



## Violence and Extremism in Thailand: Historical Roots and Media Representation

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The escalation of terrorism on a global scale has sparked a race among states and governments to investigate the problem and determine its origins. Political unrest has frequently led to the onslaught of terrorism in all countries. It is not restricted to a particular belief system, way of life, or identity. Extremism, which exists in practically all communities, has given rise to terrorism as a global problem, and Thailand was no exception.

### Thailand Throughout History

Thailand was named after its inhabiting Thai People (or Tai). It was previously known as "Siam", then changed to "Thai" in 1949 with the addition of "Land" (i.e., territory or region), and is now known as the Kingdom of Thailand, with Bangkok as its capital .

Islam was introduced to Thailand early in history among other southeast Asian nations. It was Muslim Arab and Persian merchants who introduced Islam to now-existing Muslim areas in the region since the 4th century AH (10th century CE).

Thailand's southernmost region is part of the Malay Archipelago, which includes Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, Singapore, and Pattani. The states of Thailand's far south and its provinces, where Muslims account for approximately 80% of the population, are strategically located; they connect the Malay Peninsula to the Indochina Peninsula. The majority of Muslims in the region are descended from ethnic Malays, who speak the Malay (Javai) language, which is written in Arabic letters and contains many Arabic words. After the Kingdom of Thailand annexed this southern region, most subsequent generations began to speak (Thai) as the official and government language in addition to their mother tongue (Javanese).

## Multi-Ethnic Thailand

Thailand's dominant religion, Buddhism, is practised by 95% of the population. Muslims come in second, with only 4% or, according to some estimates, 12%. Consequently, Muslims constitute a minority in Thailand. Given that Thailand was previously a Muslim country under Muslim rule, the southern states are predominantly Muslim. According to 2004 statistics, Muslims used to account for nearly 80% of the population.

This historical fact demonstrates that the Muslim population problem in the southern Thai states is not a recent issue, but rather has a long history. The Thai government's occupation of the Islamic state of Pattani ignited it, and since then Muslims have not settled down since they see their nation's past as the primary foundation for their independence. The Pattani people are convinced that Bangkok's leaders have failed to adequately address their issue, let alone find satisfactory solutions to it. This conviction stems from their rage over their worsening economic situation as well as their fear of losing their civilizational heritage and culture in a Buddhist society.

## Conflict in the South

It was claimed that the southern regions of Thailand have a majority-Muslim population and that «Malay» is their mother tongue and only language. These people are said to adhere firmly to the principles of the true Islamic religion, which distinguishes these regions from the rest of Thailand in terms of language, culture, and religion. The majority of the locals are of Thai and Malaysian descent, and they have strong ethnic and religious ties to Malaysian regions. Despite this, the locals have little economic influence in their communities, and most of them are engaged in farming, fishing, or the collection of rubber.

The region was formerly known as the Pattani Kingdom, and it was ruled by a Muslim sultan. In 1909, the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Siam signed the Treaty of Bangkok, which established the modern border between Malaysia and Thailand. The provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, and Songkhla Satun remained under Siamese rule. Thailand renounced its claim to sovereignty over the states of Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Terengganu, which later became part of Malaysia. Since then, movements demanding secession and independence from the Thai Kingdom have emerged.

The conflict arose again in January 2004 when armed members of Ratchanakarin military base in Narathiwat were described as terrorists, a description repudiated by the Thai government. Some base guards were killed and 400 weapons were stolen.

Extra violent incidents ensued, most prominently:

- On January 6, 2004, clashes broke out between southern Thai Muslims and Thai troops on multiple occasions throughout the state of Pattani leading to the deaths of many members of the Thai forces. As a result, the government imposed a curfew and martial law on «Pattani» and mobilized the armed forces. Many communities and religious institutions were besieged and searched. Due to the development of dread and anxiety, the implementation of martial law and military regulations in the southern Thai states caused disruptions in social and economic life as well as restrictions on those working in institutions for advocacy, charitable organisations, and education.
- On March 23, 2004, a bombing occurred close to the Thai government's convention centre in Narathiwat. Somchai Neelaphaijit (Abu Bakr), the president of the Muslim Attorney Council (MAC) in Pattani, was killed two days later. The Centre for Human Rights and regional newspapers reacted with a torrent of venom, putting the Thai government in a precarious position.
- Around 128 people were killed on April 28, 2004, when Thai military attacked worshippers at the Krue Se Mosque in Pattani.
- On October 25, 2004, Muslims protested in front of Tak Bai Police Station in Narathiwat to demand the release of six detainees charged with involvement in terrorist attacks. When police officers and members of the armed forces confronted the protesters, some 1300 of them were detained and transported in appalling conditions to the Pattani military base, where 78 people died from suffocation.
- 2005 5 :huge bombings .
- 2006 8 :bombings.
- 2011 24 :bombings in Yala where many Muslims and Buddhists were killed .
- January 2004 – October 2021: 21235 Security incidents in the far south where 7295 were killed and 13550 were injured.

