

Conflicts in Thailand during 2013-14: An Analysis of Conflict News in Mass Media

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Thailand's current conflicts have strikingly increased political, social, and economic instability, reduced legitimacy of governance, and undermined the rule of law. The purpose of this research was to examine types of conflicts in 6 social situations in Thailand during 2013-14. A sample of 1,200 conflict news reports from 3 daily newspapers, 2 weekly newspapers, and 3 television news channels were analyzed using content analysis and discourse analysis. The findings revealed that the conflict news reported from the deep southern regions of Thailand showed more violent behaviors than the other five conflict situations- the political conflict, the economic conflict, the environmental conflict, the public policy, and the violence against children and adolescents. All conflict news showed higher proportion of structural conflicts rather than other types of conflict. Moreover, conflict news during the 3 political periods showed differences based on writer's biased opinion and personal ideology.

Keywords: news analysis, conflicts in Thailand

Conflict in Thailand has been reported since many decades. The political conflict in Thailand have been recorded as elite conflicts that have brought about numerous changes in the socio-political arena such as the first revolution for democracy in the government in 1932 (Kasetsiri, 2000); then the ideology conflict between government and the Thai communist party between 1949-1982 (Fearon & Laitin, 2005); and the conflict between the authoritarian government and the citizen in 1973-1992 (Zimmerman, 1974). However, none of these political uprisings were as violent and prolonged as the conflict between the anti-government and the pro-government protesters, termed as the “yellow shirts” and the “red shirts” respectively, which began in 2005 (Uwanno, 2010).

Conflict was defined as a situation in which actors use conflict behavior against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or express their hostility (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). Various frameworks have been used to explain the dynamics of conflict situation in Thailand (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2011; Sandole, Byrne, Sandole-staroste, & Senehi, 2009). The social psychology's realistic group theory explained intergroup conflict rose from conflicting goals and competition over limited resources (Jackson, 1993). The intergroup conflict paradigm predominantly focuses on human social interactions in triggering conflicts which involve mixed-motives; but overtime, shift toward zero sum struggles (Hangvongse, 2013). This paradigm also examines the prejudice and discrimination toward the outgroup that accompany the intergroup hostility (Bobo, 1983). A human needs theory

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has been served as a framework to analyze the root causes of conflict “the pursuit of individual needs in the reason behind the formation of identity group in search of dignity and security” (Burton, 1990; Jeong, 2008). With a different emphasis, the notions of interests and power struggles are the most popular concepts used to illustrate Thailand’s conflicts. This viewpoint described the situation from a political perspective, which examines the realism of domination and control between the rich and the poor (Gilpin, 1984). This system theory serves as a superordinate framework for all approaches mentioned above. This framework views the conflict as a complex adaptive system that is governed by principles of self-organization. In other words, the system theory views conflict in Thailand as a complex system that can shift the focus from individual actors in the conflict towards broader recurring patterns of behavior (Hangvongse, 2013; Stones & Tangsupvattana, 2012).

A review of conflicts during 2007-2013 was conducted by selecting research studies from Thai- Lis electronic database. After a content analysis of 70 studies, the findings showed that 70 percent of research objectives of these studies were to explore the conflict situation and explain their causes. The results showed that conflict situations were classified as a family conflict (Thammachad, 2006), organizational conflict (Singto, 2007), community conflict (Sripradu, 2008), and school conflict (Wisetsri, 2011). In addition it also showed that the causes of the family conflicts was mainly a difference of opinions among family members (Sompobkolwet, 2010). The causes of organizational conflict were fighting for resources (Chuenjai, 2007), value differences (Wangrattanakul, 2012, unclear communication (Phiman, 2010), unethical practices in organization (Junpen, 2012). The cause of community conflict was mainly fighting for resources in community (Rattanapubun, 2007). Lastly the causes of the school conflict were school environment (Suthieat, 2008), senior students provoking (Singtrongpon, 2009). The review of studies showed one study about the impact of political conflict in the northern province Thailand (Khomdee, 2010).

