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Intellectual Discourse

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AL-KAWAKIBI, Abdul Rahman. *The Nature of Tyranny and The Devastating Results of Oppression*. Foreword by Leon T. Goldsmith. Translated by Amer Chaikhouni. London: Hurst, 2021, 152 pp. Hardback.
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Confirmation Bias among Adherents of Red and Yellow Politics in Thailand

Norachit Jirasatthumb*

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Atchara Sorasing***

Abstract: Disagreements between Thai partisans have manifested in the competition between red and yellow shirts. This study aims to explore bias of each partisan by employing the concept of confirmation bias. Experimental treatments were divided according to how participants were exposed to an information: (1) exposure to positive information about red politics, (2) exposure to negative information about red politics, (4) exposure to positive information about yellow politics, and (4) exposure to negative information about yellow politics. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was employed to identify the participants' original political ideology and verify whether their original beliefs changed or preserved after exposure to the experimental information. The results revealed that there existed persistence of political traits but not for all participants. There was also a decrease of political convictions after some treatments.

Keywords: confirmation bias, red shirts, Thai politics, yellow shirts

Abstrak: Perselisihan faham bersifat partisan dalam politik Thailand dapat dilihat dalam persaingan antara kumpulan baju merah dan kuning. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka kecenderungan setiap partisan dengan menggunakan konsep pengesahan kecenderungan (confirmation bias). Pelaksanaan kajian

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ini dibahagikan mengikut bagaimana peserta didedahkan kepada sesuatu maklumat: (1) pendedahan kepada maklumat positif tentang politik merah, (2) pendedahan kepada maklumat negatif tentang politik merah, (3) pendedahan kepada maklumat positif tentang politik kuning, dan (4) pendedahan kepada maklumat negatif tentang politik kuning. Analisis Komponen Utama (Principal Component Analysis: PCA) digunakan untuk mengenal pasti ideologi politik asal peserta dan mengesahkan sama ada kepercayaan asal mereka berubah atau kekal selepas pendedahan kepada maklumat kajian. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa terdapat ciri-ciri politik yang berkekalan tetapi bukan untuk semua peserta. Terdapat juga penurunan keyakinan politik selepas beberapa pendedahan kepada maklumat kajian .

Kata Kunci: pengesahan kecenderungan, baju merah, politik Thai, baju kuning

Introduction

Political bias is deeply rooted in Thai society. This bias has manifested in prolonged political unrest emanating from competition between two political opposition groups – red shirts and yellow shirts. Each group demands completely different political outcomes. Red shirts call for a real democratic system in which their votes give them an effective voice. In contrast, yellow shirts prefer military rule, mobilising in frequent *coup d'état* to stabilise the political order. In the face of these irreconcilable beliefs, this study focuses on exploring confirmation bias among these opposing parties in their political attitudes.

The conflict between red and yellow politics evolved around Thaksin Shinawatar, a wealthy businessman who was the 23rd prime minister of Thailand. His administration resonated two very opposite reactions. On the one hand, he was so much admired by rural masses from his policies targeting redistributive measures. On the other hand, there were people considering that Thaksin's government was corrupt. Thaksin's policies were nothing but a populist agenda using government budget to serve his personal aim and cronyist network in consolidating their political power and accumulating a greater wealth (McCargo & Patthamanand, 2005). These people who shared hatred towards Thaksin formed a movement called People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) or known as yellow shirts. They wore yellow shirts to show their reverence to the King and constantly accused Thaksin of disrespect to the throne. A breaking point

came at the sale of Thaksin's own company (Shin Corp) to Temasek (the Singaporean government's investment) with tax exemption in January 2006. This event sparked public outcry. The PAD rallied a huge street demonstration demanding the removal of Thaksin government and the King to appoint his own prime minister. The protest was followed by a military coup in September 2006. Thaksin was ousted from premiership and still in exile. The overthrow of elected government aroused the movement of United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) or known as red shirts. The UDD contended that all unelected governments subsequent to the coup were illegitimate and demanded a political reform to diminish the power outside the realm of democratic constitution. The antagonism between red and yellow shirts set out a momentum of political upheaval whereby the country witnessed a series of bloody street politics and government's siege of protestors.¹

