC respondents from the South, East, or West. At the same time, both groups reflect significant representation from regions that are typically associated with the rival political interest groups, with 13% of PDRC respondents from outside Bangkok drawn from the North and Northeast and 11% of red shirt respondents outside Bangkok drawn from the South, East, and West.

## Employment Status



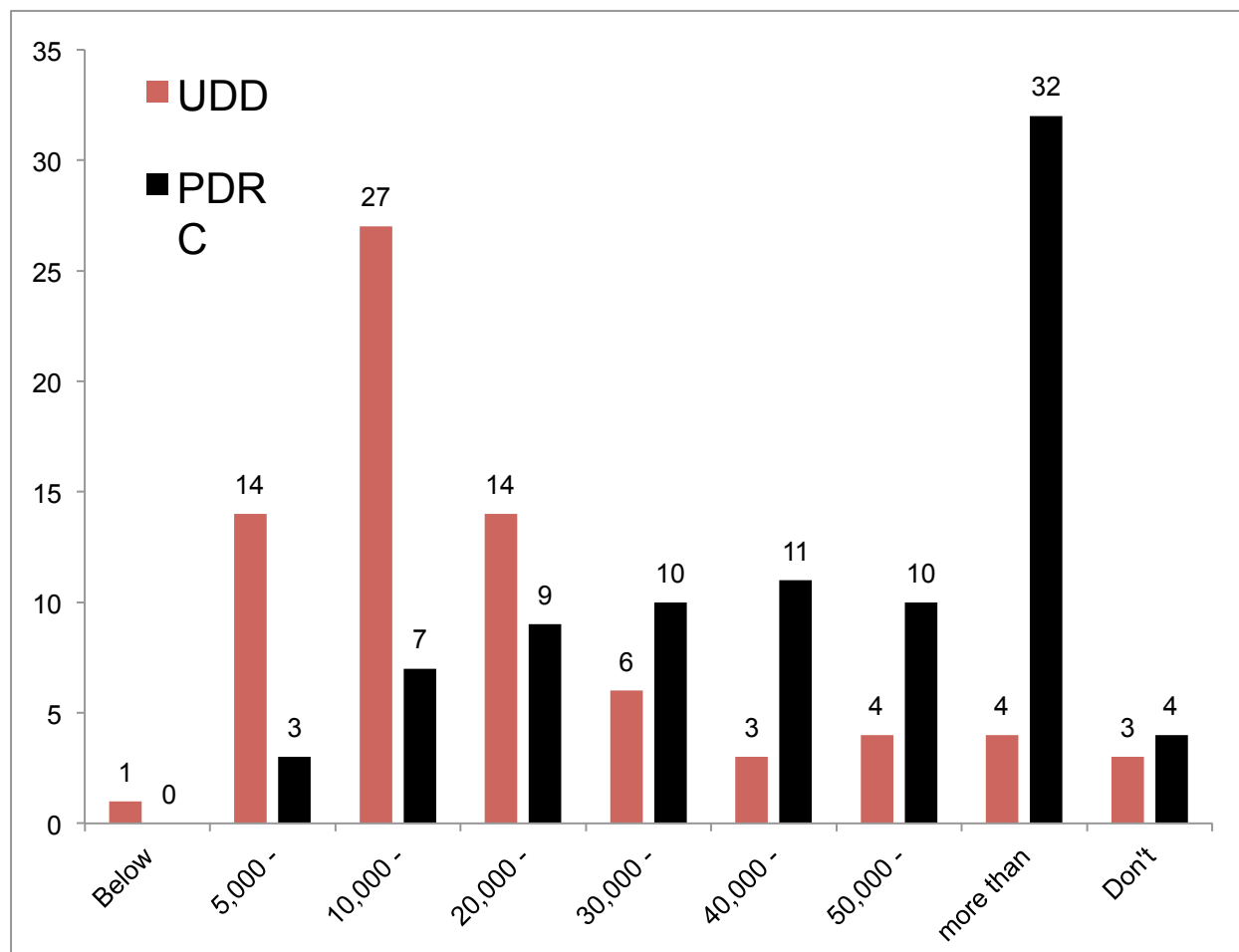
Employment levels for both groups are not significantly different with 75% of red shirt respondents and 78% of PDRC respondents engaged in the workforce.

## Specific Occupation



In terms of specific employment background, a higher percentages of red shirt respondents are engaged in trades, manual labor, and farming, with a higher concentration of PDRC respondents engaged in government service, business, and similar employment.

## Monthly Household Income



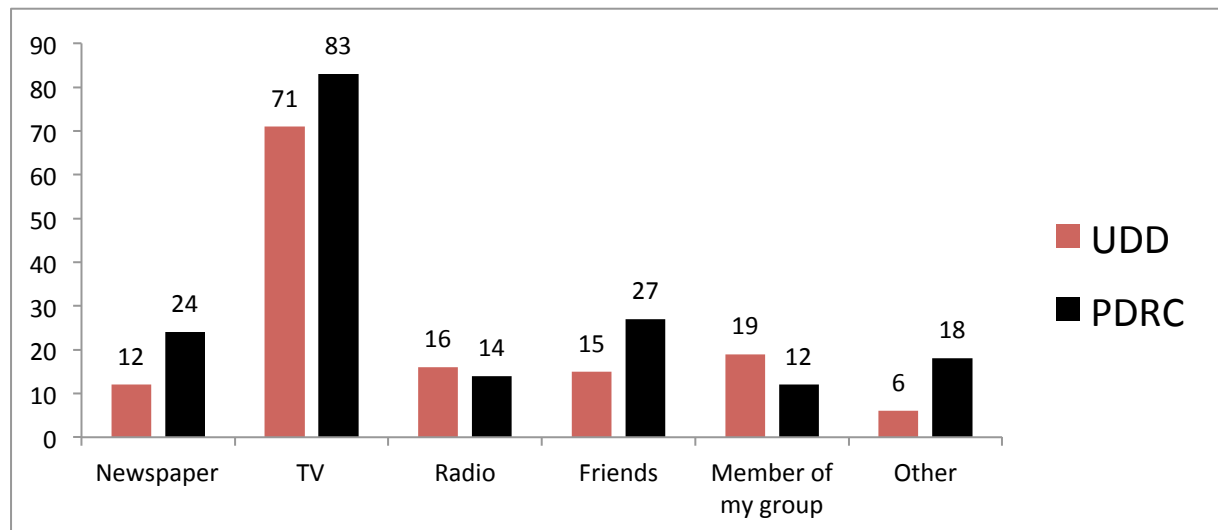
Disparity in income among respondent groups is striking. Nearly one-third (32%) of PDRC respondents earn monthly incomes exceeding 60,000 baht (\$1,900), while just 4% of red shirt respondents have similar earnings. Fifty-six percent of red shirt respondents earn less than 30,000 baht (\$1,000) per month, with 42% earning less than 20,000 baht (\$650) versus 10% of PDRC respondents.