Therefore, an analysis of mass media news content was one way to study conflict during the time it happened. The mass media news means “A news item or news report.....a text or discourse on radio, on TV or newspaper, in which new information is given about recent events” (Dijk, 1988, p. 4). A study of news can be about its structure, its production, its comprehension. The main objective of this research was to examine conflicts that happened in Thailand during 2013-14 in the news representation using news from different political periods, various news institution and genres, its contents construction by writers.

Methodology

Definition of terms

The Conflict is a situation in which actors used conflict behavior against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). In this study we examined 6 conflicts situations comprising of political conflict, economic conflict, environmental conflict, deep southern of Thailand conflict, as well as violence against children and adolescents. Period of political situations was defined as the governmental status before the parliament dissolved (from September 1, 2013 to December 8, 2013), after the

parliament dissolved (from December 10, 2013 to May 22, 2014), and after the military coup (from May 23, 2014 to September 30, 2014).

Types of conflicts selected to be studied were structural conflict, interest conflict, public policy conflict, cultural conflict. The structural conflicts are caused by forces external to the people in dispute. Limited physical resources or authority, geographic constraints (distance or proximity), time (too little or too much), organizational changes, and so forth can make structural conflict seem like a crisis. The interest conflicts are caused by competition over perceived incompatible needs. Conflicts of interest result when one or more of the parties believe that in order to satisfy his or her needs, the needs and interests of an opponent must be sacrificed. The environmental and public policy conflicts frequently begin over disagreements about the access to, use and control of public lands and resources, protection of species, and how to maintain a safe environment. Conflicts can arise if individuals or groups are not involved in decisions that affect them, or if resources are distributed inequitably. The cultural conflict is a conflict caused by differences in cultural values and beliefs that place people at odds with one another (Turner, 2005).

News discourse analysis was an analysis of language use in conflict news by writers during the period of political conflict.

Sample

The newspaper samples selected were reports about conflict news taken from headline news, columnist news from 3 famous daily newspapers representing different political practices (red, yellow, neutral political beliefs). In addition 2 weekly newspapers were selected. Television program samples were selected that addressed conflict issues and debates from 2 free TV channels representing people channel and commercial TV channel. Web Blog samples were selected from the top 5 visited and read Web Blogs. The time frame of conflict situations was the period during September 2013 to September 2014.

Data collection and instruments

Data was collected during October 2014 - December 2014. Instruments used were 4 pages of recording form for collecting data such as type of media, type of writer/moderator, type of conflict situation, and conflict behavior.

Data collection was done by 20 graduate students of the Behavioral Science Research Institute, Bangkok, using training manual and feedback from practices. Data Analysis was performed using SPSS and Excel software.

Data coding

The conflict news content was coded using type of news media, conflict situations, type of conflict, periods of political situation, conflict behavior, writer name use, and writer opinion.

Results

Findings were presented according to the 3 research questions, 1) what is the type of conflict that appeared in the conflict news?, 2) what was the conflict behavior that showed up in the conflict news?, and 3) how was the news construction influenced by the writers?

Each of the research questions is discussed in the findings.

1. What is the type of conflicts that appeared in the conflict news?

The types of conflicts were classified to structural, interest, public policy, culture, and others. During 2013-2014 when there was high political conflict in Thailand, table 1 shows that the conflict news reported was about 24.7 percent of the total sampled news. The majority of conflict news was from the Daily news.

Table 1

Frequency (percentage) of Conflict News by Type of News Media

Type of news media	Total news		Conflict news	
Daily news	3,329	(72.2)	1,026	(22.3)
Weekly news	154	(3.3)	44	(1.0)
TV programs	554	(12.1)	25	(0.5)
Web Blog	573	(12.4)	44	(1.0)
Total	4,610	(100.0)	1,139	(24.7)

Note. Data is presented in numbers (percentage).