Red and yellow shirts espouse different political worldviews. Red shirts comprise rural people who benefitted from Thaksin's populist policies (e.g., the Village Fund Program and 30-baht medical treatments) (Charoenmuang, 2016) and expand urban-based people from different professions (students, government officials, workers, etc.) (Satitniramai, 2010). Generally, red shirts opposed the coup, and defined themselves against conservative forces (high-level government officials, military, and royalist elites). They considered that these conservative elites underpinned a hierarchical system of social classes and undemocratic means that justified an injustice and oppression (Winichakul, 2008). On the other hand, yellow shirts were composed of conservative-royalist elites (Connors & Hewison, 2008). They perceived the Thaksin Government representing a capitalist state power with an attempt to establish a democratic authoritarianism (Tejapira, 2006). Therefore, they were discontented with Thaksin regime and those who rooted for Thaksin and his successions. These elites dismissed Thaksin because his grassroots populist policies and CEO-type administrative style undermined their political legitimization (Pye & Schaffar, 2008). It should come as no surprise that yellow shirts' political stance was to restore a

1 The country experienced several major protests, for example, the PAD invading and shutting down main airports (November and December 2008), the bloody protest of Red Shirts to force a new election (March-May 2010), and protests against a proposed amnesty bill that could return Thaksin to Thailand of Yingluck government (Thaksin's sister) (October 2013 – May 2014).

political order rather than transforming the social structure in favour of unprivileged classes.

Studies have verified that this political polarisation between the two groups stems from factors including their disagreement over the return of Thaksin to a political role (Manachotphong, 2014; Sukamongkol, 2014; Siha, 2017), different democratic perceptions (Keawklieng, 2017), and divergence on the legitimate method for selecting a national leader (Chaisukosol, 2012). These studies are useful in grounding the characteristics that define red and yellow politics but have not yet evaluated the level of adherence of both partisans, which could increase, or decrease under a particular situation. This specific inquiry needs to test confirmation bias within the political attitudes of each party.

Therefore, this study extends the frontier of research on Thai politics by introducing a behavioural economic approach for the experimental evaluation of political bias among both red and yellow shirts. The main objective is to verify political bias among red and yellow shirts by using an intervention. In this intervention, participants were presented with political information and subsequently evaluated on whether they react to such information by confirming more or disconfirming their pre-existing beliefs.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of confirmation bias serves as the main framework here. This behavioural economic concept contrasts with the mainstream economic representation of rational human agency, whereby economic agents are expected to always make decisions on how to act or what to believe by thoroughly considering all available and necessary information. In contrast, confirmation bias refers to a cognitive bias whereby people tend to be selective in gathering, interpreting, and recalling information. When people would like some concept to be true, they tend to deliberately seek data that are likely to confirm the beliefs they currently hold (Kahneman, 2011). In this sense, people form their beliefs based on the influence of bias and do not change these beliefs easily. They embrace only information consistent with their view and reject or neglect information that casts doubt on or undermine their view. Confirmation bias suggests that people's thinking processes are not objective.

Confirmation bias can explain well how people hold their political preferences. Political beliefs and ideologies are inherently subjective and reflect selective exposure (Klapper, 1960). That is, people who have a strong preference for a certain political party are likely to refrain from communicating with those who oppose their beliefs. In other words, people may feel more comfortable exchanging information with political allies, not foes. Moreover, people only pay attention to what seems to be consistent with their political attitudes. Most importantly, confirmation bias leads people to selectively interpret information in relation to what they like and to have a tendency to forget undesirable information. Thus, confirmation bias suggests that people are not passive recipients of political information; rather, they evaluate information with reference to their convictions on certain political issues.

Social and political convictions appear in the classical literature testing confirmation bias. Lord et al. (1979) performed an experiment showing that both proponents and opponents of capital punishment became more polarised when asked to evaluate information challenging their existing attitudes. An experiment by Anderson et al. (1980) found that research participants tended to cling to their beliefs about either a negative or a positive relationship between risk-taking and success among firefighters despite the absence of direct evidence to confirm their view. Research on gun control by Taber & Lodge (2006) affirmed that participants' processing of relevant information is affected by confirmation bias. When given arguments in support of and against gun control, they actively chose only non-threatening sources to support their prior beliefs. This behaviour of seeking out confirmatory evidence was traced to the neuro level in Westen et al. (2006). Neuro-imaging evidence showed that subjects had more neural activity related to motivated reasoning when evaluating speeches by committed co-partisans than when evaluating those of opposing candidates. This finding is quite consistent with that of Westerwick et al. (2017), who found that research subjects' information processing reflected selective exposure: they assessed only information corresponding with their existing beliefs, regardless of the quality of the information.