## ORGANIZATION OF THE RALLY

### Sources of Information about Political Rallies

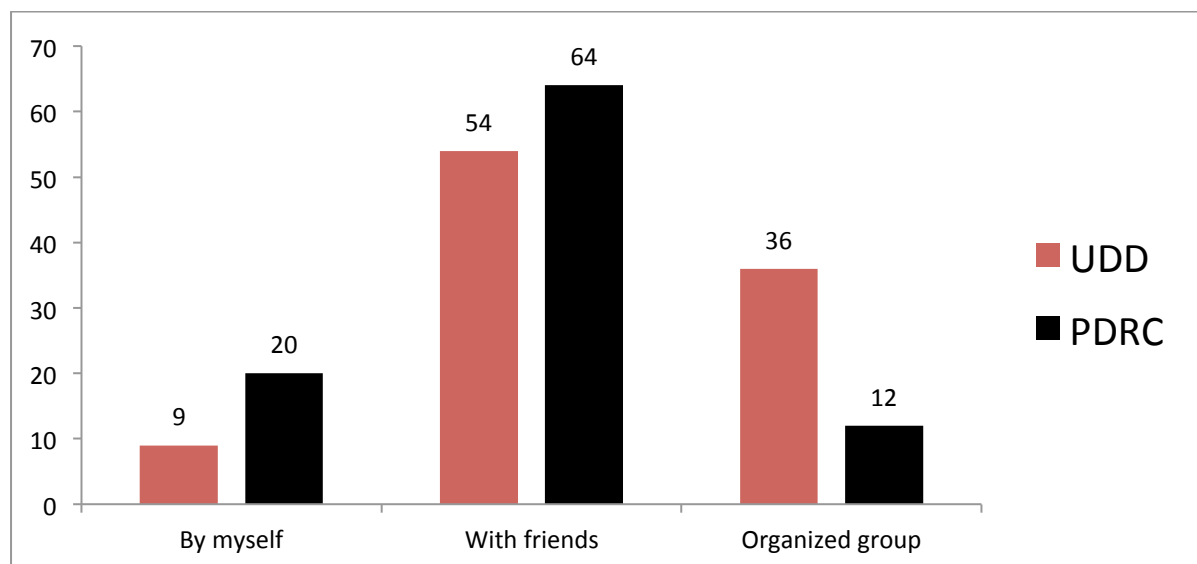
*How did you learn about this rally?*



Respondents from both groups learned about the rallies from similar sources, with television reporting the most cited source. Multiple responses were allowed for this question, which resulted in totals greater than 100%.

### Individual or Group Attendance

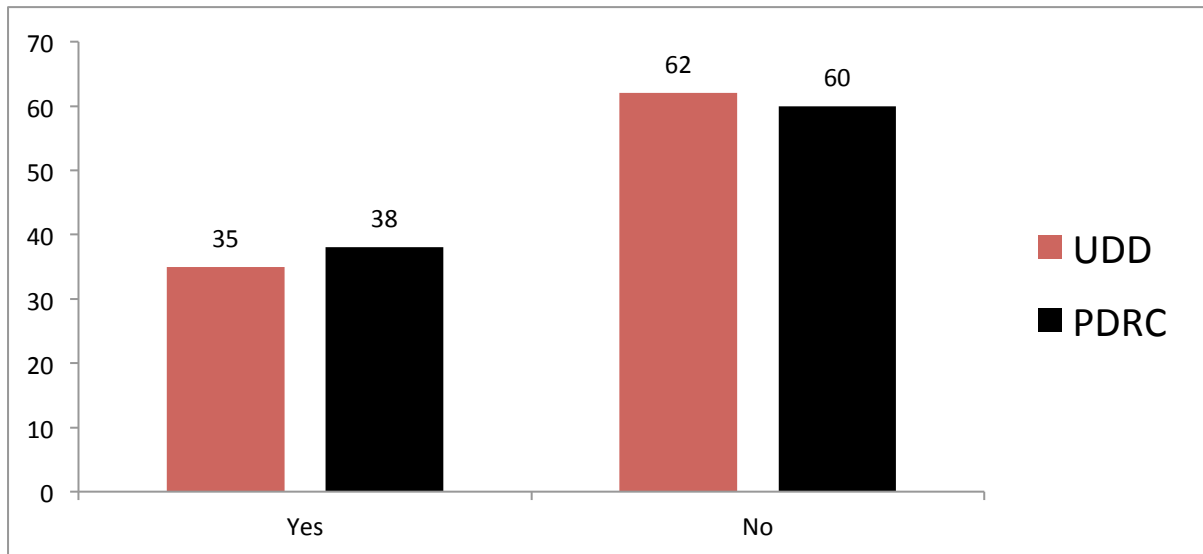
*Did you come here as an individual or with friends, or as part of an organized group from your area?*



PDRC respondents were more likely than red shirt counterparts to attend rallies alone (20% versus 9%), while red shirt respondents were significantly more likely than PDRC respondents to attend as part of a larger organized group (36% versus 13%). The majority of respondents in both groups (54% red shirt and 64% PDRC) attended rallies in the company of smaller groups of friends (as distinct from larger organized groups).