In table 2 when the 6 conflict situations were classified by types of conflicts, it was found that there was a pattern of type of conflict in all conflict situations. The highest type of conflict was a structural conflict, secondly the interest conflict, thirdly the public policy conflict, lastly the cultural conflict. In addition the majority of conflict in news was from the political situation.

When the conflict situations were classified during the 3 political situations in Thailand, it showed that the highest percent of conflict news was reported during the time after the parliament dissolved. The lowest percent of conflict news was during after the military coup, as shown in table 3.

2. What was a conflict behavior that showed up in the conflict news?

The content about the conflict news was analyzed to explore 4 kinds of conflict behaviors. As being showed in table 4 and table 5, the conflict behaviors were mostly the opinion disagreement between 2 parties, and during the period of after military coup the conflict behaviors percentage was the lowest in all situations.

3. How was the news construction influenced by the writers?

The conflict news was co-constructed by its writers, their personal beliefs and ideology; their opinions were presented in the news content. Table 6 showed that in the conflict news the writers chose not to give the real name. As showed in table 7, when the writers used either hidden or openly name, the writers showed more neutral than biased opinion when writing news.

Table 2

Frequency (percentage) of News by Types and Conflict Situation

Conflict Situation	Type of conflict					Others
	Structural conflict	Interest conflict	Public Policy conflict	Cultural conflict		
Political	681 (70.8)	160 (16.6)	55 (5.7)	37 (3.8)	29 (3.0)	
Economic	136 (87.7)	14 (9.0)	4 (2.6)	1 (0.6)	0 (0.0)	
Social and cultural	141 (83.4)	10 (5.9)	6 (3.6)	6 (3.6)	6 (3.6)	
Violence against children and adolescents	37 (92.5)	2 (5.0)	1 (2.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	
Natural resources	48 (80.0)	6 (10.0)	2 (3.3)	2 (3.3)	2 (3.3)	
Deep southern	79 (90.8)	8 (9.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	

Note. Data is presented in numbers (percentage).

Table 3

Frequency (percentage) of Conflict News During 3 Periods of Political Situations

Situation	Period				Total
	Before parliament dissolved	After the parliament dissolved	After the military coup		
Political conflict	216 (31.3)	355 (51.4)	120 (17.4)	691 (100.0)	
Economic conflict	55 (40.1)	55 (40.1)	27 (19.7)	137 (100.0)	
Social and culture	23 (16.0)	71 (49.3)	50 (34.7)	144 (100.0)	
Violence against children and adolescents	8 (21.6)	20 (54.1)	9 (24.3)	37 (100.0)	
Natural resources conflict	18 (36.0)	16 (32.0)	16 (32.0)	50 (100.0)	
Deep Southern conflict	29 (36.3)	31 (38.8)	20 (25.0)	80 (100.0)	
Total	349 (30.6)	548 (48.1)	242 (21.2)	1,139 (100.0)	

Note. Data is presented in numbers (percentage).

Table 4

Frequency (percentage) of Conflict Behaviors by Conflict Situation News

Situation	Conflict behavior				Obstruct needs and demands of other parties
	Opinion disagreement	Violence/ fighting/killing	2/More than 2 parties involved		
Political	691 (35.7)	150 (7.8)	614 (31.7)	479 (24.8)	
Economic	137 (37.1)	13 (3.5)	115 (31.2)	104 (28.2)	
Social and cultural	144 (37.5)	39 (10.2)	123 (32.0)	78 (20.3)	
Violence against children and adolescents	37 (33.3)	26 (23.4)	28 (25.2)	20 (18.0)	
Natural resources	50 (35.7)	4 (2.9)	46 (32.9)	40 (28.6)	
Deep Southern	80 (29.0)	67 (24.3)	77 (27.9)	52 (18.8)	

Note. Data is presented in numbers (percentage).