It can be seen that political bias is observable in many circumstances. However, there are no studies applying the confirmation bias framework to a social context in which an intense political conflict exists. Therefore, we apply this framework to the Thai context to see whether research

participants' attitudes towards their preferred ideology (either yellow or red) change when they are exposed to information that confirms or contrasts with their original belief.

Methodology

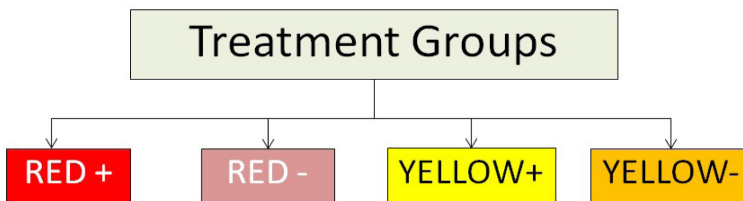
Key Working Hypotheses

This study aims to test confirmation bias among research participants who are either red or yellow shirts. The study hypothesises that adherents to both ideologies display political bias in two senses. First, they tend to confirm their attitudes after exposure to political information that is consistent with their original beliefs. Second, exposure to information that opposes their politics does not undermine their leanings. That is, participants are likely to continue to hold the same political beliefs.

Experimental Design

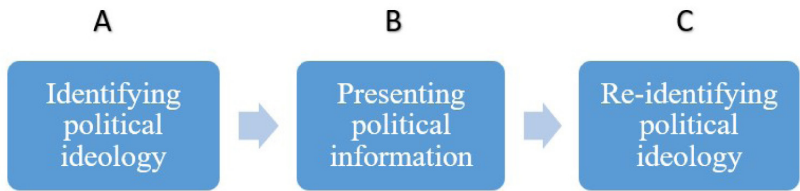
This study set up an experiment to test the above hypotheses. This experiment used political information as an intervention to explore how red-shirt and yellow-shirt participants respond to such information. We divided the research participants into four treatment groups. The type of information the participants received classified each group. The rationale for this classification was to allow comparative discussion of the results on confirmation bias among the groups. Figure 1 presents the four treatment groups in this study. The first group consists of participants who received positive information about red politics (*RED+*). The second group comprises participants who received negative information about red politics (*RED-*). The third group includes participants who received positive information about yellow politics (*YELLOW+*). The fourth group is made up of the participants who received negative information about yellow politics (*YELLOW-*). The numbers of participants in each group were 91, 103, 115, and 83, respectively.

Figure 1 Treatment groups in the study



Each treatment group was subjected to an identical experimental procedure. Figure 2 shows the design of this experiment. Firstly, the political ideology of each participant was identified. This identification revealed how many participants in each group held red and yellow ideologies. The experiment next presented the participants with political information. They were assigned to read information that varied according to their treatment group. This intervention is critical for testing the persistence of political bias. Finally, political ideology was assessed again to explore the change or perseverance of participants' political adherence in each treatment group.

Figure 2 Experimental design



Data Analysis

A three-part questionnaire was designed in relation to the experiment and classification of the treatment groups. The first part asks about demographic data. The second part lists 13 questions on their opinions on political issues, including the Thai electoral system, *coup d'état*, the legitimacy of political movements, the character of political leaders, etc. Participants responded to each question with ratings on a Likert scale with 5 levels (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). The third part of the questionnaire presents information about Thai politics. It is a short article covering major ideological points, including political regime, characteristics of political leaders, and political and social change. There are four types of information referring to four political orientations: (a) a positive attitude towards red shirts, (b) a negative attitude towards red shirts, (c) a positive attitude towards yellow shirts, and (d) a negative attitude towards yellow shirts. The drafting of these articles required assistance from a political specialist to validate the accuracy of the information. The participants were asked to read this information and complete the second part of the questionnaire again.