### Financial Contributions

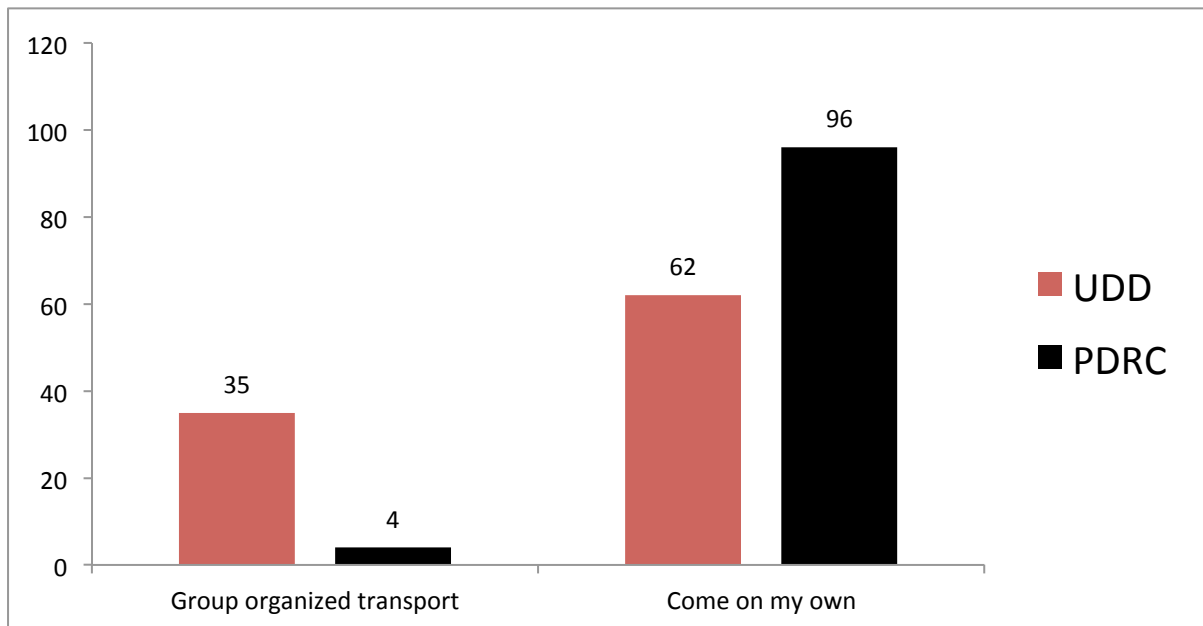
*Do you pay membership fees or dues or voluntary contributions to a common pool of funds to support the activities of the group?*



There is no significant difference between the percentages of respondent group members that do or do not contribute financial resources to support the activities of their respective groups, with the majority of both respondent groups (62% red shirt and 60% PDRC) providing no financial contributions.

### Mode of Travel to the Demonstration Sites

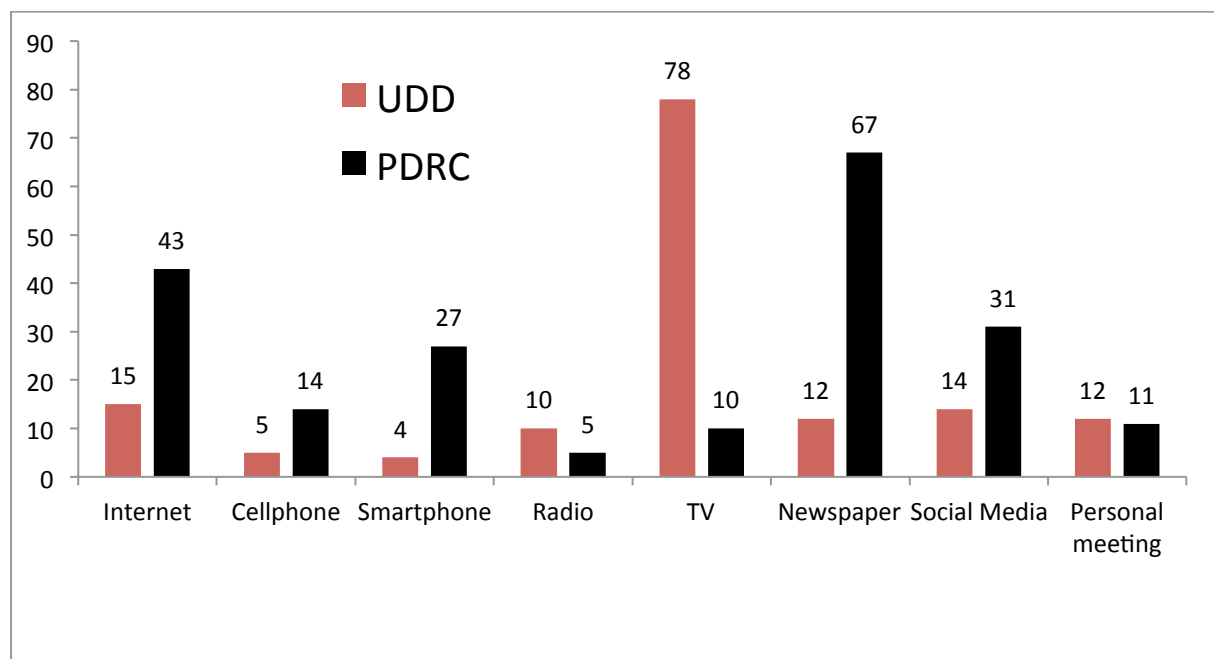
*Did the group organize transport or did you come here on your own?*



Just over one-third of red shirt respondents (35%) traveled to the stadium by organized transport (buses), while nearly all PDRC respondents (96%) arranged their own transport.

## Sources of Information on Domestic Political Events

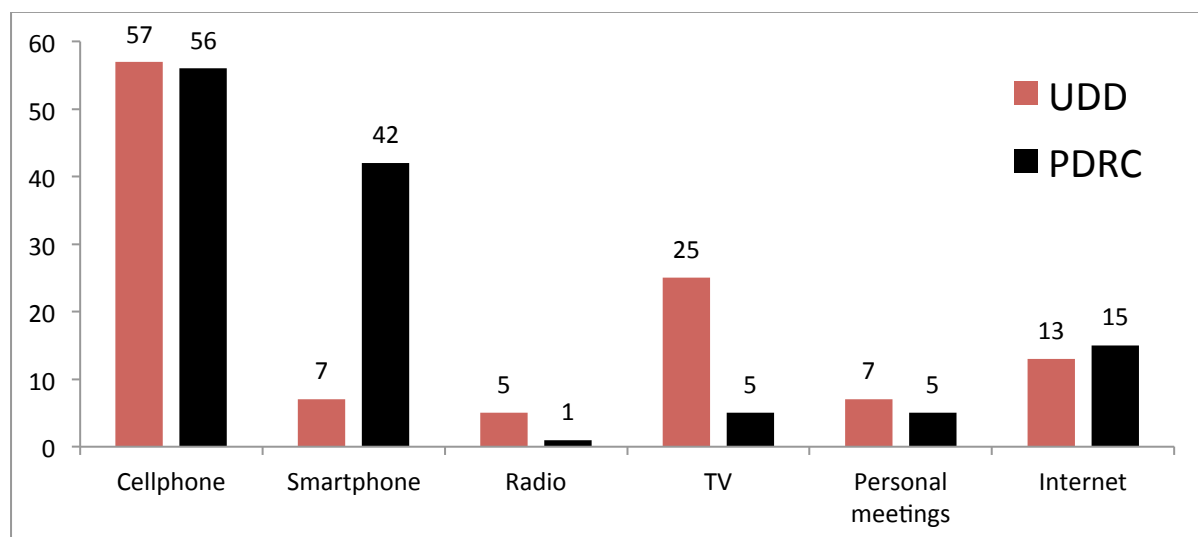
*How do you usually get information about political events in Thailand?*



