MOVE: Understanding the Patterns of Violence in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces

Dr. Abdunrohman Mukem¹ and Sarehan Khwankawin² Written on 26 February 2023

Introduction

Nearly two decades have passed since the gun robbery at the 4th Development Battalion (Pi-Leng Camp), Krom Luang Narathiwat Rajanagarindra Camp in Narathiwat Province on January 4, 2004. This incident reverberated like a 'loud gong', exposing the chronic issues plaguing Thailand's southern border provinces to the broader society issues that have previously been swept under the rug. This event came to be known as the 'unrest situation in the southern border provinces,' later evolving into 'protracted violence,' an ongoing state of unrest that has persisted for over two decades.

The southern border provinces have been entangled in multiple, overlapping issues for over two decades. These issues are complex and require simultaneous attention and resolution. Over the past 19 years, there has been a surge in violence starting from 2004, leading to the tragic loss of lives and injuries. According to a 2023 report from Isra News, "This violence led to a staggering 4,160 deaths and 11,169 injuries from 16,489 incidents. More than 4.9 billion baht has been expended to tackle this issue" (Isra News, 2023). Srisompop Jitpiromsri, a leading expert and data provider on the violent situations in the southern border, has presented increasingly alarming statistics. Having dedicated two decades to studying this issue, Jitpiromsri asserts, "From 2004 to 2021, an estimated 21,328 conflict-related incidents have occurred. This has resulted in 7,314 deaths and 13,584 injuries, amounting to a total of 20,898 casualties" (Srisompop Jitpiromsri, 2023).

Despite substantial financial investments intended to address the challenges of the southern border, eight consecutive governments, led by six prime ministers ranging from Thaksin Shinawatra to Gen. Prayuth Chan-o-cha, have faced difficulties in

¹ Dr. Abdunrohman Mukem, Researcher (AR-5), South Asia Studies Center, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University

² Sarehan Khwankawin, Researcher, Muslim Studies Center, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University

suppressing the violence (BBC News, 2023). The unrest, primarily centered in the southern border provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and four districts in Songkhla - Jana, Na Thawi, Thepha, and Saba Yoi, has intermittently spilled over to other provinces. Instances like the 2005 Hat Yai district bombing and the 2013 Sadao district unrest (The Citizen Plus, 2012 and Isara News, 2019) bear testimony to this fact. These incidents have had profound implications on Thailand's overall economy, societal fabric, culture, education, religion, and numerous other aspects.

Understanding Violence in the Southern Border Provinces: Knowledge for Prevention

The situation in Thailand's southern border provinces is marked by pervasive violence, a myriad of perpetrators, numerous casualties, and intricately demarcated "risk" and "safe" zones. An insightful summary by the Monitoring Centre on Organized Violence Events (MOVE) of the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, sheds light on the situation. The flurry of violent incidents - ranging from arson and bombings to mass shootings and riots - paint a disconcerting picture of the four southern border provinces, drawing them perilously close to the precipice of becoming a "fragile state."

The term "fragile state"³ (Fund for Peace, 2014) is often used to denote a deeply undesirable situation wherein a state's capacity to effectively deliver crucial services - such as education, security, economic stability, public health, and equitable distribution of basic welfare - is severely compromised. Additionally, a fragile state often finds itself ensnared in the cyclical snare of violent political and societal conflicts (The Momentum, 2566).

The persistent unrest in the southern border region over the last two decades raises crucial questions about the present "face of the state". The primary query being: Is the state inching closer to the status of a "fragile state"? Different perspectives may yield varying interpretations, but there's a prevailing concern that cannot be overlooked: the sustained conflict in the southern border provinces may be gradually influencing the state's stability. Evidence of this concern is apparent in situations where the state has faced challenges in maintaining citizen security and effectively delivering public services,

³ The term "Fragile State" gained popularity after the Fund for Peace renamed their index from the "Failed States Index" to the "Fragile States Index" in 2011.

characteristics typically linked to a "fragile state." Additionally, areas where state authority is diminished or absent altogether serve as further indicators of this challenging scenario (National Reconciliation Commission, 2006: 51)

The MOVE online database is a valuable resource that is dedicated to documenting crucial details of violent incidents. It provides information on the perpetrators and victims, as well as the date, place, and time of each event. This comprehensive database covers a span of five years and comprises a total of 2,344 incidents. During the initial phase of data collection conducted by MOVE, the timeframe covered is from 2016 to 2022. The data is sourced from online archives of five national newspapers: Bangkok Post, Khaosod, Thairath, Manager, and Matichon (MOVE, 2023). This article aims to delve into MOVE's data concerning the violent situation in the southern border provinces, namely Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala. Specifically, this article will explore four key aspects: the types of violence observed, the identification of perpetrators involved, the number of casualties in terms of injuries and fatalities, and the specific locations where these violent incidents occurred.