PCA was then conducted on the data from the questionnaires. We used the PCA technique to extract information on participants' primary political orientation. This method drew on Manachotphonong (2014), but we made a modification by adding an experimental procedure to explore the different outcomes among the treatment groups. The results from a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (0.625) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (significance level of 0.000) indicated that the questionnaire variables were suitable for use with PCA to detect structures. In this study, PCA was performed on the data from the questionnaires to extract the classification of the principal components in terms of political ideologies. A main measurement here was the factor loadings. When a particular question had a high factor loading (above 0.5) with respect to a specific component, this question was included as a sub-element, while those questions with values lower than 0.5 were not taken into account. In other words, PCA detected which questions were related to each other and able to be organised under a particular political ideology. The researchers interpreted and named each group according to the details of its sub-elements.

It should be noted that there were two layers of analysis. The first layer was a component analysis with respect to the total number of participants to inform the general categorisation of political ideologies. The second layer was an analysis within each treatment group to compare the weight of factor loadings before and after the participants were manipulated with the information intervention.

Data Collection

This study recruited a total of 392 research participants. They all resided in Khon Kaen, Thailand. Data collection was not completed all at once. The researchers gradually collected approximately 30-50 participants at a time until reaching the desired number. Every experiment was conducted in a quiet room without any distraction. There was space between the participants' desks so that they were able to perform the assigned tasks individually. The participants were informed about the details of the experiment and instructed to respond to the first and second parts of the questionnaire. This step took approximately 40 minutes. Then, the participants were given a sheet of political information (the third part of the questionnaire) and asked to read it within 20 minutes. After reading the information, the participants were instructed to redo

the questionnaire items on political attitudes (the second part of the questionnaire). This process took 30 minutes. It should be noted that some participants withdrew from the experiment after recruitment. This resulted in an uneven number of participants among treatment groups.

Results and Discussion

General Characteristics of Participants

The experimental setting requires that participants in each treatment group have similar characteristics to clearly evaluate the intervention outcomes. Tables 1-6 show the similarity among the treatment groups in terms of gender, age, civil status, occupation, education, and income. Most participants in each group were female, single, and between 20 and 29 years of age. More than 40% of the participants in each treatment group had incomes in the range of 5,000–15,000 baht (1 US dollar is approximately 30 baht). The proportions of participants with and without an undergraduate degree are similar. The participants in each group are mostly college students and work in the public sector

Table 1 *Gender in each treatment group*

	Male		Female		Total
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
RED+	21	23%	70	77%	91
RED-	34	33%	69	67%	103
YELLOW+	37	32%	78	68%	115
YELLOW-	33	40%	50	60%	83
Total	125	32%	267	68%	392

Table 2 *Civil status in each treatment group*

	RED+		RED-		YELLOW+		YELLOW-	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Single	57	63%	69	67%	81	70%	47	57%
Married	27	30%	29	28%	26	23%	35	42%
Widowed/Divorced	6	7%	4	4%	8	7%	0	0%
Separated	1	1%	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
Total	91	100%	103	100%	115	100%	83	100%

Table 3 *Age in each treatment group*

	RED+		RED-		YELLOW+		YELLOW-	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 19 years	6	7%	11	11%	24	21%	9	11%
20-29 years	48	53%	54	52%	53	46%	31	37%
30-39 years	5	5%	7	7%	4	3%	6	7%
40-49 years	12	13%	13	13%	19	17%	18	22%
50-59 years	13	14%	12	12%	11	10%	16	19%
More than 60 years	7	8%	6	6%	4	3%	3	4%
Total	91	100%	103	100%	115	100%	83	100%

Table 4 Monthly income in each treatment group

	<i>RED+</i>		<i>RED-</i>		<i>YELLOW+</i>		<i>YELLOW-</i>	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 5,000 baht	6	7%	9	9%	11	10%	6	7%
5,001 - 15,000 baht	46	51%	51	50%	50	43%	34	41%
15,001 - 25,000 baht	17	19%	13	13%	15	13%	13	16%
25,001 – 35,000 baht	8	9%	12	12%	17	15%	11	13%
35,001 – 45,000 baht	4	4%	6	6%	10	9%	6	7%
45,001 – 55,000 baht	6	7%	6	6%	2	2%	8	10%
More than 55,001 baht	4	4%	4	4%	10	9%	5	6%
Prefer not to answer	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	91	100%	103	100%	115	100%	83	100%

Table 5 Education in each treatment group

	RED+		RED-		YELLOW+		YELLOW-	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Lower than undergraduate level	39	43%	44	43%	63	55%	37	45%
Undergraduate level	52	57%	49	48%	49	43%	40	48%
Higher than undergraduate level	0	0%	10	10%	3	3%	6	7%
Total	91	100%	103	100%	115	100%	83	100%