PDRC respondents are much more likely than red shirt counterparts to use the internet, smart phones, or social media to learn about events in Thailand, while red shirts rely primarily on television and to a lesser extent on radio. PDRC respondents are also much more likely than red shirt respondents to receive news from newspapers. Multiple responses were allowed for this question.

## Use of Technology for Rally Organizing

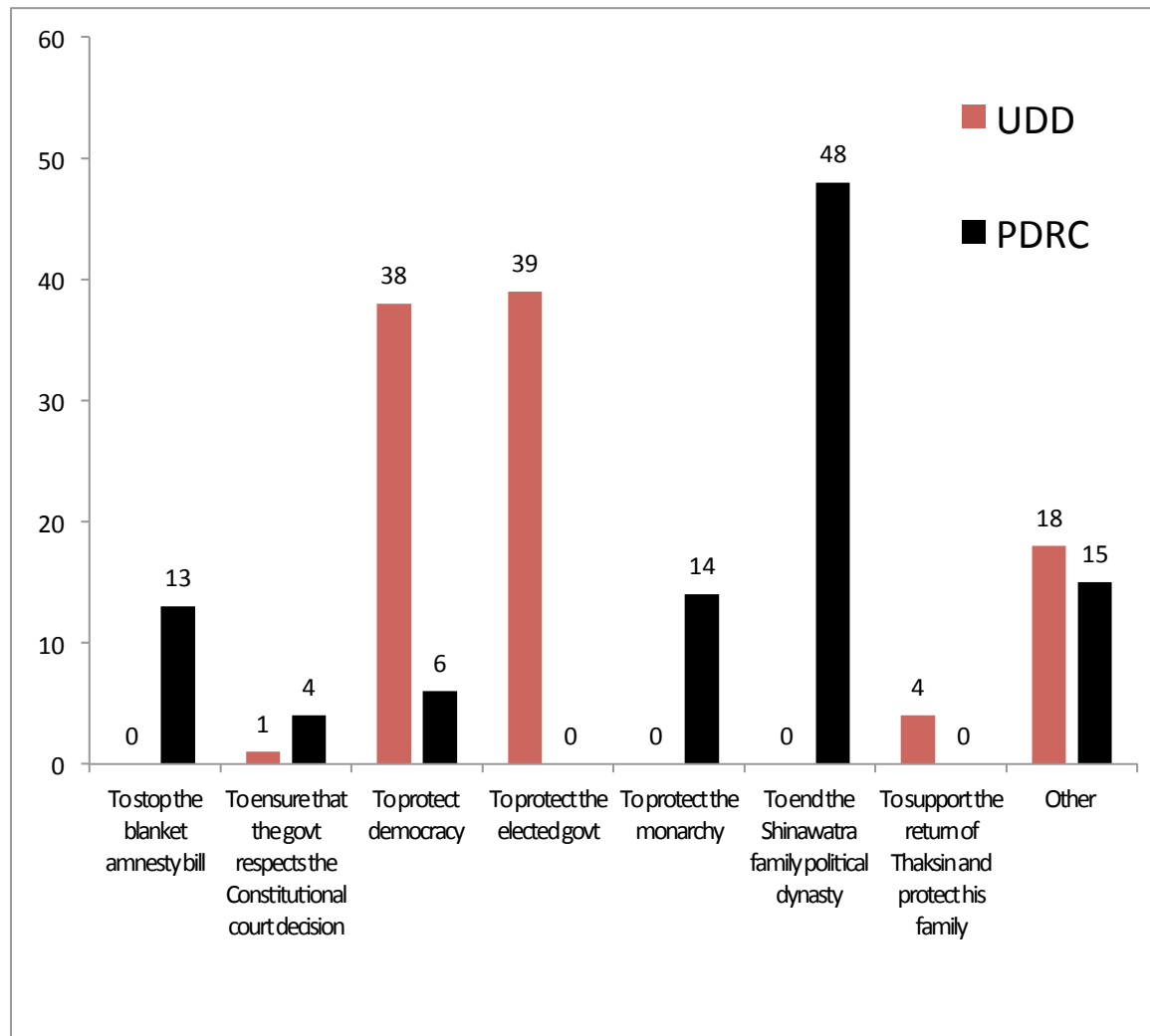
*What is the main technology for organizing rally participation?*



Both respondent groups rely on simple cell phone sets (feature phones) as the most useful tool for rally organizing. PDRC respondents make significantly greater use of smart phones (42% versus 7% red shirt). Red shirt respondents are more reliant than PDRC counterparts on television as a source of information that prompts them to mobilize (25% versus 5%).