1. Types of violence

According to the MOVE's data, there were a total of 796 recorded violent incidents in the southern border provinces between 2016 and 2022. These incidents encompass a range of categories, including insurgent attacks, military counterinsurgency operations, violence associated with criminal gangs, encounters between security forces and civilians, instances of electoral violence, sexual assaults, and mob attacks. Regrettably, these forms of violence have not been limited to the southern border provinces but have also occurred throughout Thailand as a whole. Further information and a comprehensive breakdown of these incidents can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Types of Violence				
Types of Violence	Pattani	Narathiwat	Yala	Total
Insurgent Attack	239 (83%)	226 (78.5%)	167	632
			(75.9%)	
Criminal Gang-based Violence	18 (6.3%)	38 (13.2%)	30 (13.6%)	86
Military Counterinsurgency	26 (9%)	22 (7.6%)	16 (7.3%)	64
Security Force – Civilian	2 (0.7%)	1 (0.3%)	2 (0.9%)	5
Encounter				
Sexual Assault	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)	3 (1.4%)	5
Electoral Violence	1 (0.3%)	0	2 (0.9%)	3
Mob Attack	1 (0.3%)	0	0	1

Total	288	288	220	796
Source: https://movedata.knowmorenomoreviolence.com/				

Based on the data presented in Table 1, insurgent attacks constituted an average of 82.2% of all types of violence in the region. This suggests that the majority of violent incidents in the southern border provinces were perpetrated by dissident groups challenging the state. However, it is important to note that there were also other forms of violence present in the region, including violence perpetrated by organized crime groups and military actions taken against insurgent groups. Among the three provinces, Pattani had the highest number of insurgent attacks, with a total of 239 incidents recorded. Narathiwat followed closely with 226 attacks, while Yala had the lowest number at 167. Correspondingly, military operations were also carried out against the insurgent groups, with Pattani witnessing 26 operations, Narathiwat experiencing 22, and Yala having 16 operations conducted in response to the insurgencies.

According to the MOVE data from 2016 to 2022, in addition to the ongoing unrest, the three southern border provinces experienced a significant number of incidents involving violence attributed to criminal gangs. Notably, Narathiwat recorded 86 incidents, surpassing other areas in terms of violence. Narathiwat is frequently characterized as a "gold mine of criminal gangs" due to its vulnerability to exploitation along the Thai-Malaysian border. Both civilian and corrupt authorities benefit from engaging in illegal businesses and other illicit activities in this border region. On the other hand, fewer incidents of violence attributed to criminal gangs occur in Yala and Pattani compared to Narathiwat. This can be attributed to the relatively smaller amount of land along the border, with the exception of Baetong district. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Yala is recognized as the "economic town" of the southern border province and is regarded as a prominent hub for business activities based on personal observations and expert insights.

Furthermore, Table 1 provides insights into the occurrence of specific types of violence in the southern border provinces. Surprisingly, there were only 64 recorded instances of "military action against insurgents", representing 8.3% of the total incidents. In contrast, the number of cases classified as "gang-based violence" surpassed those categorized as "confrontations between security forces and civilians." It is important to acknowledge that although the MOVE database identified only three cases of "electoral violence," personal observations indicate that there have been numerous instances of

such violence; it has long been a well-known issue within the local community. The prevalence of electoral violence can be attributed to the cultural context of the southern border provinces. Many individuals in the region aspire to attain positions of power and influence at the sub-district, district, or provincial levels, seeking to elevate their social status. This desire for status may stem from the history of oppression experienced in the region. As a result, "election and local politics" have led to significant losses, including cases where entire families have been specifically targeted and murdered. These losses also encompass killings of political opponents, sniper attacks, and acts of revenge that involve drowning.