Table 6 Occupation in each treatment group

	RED+		RED-		YELLOW+		YELLOW-	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Student/College student	45	49%	54	52%	68	59%	33	40%
Public-sector employee	30	33%	36	35%	38	33%	37	45%
Private-sector Employee/Business owner	13	14%	10	10%	7	6%	12	14%
Unemployed	3	3%	3	3%	2	2%	1	1%
Total	91	100%	103	100%	115	100%	83	100%

General Political Ideologies of Participants

This section reports the general results on participants’ political ideologies before the details of the experiment are elaborated in the following sections. The results of PCA in Table 7 indicate that there are 4 principal components (comp.1-comp.4). Each component represents a particular political ideology defined by the details of the sub-elements (questions). Only the questions with factor loading values greater than 0.5 are counted as sub-elements of a component. Component 1 represents the “red-democracy” ideology, which includes questions 1, 7, 10, and 11. There were 97 participants in this group. They believe in electoral democracy and prefer a Thaksin premiership. Component 2 represents the “red-corruption” ideology, which includes questions 5 and 6. There were 102 participants in this group. Adherents of this ideology tolerate corruption as long as politicians are able to run the country. Component 3 represents the “yellow-conservative” ideology, which includes questions 2, 3, and 4. There were 109 participants in this group. They represent a conservative force that upholds the monarchy and supports the political power established by the *coup d’état*. Component 4 represents the “red-radical” ideology, which includes questions 8, 9, and 12. There were 84 participants in this group. They resent the illegitimate power of political elites and wish to eliminate the patronage system. Note that it was not possible to include sub-element no. 13 into any principal component.

Table 7 *Principal components of political ideologies*

Questions (Sub-elements)	Factor Loading			
	Comp. 1	Comp. 2	Comp. 3	Comp. 4
1. The country should be run as a democratic system where the power comes from the people	0.588			
2. <i>Coups d’état</i> solve political and social unrest			0.665	
3. Maintaining the existing structure of the country’s administration creates stability			0.695	
4. It is legitimate for a political movement to seek to protect the monarchy			0.694	
5. Vote-buying is acceptable as long as politicians have the ability to manage the country		0.774		

6. Corruption among politicians is not related to the country's development and people's quality of life		0.781		
7. Elections are the most suitable approach for selecting a national leader	0.663			
8. A political movement against the power of political elites is justified				0.531
9. Authoritarian democracy is unacceptable because of its dictatorial character and interventions in independent commissions				0.821
10. The prime minister should be courageous, assertive, and skilful in business, like Thaksin Shinawatra	0.656			
11. Promoting free trade encourages new businesses and economic mobility	0.633			
12. Nepotism and the patronage system should be dismantled urgently				0.664
13. The government should compensate the victims of the political protests of 2013-2014				

Overall, there are 3 red ideologies to which 283 participants adhere and 1 Yellow ideology to which 109 participants adhere. This result suggests that in general, the participants are mostly on the red spectrum. This result reflects the political reality of the Khon Kaen area, where a 619,139-vote majority (from a total of 908,054 votes) in the 2011 general election went to the Pheu Thai Party (Election Commission of Thailand, 2011). This party represented Thaksin's nominee and red politics.

Exploring Confirmation Bias within Each Treatment Group

This section gives an extensive discussion of political bias among the treatment groups. The analysis approach used is again PCA. However, instead of extracting the principal component from the total group of

participants, PCA extraction was performed with respect to the number of participants in each treatment group. This method allows for comparison of the experimental results between treatment groups. It is important to note that when the principal component is extracted separately in this way, the total numbers of participants in the red and yellow groups do not necessarily have to match those in the previous results for general political ideologies. However, the results in Table 8 still suggest that the participants are mostly on the red spectrum. Additionally, PCA extraction within each treatment group revealed a green group, who are neither red nor yellow in their political leanings. The table shows the change in the number of participants in the respective ideological groups. After reading the information, the numbers of participants in the red and yellow groups decrease, while the number in the green group increases. The analysis of each treatment group is as follows.