## Motivation in Attending Political Rally

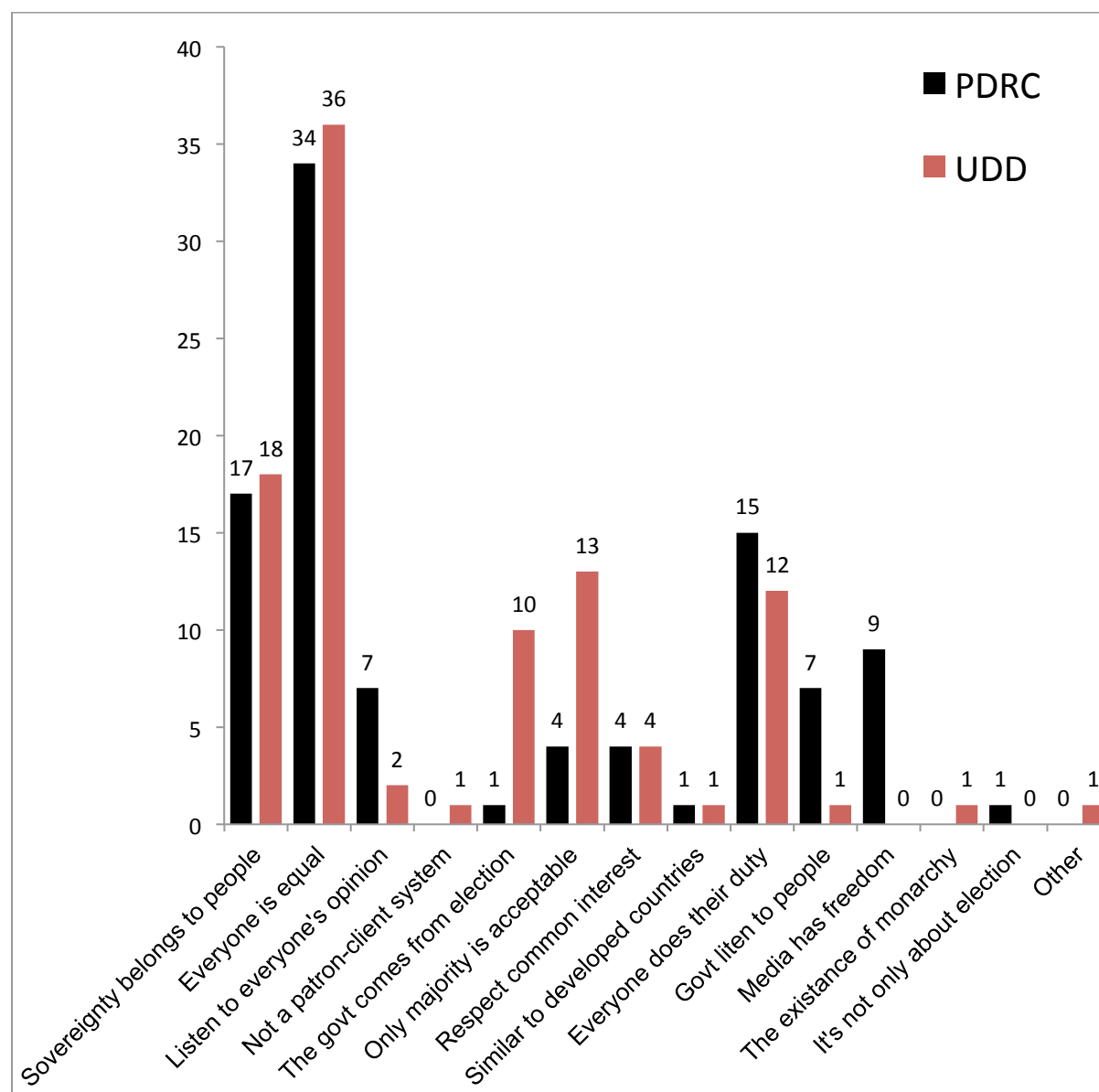
*What issue motivated you to come to the rally today?*



Members of the two respondent groups cited different motivating factors in attending their respective rally events. Almost 80% of red shirt respondents were motivated by the urge to protect the elected government (39%) and democracy (38%). Forty-eight percent of PDRC respondents were motivated by a desire to end Shinawatra family involvement in politics, with additional factors of importance to PDRC protesters cited including protecting the monarchy (14%) and stopping the blanket amnesty bill (13%). Just 4% of red shirt demonstrators indicated that they were motivated by support for Mr. Thaksin's return and the protection of his family.

## Support for Democracy

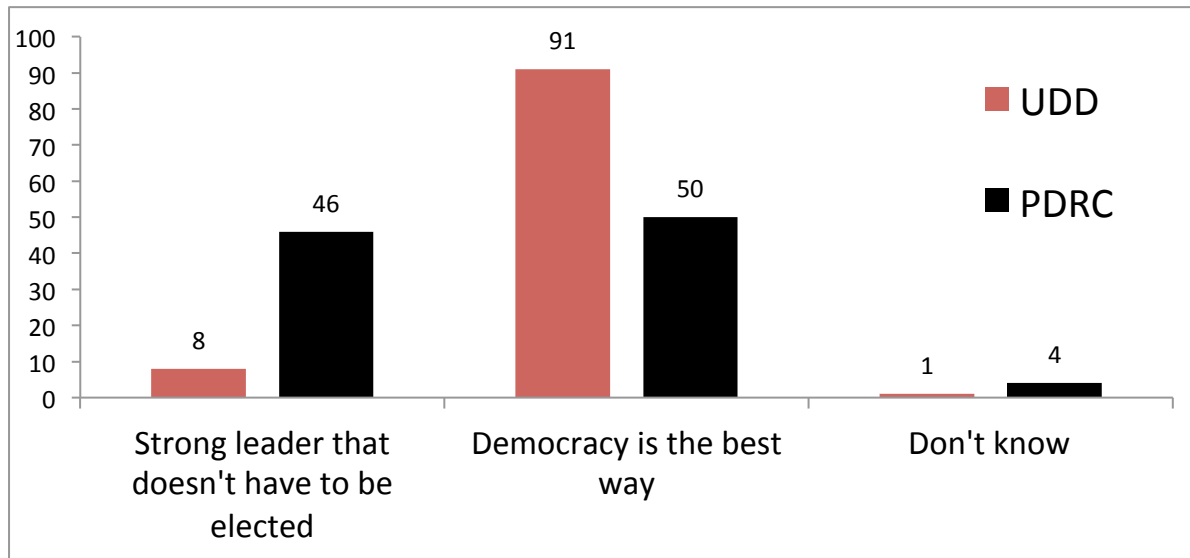
*If a country is called a democracy, what does that mean to you?*



While both respondent groups reflected similar support for sovereignty of the people and equality, commonality of understanding broke down beyond that point, with responses seemingly keyed to topical issues. For example, 23% of red shirt respondents related democracy to elections or felt that only majority rule is acceptable, while just 5% of PDRC respondents support this view. Conversely, 14% of PDRC respondents felt that democracy means listening to everyone's opinion or that government listens to the people, while only 3% of red shirt respondents concur.