Table 5

Frequency (percentage) of Conflicts News by Conflict Behaviors and 3 Periods of Political Situation

Periods of political situation	Conflict behavior				Obstruct needs and demands of other parties
	Opinion disagreement	Violence/ fighting/killing	2/More than 2 parties involved		
Before parliament dissolved	349 (36.0)	71 (7.3)	294 (30.3)	256 (26.4)	
After parliament dissolved	548 (35.7)	149 (9.7)	475 (31.0)	362 (23.6)	
After military coup	242 (33.3)	94 (12.9)	235 (32.4)	155 (21.3)	

Note. Data is presented in numbers (percentage).

Table 6

Percentage of Writers/Moderators Using Real Name in Conflict News

Writers/moderators	Frequency	Percentage
No use of name	711	62.4
Openly named	117	10.3
Hidden name	311	27.3
Total	1,139	100.0

Table 7

Frequency (percentage) of Conflict News by Writers/Moderators' Opinion and Name Use

Opinion	Name used				Total
	No name	Openly named	Hidden name		
Neutral	686 (96.5)	95 (81.2)	260 (83.6)	1,041	(91.4)
Biased	25 (3.5)	22 (18.8)	51 (16.4)	98	(8.6)
Total	711 (100.0)	117 (100.0)	311 (100.0)	1,139	(100.0)

Note. Data is presented in numbers (percentage)

Table 8 showed that during the 3 periods of political situation in Thailand, news writers showed more of a neutral opinion than a biased opinion. It was found that the percent of the biased opinion news was highest before parliament dissolved period, and then the percentage tends to decrease during the following periods.

Table 8

Frequency (percentage) of Conflict News by Period of Political Situations and Writers/Moderators' Opinions

Writers/ Moderators' opinion	Political situation period			Total
	Before parliament dissolved	After parliament dissolved	After military coup	
Neutral	304 (87.1)	507 (92.5)	230 (95.0)	1,041 (91.4)
Biased	45 (12.9)	41 (7.5)	12 (5.0)	98 (8.6)
Total	349 (100.0)	548 (100.0)	242 (100.0)	1,139 (100.0)

Table 9 shows that the writer showed his personal ideology more during the period of military coup.

Table 9

Frequency (percentage) of Conflict News by Writers/Moderators' Ideology During 3 Periods of Political Situation

Ideology present	Political situation period			Total
	Before parliament dissolved	After parliament dissolved	After military coup	
Yes	88 (25.2)	109 (19.9)	84 (37.7)	281 (24.7)
No	261 (74.8)	439 (80.1)	158 (65.3)	858 (75.3)
Total	349 (100.0)	548 (100.0)	242 (100.0)	1,139 (100.0)

Conclusion and Discussion

This study described type of conflicts, conflict behaviors, discourse in conflict, and conflict constructions in conflict news during the time of high political conflict in Thailand in 2013-2014. It was found that conflict news in political situations was the highest percentage among the 6 situations being studies. In addition the structural conflict was the mostly found type of conflict in 6 conflict situations. This similar finding was reported in the study of conflict management of political conflict in Thailand between 2004-2010, where it was found that political conflict root cause was the demands of powers and benefits (Sooksai, 2010).

The conflict behavior in news was mostly founded to be an opinion disagreement between 2 or more than 2 parties. In general, the language used in conflict news showed more neutral opinion of the writer than the biased opinion. However before the period when the parliament was dissolved, there was the highest percentage of biased opinions among the news writers. The language used for reporting political conflict news showed the highest percentage of bias. In addition, the writers showed the highest percentage of their personal ideology during after the military coup period.

The findings of this study showed how news analysis can be used to reflect the current situation of the society. In this study the news context was analyzed within the political situation in Thailand. Also the news production, the language used, the writers' beliefs and biases were analyzed within the political situation. The finding of conflict type in the conflict news was mostly structural conflict may be used for conflict prevention as it was an evidence of power structures in the society. The findings of textual structure in conflict news such as writers' opinions and personal ideology may be used for internal news production within the news institutes to monitor how the news context should be presented during conflict situation because using biased opinions may persuade coercive action between parties. The use of conditions of communicative peace may help in harmonizing political situation (Matos, 2000). A close look at the production of conflict news may by useful to prevent any minor news grievance to become a trigger event.

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