Table 8 *Cumulative number of participants in red, yellow, and green groups*

	Red	Yellow	Green	Total
Before reading information	275	87	30	392
After reading information	261	61	70	392

Treatment Group: Red Positive (RED+)

This group consists of 91 participants who received positive information about red politics. PCA extraction revealed that there were 5 principal components in this group: red politics defined by sub-elements 1, 7, 10, and 11; red politics defined by sub-elements 5 and 6; red politics defined by sub-elements 9 and 13; yellow politics defined by sub-elements 2 and 3; and yellow politics defined by sub-element 4. Table 9 indicates the numbers and factor loading values of participants who adhere to these ideologies. There are 58 participants on the red-shirt spectrum and 33 participants on the yellow-shirt spectrum. The factor loading values here are an average of those for all sub-elements in the respective spectrum. The factor loading values for the red and yellow ideologies are 1.066 and 1.072, respectively.

Table 9 Results for treatment group RED+

	Red		Yellow		Green	
	frequency	factor loading	frequency	factor loading	frequency	factor loading
Before reading information	58	1.066	33	1.072	0	-
After reading information	56	1.147	15	1.092	20	0.976

After reading the information, PCA extraction revealed that the same sub-elements were still dominant among the participants who adhered to a red ideology. The results on Table 9 show that their number slightly decreases from 58 to 56, and the factor loading value increases from 1.066 to 1.147. This result could be interpreted as the participants on the red spectrum having more conviction in their original beliefs after reading information that favours their pre-existing beliefs. On the other hand, the number of participants on the yellow spectrum shows a remarkable drop from 33 to 15 after exposure to this information. It is possible that exposure to RED+ information decreased their adherence to yellow politics. However, the green group in the table explains this situation. The participants in the green group mostly fell on the yellow spectrum in the pre-treatment phase. After reading the information, they became less opposed to red ideology. They still supported the *coup d'état* (sub-element 2), but agreed that red shirts who were victimised during the 2013-2014 protests should be compensated (sub-element 13). However, it should be noted that the remaining 15 participants on the yellow spectrum intensified their original beliefs, as shown by the increased factor loading.

Treatment Group: Red Negative (RED-)

This group consists of 103 participants who received negative information about red politics. PCA extraction revealed that there are 5 principal components in this group: red politics defined by sub-elements 1, 7, 10, and 11; red politics defined by sub-elements 5 and 8; red politics defined by sub-elements 8, 9 and 12; red politics defined by sub-elements 6 and 13; and yellow politics defined by sub-elements 3 and 4. Table 10 indicates the numbers and factor loading values among adherents to the

two ideologies. There are 81 participants on the red-shirt spectrum and 22 participants on the yellow-shirt spectrum (as shown in Table 4). The factor loading values here are an average of those of all sub-elements within the respective spectrum. The factor loading values for the red and yellow ideologies are 1.033 and 1.091, respectively.

Table 10 *Results for treatment group RED-*

	Red		Yellow	
	frequency	factor loading	frequency	factor loading
Before reading information	81	1.033	22	1.044
After reading information	83	1.091	20	1.121

After exposure to the treatment information, PCA again captured almost all the sub-elements on the red spectrum, except sub-element no. 8. Table 10 shows that the number of adherents to red politics increased slightly from 81 to 83, and the factor loading value increased from 1.033 to 1.091. This result is consistent with a classic case of confirmation bias in which people tend to be less receptive when facing counter-indicative information (Nickerson, 1997). Thus, reading negative information about red-shirts did not lessen participants’ adherence to their original beliefs. On the yellow-spectrum side, participants reported having even more conviction in their original beliefs, as seen from the increase in their factor loading value from 1.044 to 1.121. This was not a surprising result because the participants on the yellow spectrum read negative information about their political opposition.

Treatment Group: Yellow Positive (YELLOW+)

This group consists of 115 participants who received positive information about yellow politics. PCA revealed 5 principal components in this group: red politics defined by sub-element 1; red politics defined by sub-elements 5 and 6; red politics defined by sub-elements 8, 9 and 12; red politics defined by with sub-elements 10, 11 and 13; and yellow politics defined by sub-elements 2, 3 and 4. Table 11 indicates the numbers and factor loading values of adherents to the two ideologies. There are 83 participants on the red-shirt spectrum and 32 participants on the yellow-

shirt spectrum. The factor loadings here are an average of those of all sub-elements on the respective spectrum. The factor loading values for the red and yellow ideologies are 1.152 and 0.908, respectively.