Equally alarming is the prevalence of "sexual assaults," which were reported in over five incidents. Thai society, including the southern border provinces, remains influenced by patriarchal norms. However, an equally intriguing issue has emerged in the southern border provinces, leading to numerous incidents of violence. This issue pertains to the gender identity of the LGBTI community, known as "Por-Nae" in the Yawi dialect. The existence of this issue underscores the ongoing societal transformations occurring in the southern border provinces, where emerging values regarding gender diversity challenge the conventional belief that there are only two genders, male and female. Gender diversity is increasingly prevalent in educational institutions, ranging from primary schools to higher education. Moreover, it has become more visible in the public sphere, including public performances, contests, competitions, and fashion shows. The coexistence of these new expressions of gender diversity alongside traditional notions of heterogeneity has created a fertile ground for potential conflicts. Unfortunately, this clash of cultures has led to instances of gender-based violence within the southern border provinces. Confrontations, physical attacks, and even incidents of violence resulting in fatalities have been reported as a consequence. Engaging in discussions about gender identities can also expose individuals to violence, as evident from personal accounts shared by those in our close circles.

2. Perpetrators

The MOVE provides an overview of various perpetrator groups involved in the recorded incidents. These groups can be classified as "non-state actors", "state actors", "unidentified", and "ambivalent others". The distribution of perpetrators varied across the 715 recorded situations and events, and further details can be found in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Types of Perpetrators				
Types of	Pattani	Pattani Narathiw Yala		Total
Perpetrators		at		
Non-state	250 (86.8%)	252	192 (87.3%)	694
		(87.5%)		
State	30 (10.4%)	23 (8%)	19 (8.6%)	72
Unidentified	8 (2.8%)	13 (4.5%)	7 (3.2%)	28
Ambivalent	0	0	2 (0.9%)	2
Others				
Total	288	288	220	796
Source: https://movedata.knowmorenomoreviolence.com/				

Between 2016 and 2022, a total of 694 incidents perpetrated by non-state actors were reported. The majority of these incidents were concentrated in Narathiwat (252), followed by Pattani (250), and Yala (192). In the same period, state actors were responsible for 72 incidents. Pattani recorded the highest number of such incidents, approximately 30, followed by Narathiwat and Yala, with approximately 23 and 19 incidents, respectively. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the violence, the MOVE has segmented the data based on the specific types of perpetrators involved. The wide range of implicated groups includes insurgents, army rangers, criminal gangs, security forces, men's groups, provincial police, paratroopers, police volunteer rangers, army rangers, defense volunteers, ISOC, and others, as detailed in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Sub-types of Perpetrators				
Sub-Types of Perpetrators	Pattani	Narathiwat	Yala	Total
Insurgent	235	217 (78.9%)	159 (74.6%)	611
	(83.9%)			
Criminal Gang	8 (2.9%)	18 (6.5%)	13 (6.1%)	39
Army Ranger	11 (3.9%)	13 (4.7%)	1 (0.5%)	25
Security Forces	8 (2.9%)	4 (1.5%)	9 (4.2%)	21
Group of Men	3 (1.1%)	3 (1.1%)	4 (1.9%)	10
Youth Group	0	4 (1.5%)	7 (3.3%)	11
Insurgents - BRN	3 (1.1%)	9 (3.3%)	3 (1.4%)	15
Ranger, Police	3 (1.1%)	2 (0.7%)	2 (0.9%)	7
Provincial Police	2 (0.7%)	0	2 (0.9%)	4
Royal Thai Army (RTA)	1 (0.4%)	2 (0.7%)	1 (0.5%)	4
Insurgents - RKK	1 (0.4%)	0	5 (2.3%)	6
Police	1 (0.4%)	0	1 (0.5%)	2
Defense Volunteer	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.4%)	0	2
ISOC	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.4%)	0	2

Army Police, Ministry of	1 (0.4%)	0	1 (0.5%)	2
Interior				
Teacher	0	0	2 (0.9%)	2
Army Ranger, Defense	1 (0.4%)	0	0	1
Volunteer				
Hitman	0	0	1 (0.5%)	1
Border Patrol Police	0	0	1 (0.5%)	1
RTA, Police, Ministry of	0	0	1 (0.5%)	1
Interior				
Individual	0	1 (0.4%)	0	1
Total	280	275	213	768
Source: https://movedata.knowmorenomoreviolence.com/				

For incidents where perpetrators can be identified, it was found that more than 80% of perpetrators were non-state actors, including insurgents, average citizens, and criminal groups. This indicates that non-state actors were responsible for the majority of violent cases in the southern border provinces.