## Support for Democracy - II

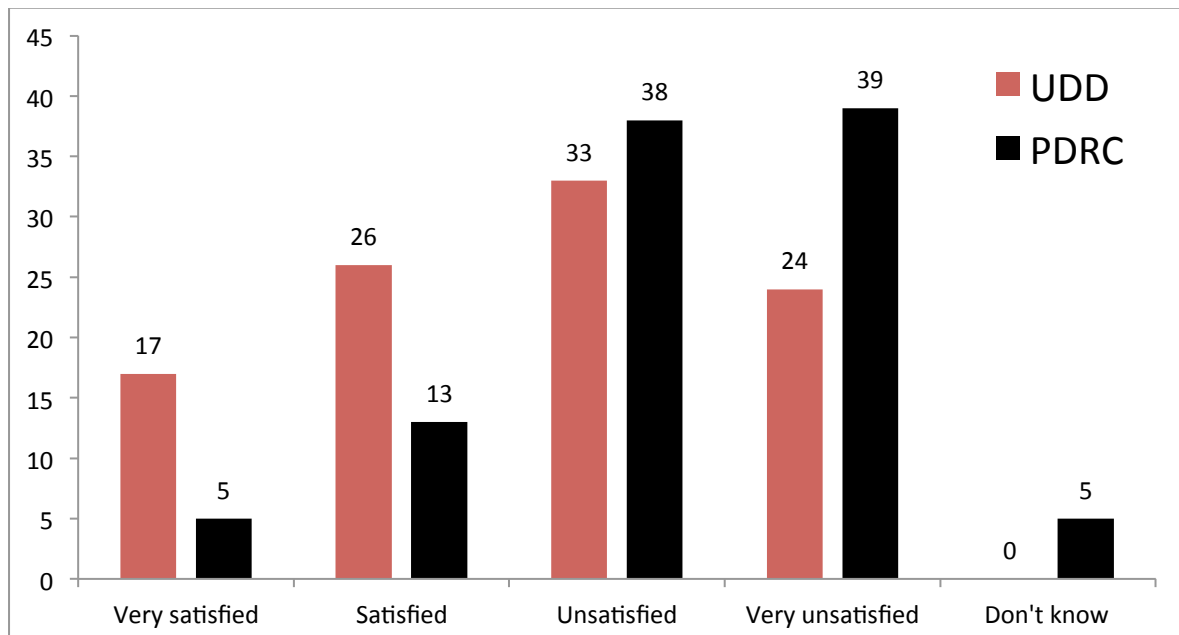
*On some occasions, democracy doesn't work. When that happens there are people that say we need a strong leader who doesn't have to be elected through voting. Others say that even if things don't function, democracy is always the best. What do you think?*



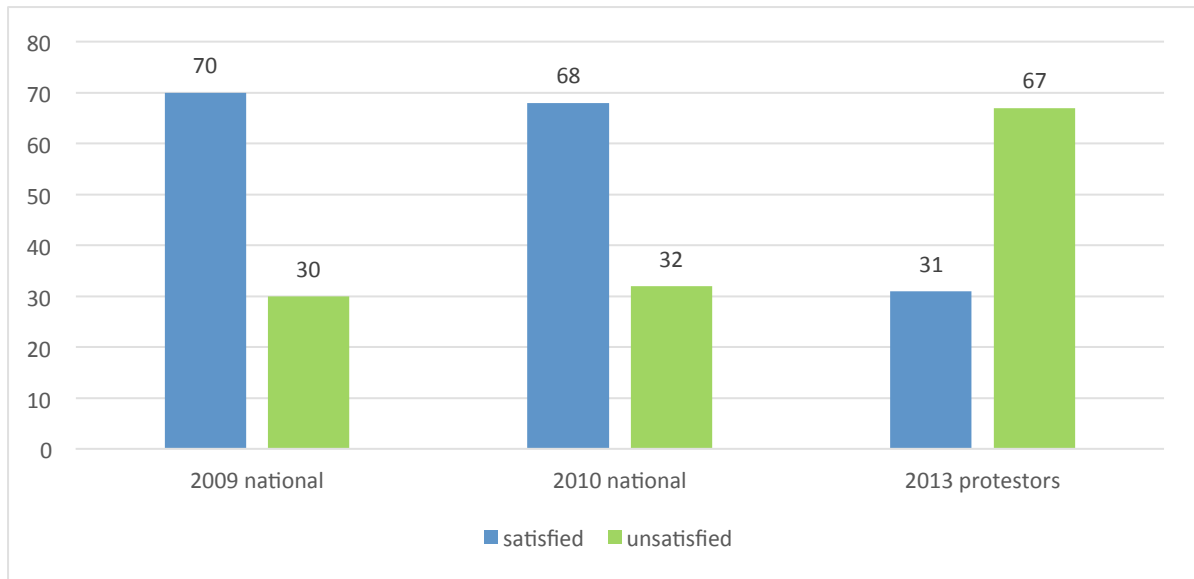
Support for democracy is exceptionally strong (91%) among red shirt respondents, while PDRC respondents are divided, with half (50%) believing democracy is always best and 46% preferring a political leader that need not be elected.

## Satisfaction with Democracy in Thailand

*In general, would you say you are very satisfied, satisfied, unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the way democracy works in Thailand?*