Table 11 Results for treatment group *YELLOW+*

	Red		Yellow	
	frequency	factor loading	frequency	factor loading
Before reading information	83	1.152	32	0.908
After reading information	89	1.121	26	1.109

After participants’ exposure to the information treatment, PCA again captured almost all the sub-elements on the red spectrum, with the addition of sub-element no.7. Table 11 shows that the number of participants espousing red politics increases from 83 to 89, and the factor loading value decreases from 1.152 to 1.121. The decrease in the factor loading value suggests that reading positive information about yellow politics lessened this group’s bias in favour of red politics. However, the number of participants on the red spectrum increases.

These increased numbers indicate that 6 participants who originally fell on the yellow spectrum became redder despite reading optimistic information about yellow politics. This result may not align with theoretical predictions but is very interesting. Normally, behavioural economics tends to posit a systematic and persistent bias among people. However, in some cases, people have been found not to maintain their original standpoint and to be able to process interventions rationally if they feel that they are being manipulated, especially by monetary incentives (Frey & Oberholzer-Gee, 1997). For this treatment group, the information intervention may have created the impression that the research participants were being subjected to excessive attempts at persuasion. Therefore, they may have resisted the information, and their political ideology correspondingly inclined towards the red spectrum. Note also that the remaining 26 participants on the yellow spectrum intensified their political beliefs, as seen from the increased factor loading value (1.109).

Treatment Group: Yellow Negative (YELLOW-)

This group consists of 83 participants who received negative information about yellow politics. PCA revealed no purely yellow components. The results were a combination of red and green components. There were 5 principal components in this group: red politics defined by sub-elements 5 and 6; red politics defined by sub-elements 7, 10 and 11; red politics defined by sub-elements 9, 12 and 13; green politics defined by sub-elements 3, 4 and 8; and green politics defined by sub-elements 1 and 2. Table 12 indicates the numbers and factor loading values of adherents to the two ideologies. There are 53 participants on the red spectrum and 30 participants on the green spectrum. The factor loadings here are an average of those for all sub-elements on the respective spectrum. The factor loading values for the red and green ideologies are 1.073 and 1.095, respectively.

Table 12 Results for treatment group *YELLOW-*

	Red		Yellow		Green	
	frequency	factor loading	frequency	factor loading	frequency	factor loading
Before reading information	53	1.073	0	-	30	1.095
After reading information	33	1.255	0	-	50	1.022

PCA indicates that the participants were less inclined towards the red spectrum after being subjected to the information treatment. Table 12 shows that the number of participants on the red spectrum considerably decreases by 20. This result could be interpreted in the same way as that for the previous treatment group. Reading a critique of yellow politics clearly supported a preference for red politics, but some participants still may have felt that this information was overwhelming. Therefore, they may have toned down their original beliefs, resulting in many more participants falling on the green-spectrum. Moreover, the increase in the factor loading value to 1.255 in the table indicates that the remaining participants on the red spectrum intensified their adherence to their original ideology.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to explore the confirmation bias of two political oppositions – red and yellow shirts. We divided the participants into four treatment groups according to the information they were exposed to. PCA approach was employed to classify their ideologies (coding as red, yellow, and green spectrums) before and after exposure to the information.

PCA revealed that the participants mostly fell on the red spectrum. Significant conclusions can be drawn from the results for the different treatment groups. The first conclusion is that confirmation bias was indeed present. The participants in the *RED-* treatment definitely verified this, as they tended to intensify their original belief regardless of the kind of information they received. However, a second set of results did not support the hypothesis. The notion of confirmation bias implies persistence of belief. However, the results demonstrated that political attitudes are changeable. The results of treatment *YELLOW+* showed that the political conviction of participants on the red spectrum decreased when they received information opposing their original beliefs. Likewise, in treatment *RED+*, some participants switched from the yellow to the green spectrum. Relatedly, the third finding was that the participants' reasoning was not always biased. There were participants, especially yellow shirts in treatment *YELLOW+* and red shirts in *YELLOW-*, who probably perceived the experiment to be a manipulation and became more reluctant to confirm their beliefs.

These findings suggest that there is still hope for reconciliation in Thai politics. The change in political attitudes and inclinations toward opposing ideologies may reflect sympathy for the political opposition. This study recommends that the pursuit of democratic order is desirable to ensure people's equal access to transparent information, thus allowing them to justify their political decisions and have space for negotiation of ideological differences.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this study.

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