For this category, insurgents or state dissidents consistently emerged as the most prevalent perpetrators across all three southern border provinces. However, the second most frequent subtype of offenders varied from province to province. In Pattani, 81.6% of incidents were committed by insurgents, with army rangers accounting for 3.8% and criminal gangs for 2.8%. In Narathiwat, insurgents were responsible for 75.3% of incidents, followed by criminal gangs at 6.3% and army rangers at 4.5%. In Yala, insurgents accounted for 72.3% of incidents, with criminal gangs comprising 5.9% and security agencies contributing to 4.1% of incidents. In recent years, there has been an increase in violence attributed to security forces, which have shown a higher tendency for such actions compared to criminal groups. On the other hand, other perpetrators such as male gangs, youth groups, hitmen, and local triads accounted for only a small fraction of the incidents.

Despite the spread of violence across the southern provinces, Pattani recorded the highest number of incidents from insurgent activities. The city, regarded as the center of an ideological movement, stands as a significant stronghold, steeped in the powerful collective memory of "Pattani Darussalam." To effectively address the challenges in the southern border, the state must devise a strategic solution specifically for the situation in Pattani, with particular emphasis on the ongoing peace talks. Pattani holds particular significance as it serves as both a negotiation ground and a source of ideological momentum, demanding special attention in this regard.

7

3. Number of injuries and deaths

According to a report from Deep South Watch, Srisomphob Jitpiromsri, a renowned expert and a preeminent source of knowledge on the southern border provinces, who has led the study for nearly two decades, stated, "Between 2004 to 2021, an estimated 21,328 conflict-related incidents occurred. This resulted in 7,314 fatalities and 13,584 injuries, amounting to a total of 20,898 victims" (Srisompop Jitpiromsri, 2023).

The data presented by the MOVE underscores the grave reality of the situation in the southern border provinces, where a significant number of people have been impacted, either through injuries or loss of life. In the period between 2016 and 2022 alone, out of the 796 recorded incidents, the number of injuries per incident ranged between 0 and 100, as illustrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Number of Injuries				
Numbers of Injuries per Incident	Pattani	Narathiwat	Yala	Total
0	153 (56.2%)	155 (56.4%)	122 (57.2%)	430
1-10	113 (41.6%)	117 (42.5%)	87 (41%)	317
11-50	5 (1.8%)	3 (1.1%)	4 (1.8%)	12
51-100	1 (0.4%)	0	0	1
Total	272	275	213	760
Source: https://movedata.knowmorenomoreviolence.com/				

According to the data from MOVE, between 2016 and 2022, there were a total of 760 incidents related to unrest in the three southern border provinces, leading to various degrees of injuries. Out of these incidents, 317 resulted in a range of 1 to 10 injuries per occurrence. Pattani and Narathiwat experienced similar numbers of injuries during this period, with 113 and 117 recorded, respectively. Conversely, Yala had fewer incidents, with only 87 recorded injuries.

A noteworthy finding from the data reveals that 12 incidents resulted in a significant number of injuries, ranging from 11 to 50 per incident. Among these incidents, Pattani reported the highest number of incidents, with five instances, followed by Yala with four, and Narathiwat with only three. Further highlighting the severity of the

8

51 to 100.