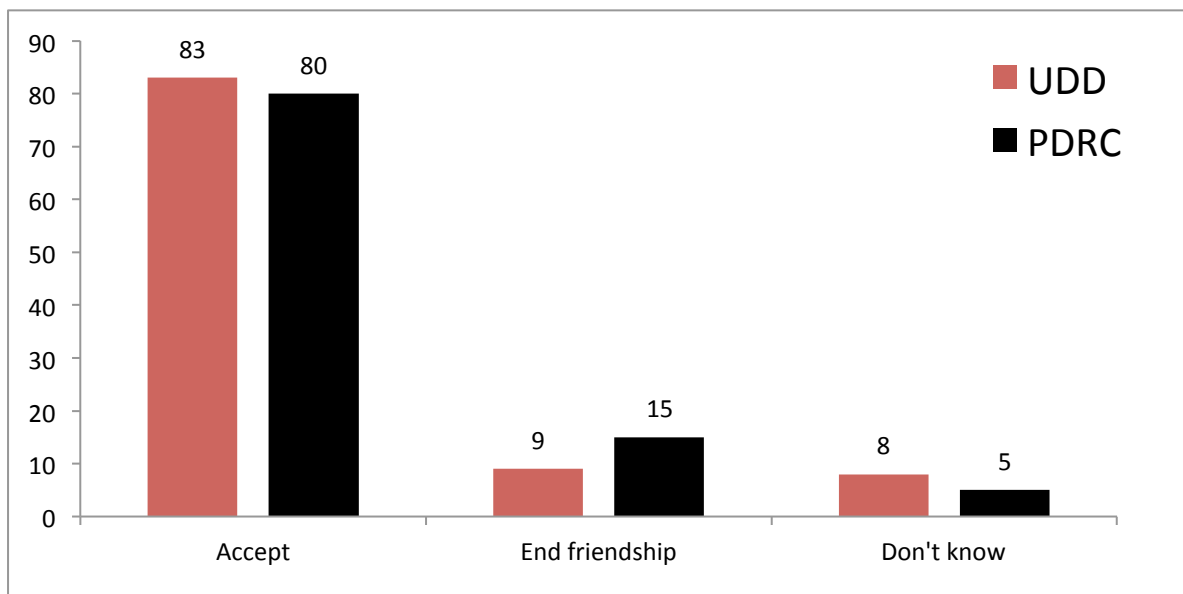
Although red shirt respondents are more satisfied with democracy in Thailand than their PDRC counterparts (43% red shirts versus 18% PDRC), majorities of both groups (57% and 77%, respectively) remain unsatisfied.



Comparing overall satisfaction with democracy among both respondent groups with the national responses reported in perception surveys conducted by The Asia Foundation in 2009 and 2010, the results reflect a near mirror image reversal. For a more detailed comparison of the political extremes represented by protest groups surveyed and the general public views reported in 2010, see the Foundation's 2010 survey, *Exploring National Consensus and Color Polarization*, <http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/855>.

### Political Tolerance

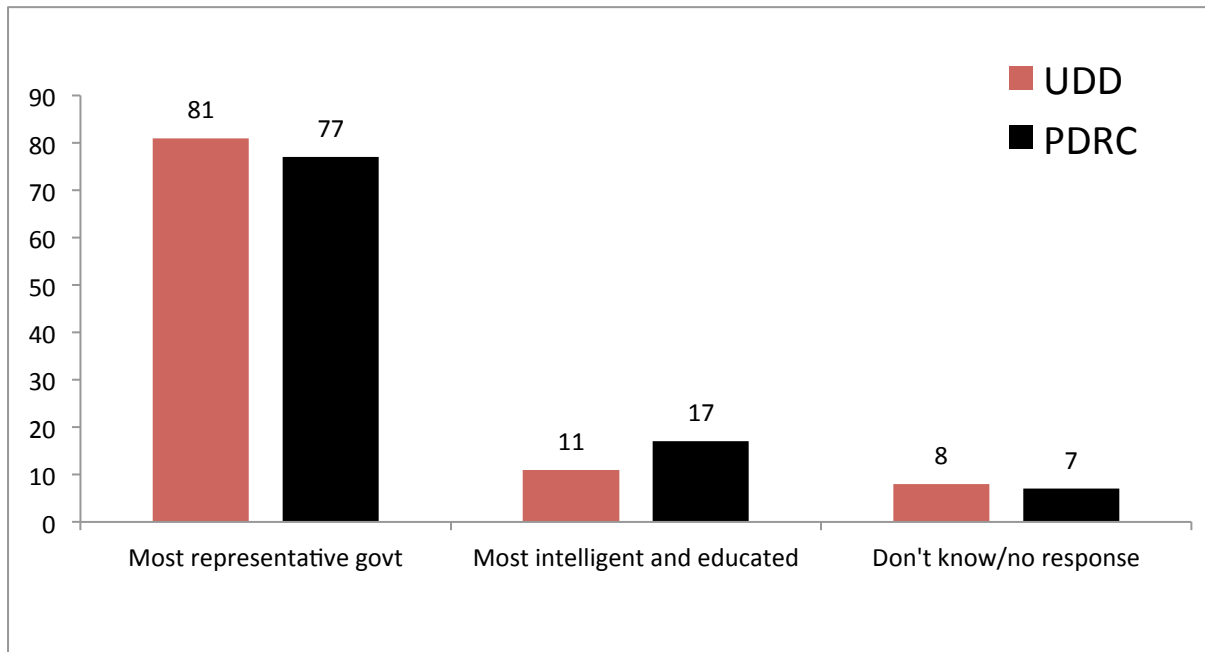
Suppose a friend of yours supported a color movement (red or yellow) that most people did not like. Would you accept that, or would it end your friendship?



There is no significant difference in levels of personal political tolerance expressed by either group. Compared to acceptance among the general public, which was 93% in 2009, the protestors are just ten percent less likely to accept political differences in friends, which is striking given the intensity of the political conflict. It may be noted Thailand has the highest level of political tolerance of any country surveyed by the Foundation in Southeast Asia.

## Optimal Composition of Democratic Government

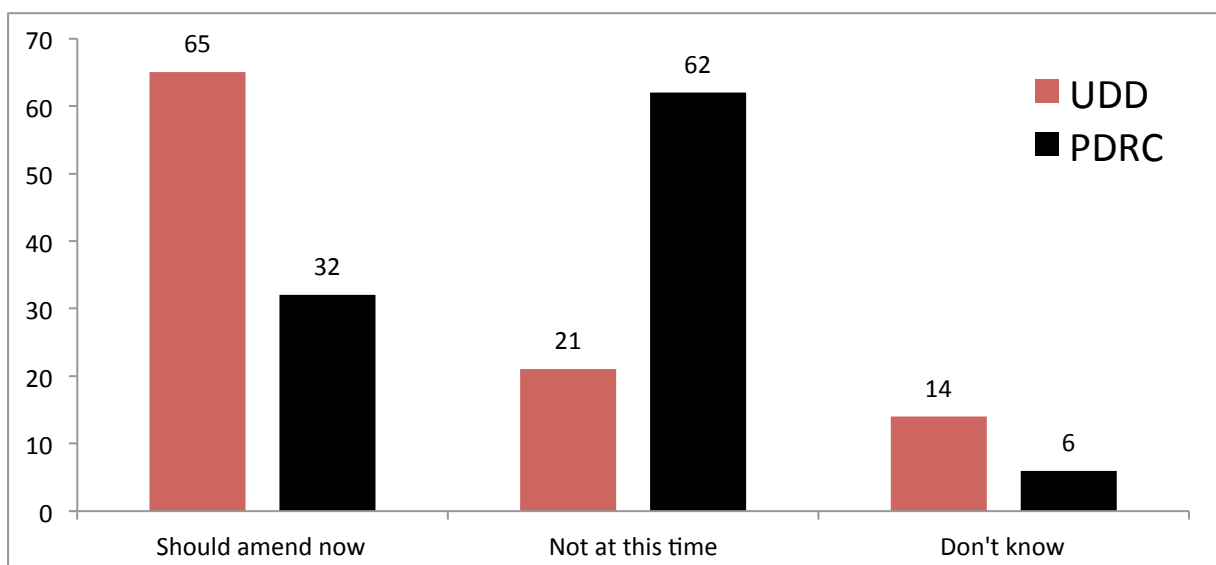
*Here are two ways of thinking about democratic government: the best government will include representatives from all areas of the country and levels of society; the best government will be provided by the most intelligent and best educated. Which is closer to your view?*