In addition to the sometimes gruesome manner of killing such as lynching and burning alive, some murders occur at random, without distinguishing between Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslims in southern Thailand are no longer confident in themselves as

a result of these frequent horrifying occurrences; explosions can happen anywhere and at any time, including in markets, schools, streets, and even mosques, and people are now living in fear and dread.

## Media Representation

Thailand's media fell into the clutches of the globalization of media under American hegemony. In addressing the issue of terrorism, the media generally follows the lead of the Western media, particularly the American, French, and German media, in addition to the Eastern media, which also emulate the Western media in terms of news sources, information and analysis, media reading, and psychological and social interpretation of facts.

Thai media's portrayal of terrorism issues is nothing more than an imitation of the Western media's voice, which they forced on the majority of media outlets worldwide. In the way they handle and interpret terrorist events and data, they are slaves to Western philosophy and society, and their approach to the horrifying reality of terrorism is far from neutral. They provide straightforward, limited interpretations, making rash allegations without solid justification and with little regard for the collective intelligence of the people.

A closer look at the materials published in the Thai media related to terrorism reveals that they are characterized by the following:

1. Media follow-ups of terrorist operations are mostly informative, hasty, and sometimes superficial.
2. Poor media follow-ups, mostly analytical and interpretative, as well as a lack of survey follow-ups, confining media representation to a superficial level.
3. Paying more attention to terrorist incidents than the causes and motives of terrorism .
4. Never engaging experts and professionals to address aspects of terrorism, and poor cooperation with pedagogical and social institutes fighting terrorism.
5. Falling into either of two traps: understatement or exaggeration of terrorism. This adversely affects the authenticity, access, and influence of the media.

6. Addressing terrorism as an independent phenomenon without necessarily associating it with extremism and violence .
7. Failure to adhere to media sciences' principles and theories, as well as careless usage of effective persuasive introductions The majority of media content is impromptu and unplanned, which disrespects the intelligence of the audience.

## Thailand and Counter-Terrorism

The US annual report on terrorism for 2020 states that the main weakness of Thailand is that it provides easy access to terrorism. However, Thailand never witnessed any cross-border terrorist attacks that year. It only faced violent separatist attacks in the far south of Thailand. Thai authorities confirmed that there is no evident link between local insurgents and international networks.

The Thai government continues to focus on and prioritize the challenges posed by local policies. It is an active actor in the global fight against terrorism, supporting counter-terrorist efforts by joining a number of regional and multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM).

Thailand adopts a counterterrorism plan that was released in 2017. Plans for regional security and counterterrorism are included in the national security strategy (2019–2022), which was issued in November 2019. The government started programmes and dialogue projects to combat violence, including:

### 1 .New Hope

This project began in the early 1990s and is still active in the Islamic community today. Its goals include establishing security and peace in Thailand's southern regions, eliminating all forms of intolerance and conflict between Muslims and Buddhists.

However, the project has some flaws, such as failing to account for religious, cultural, and social differences among Thai people. This sowed discord between Muslims and Buddhists, because Muslims refuse to engage in social and religious activities that combine Islamic and Buddhist provisions in all aspects of life. As a result, the project failed in the Muslim communities of the south.

## 2 .Sriwijaya:

The project, which began in 1993, was structured on three pillars: liberty, goodwill, and equality. It promises social and economic development for future welfare and security in southern states, where Muslims and Buddhists will be treated equally. Despite those assurances, learned Muslims recognize the project's danger. They believe it is intended to instill Buddhist culture among Muslim communities while undermining Islamic morals.

## 3 .National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) :

It includes members of different backgrounds and perspectives, including prominent Muslim figures, such as the secretary general of the Central Islamic Council of Thailand (CICOT), presidents of the Islamic Councils in the three Thai states, President of Yala Islamic University, president of the Young Muslim Association of Thailand (YMAT), and some Muslim experts, physicians, and politicians.

NRC studies facts and existing circumstances from different perspectives and lays suitable plans, to recover the mutual understanding between all segments of Thailand and maintain security, especially in the three southern states. In March 2006, NRC concluded in three reports that it is necessary to avoid violence at all costs when addressing problems, utilizing proper strategies while taking into consideration the cultural and social variances between people, and making the Malay language a second language in all three states.