The majority of respondents in both groups (81% red shirts versus 77% PDRC) believe that the best government will include broad geographic and societal representation.

## Constitutional Reform

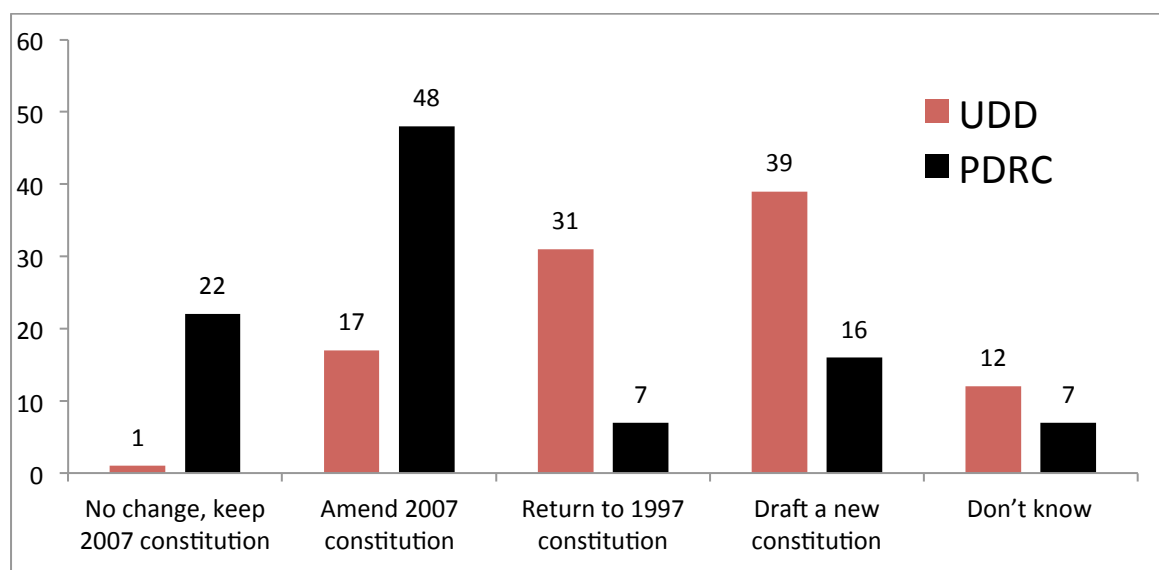
*Should the Constitution be amended?*



While approximately one-third of PDRC respondents (32%) and two-thirds of red shirts (65%) see constitutional amendment as a viable way forward, many on both sides remain unconvinced.



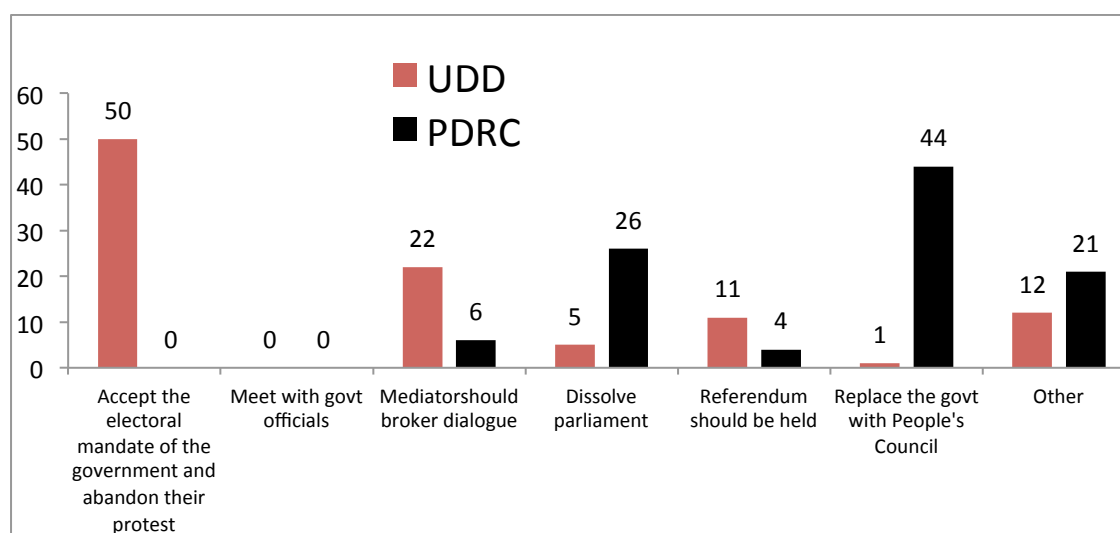
*Which of these options would you prefer for possible changes to the Constitution?*



Seventy-nine percent of respondents support some form of constitutional change (amendment, return to the 1997 Constitution, or drafting a new charter). Seventy percent of red shirt respondents would like to draft a new constitution or return to the 1997 Constitution. In contrast, PDRC respondents support the 2007 Constitution, with 70% disposed to either amend it or leave it as is.

### **Measures to End the Political Tensions**

*What actions are likely to end the political tensions?*



There is no consensus and very little overlap between the two respondent groups in their respective views of the actions to be taken to resolve political tensions. Fifty percent of red shirt respondents feel that anti-government protesters should accept the electoral mandate of the present government and abandon their protest. In contrast, 44% of PDRC respondents believe that the elected government should be replaced with a non-elected “People’s Council.”

## **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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