 Table 5: Number of Deaths

 Numbers of
 Pattani
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Numbers of Deaths per Incident	Pattani	Narathiwat	Yala	Total
0	131 (46.5%)	157 (55.1%)	121	409
			(55.5%)	
1-10	151 (53.5%)	128 (44.9%)	96 (44%)	375
11-50	0	0	1 (0.5%)	1
51-100	0	0	0	0
Total	282	285	218	785
Source: https://movedata.knowmorenomoreviolence.com/				

4. Sites of Violence

Data regarding the location of violent incidents serves as a crucial aspect in comprehending the situation in the southern border provinces. It provides valuable insights into the specific areas where these incidents have occurred, enabling us to distinguish between "risk places" and "safe places" within these provinces. Further details are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Sites of Violence				
Sites of Violence	Pattani	Narathiw	Yala	То
		at		tal
Open Areas, Street or	180	191	132 (60%)	50
Public Transport	(62.5%)	(66.3%)		3
Private Residential	35	31	34	10
Premises	(12.2%)	(10.8%)	(15.5%)	0
Military or Police	21 (7.3%)	35	28	84
Premises		(12.2%)	(12.7%)	
Commercial Premises	29	19 (6.6%)	11 (5%)	59
	(10.1%)			
Schools or Educational	13 (4.5%)	0	5 (2.3%)	18
Institutions				
Religious Sites or	4 (1.4%)	6 (2.1%)	4 (1.8%)	14
Grounds				
Government Offices	3 (1%)	3 (1%)	3 (1.4%)	9
Others	3 (1%)	0	3 (1.4%)	6
Medical Facilities	0	3 (1%)	0	3
Total	288	288	220	79
				6
Source: https://movedata.knowmorenomoreviolence.com/				

situation, a single incident in Pattani led to a substantial number of injuries, ranging from

In the three southern border provinces, between 2016 and 2022, approximately eight types of locations were identified as potential sites for violent incidents. Among these, open areas, streets, or public transport witnessed the highest frequency of occurrences, totaling 503 incidents. A breakdown of incidents by province shows that Narathiwat experienced the highest number, with around 191 incidents. Pattani followed closely with approximately 180 incidents, while Yala reported the lowest number of such incidents at 132.

Analyzing the data by individual provinces, it is evident that there are five primary "risk places" in Pattani. The highest frequency of incidents takes place in "open areas, streets, or public transport," accounting for 62.5% of incidents. Following this are "private residential premises" with 12.2%, "commercial premises" at 10.1%, "military or police premises" at 7.3%, and "schools or educational institutions" at 4.5% of incidents. Conversely, Pattani features three comparatively safer areas. These areas include "medical facilities," which have reported no incidents during the recorded period, "government offices" with only three incidents out of 288, and "religious sites or grounds" where a mere four incidents occurred.

In Narathiwat, similar to Pattani, the primary "risk place" is "open areas, street, or public transport," accounting for 66.3% of incidents. However, the subsequent areas diverge from Pattani's pattern. The second highest risk area for Narathiwat is "military or police premises" at 12.2%, followed by "private residential premises" at 10.8%, "commercial premises" at 6.6%, and "religious sites or grounds" at 2.1%. Safer areas in the province include "medical facilities" and "others" where no incidents were recorded during the period, while "government offices" only saw three incidents out of 288.

For Yala Province, the top five "risk areas" include "open areas, street, or public transport", accounting for 60% of incidents. "Private residential premises" follow at 15.5%, followed by "commercial premises" at 13%, "military or police premises" at 4.3%, and "schools or educational institutions" at 3.5%. "Medical facilities" again was found to be the safest area, with "others" seeing only two incidents out of 220. "Religious sites or grounds" witnessed three incidents out of the same total.

Addressing Challenges in the Southern Border Provinces: Insights from the MOVE Database

The MOVE database, which compiles statistics on violent incidents in the three southern border provinces from 2016-2022, as reported by mainstream newspapers, provides a clear perspective on the "movement and dynamics of violence in the southern border provinces". The primary insights gleaned from this data are as follows:

1. Types of violence

The nature of violence in the southern border provinces is varied and complex. Between 2016 and 2022, a total of 715 violent incidents were reported, which can be categorized into seven distinct types. This means that the occurring violence is not solely a result of "attacks by insurgent groups". A recent trend that has emerged, but is not yet reflected in the MOVE data, includes political violence occurring at both the national and local levels, as well as incidents related to religious leaders, staged attacks, criminal gangs, and more. Another significant concern is gender-based violence. Issues such as sexual harassment and abuse continue to persist in the southern border communities, often leading to conflicts that involve physical abuse, assault, and even murder, occurring regularly.

2. Types of perpetrators

While "insurgents" were responsible for most of the violence overall, there are distinct patterns of perpetration in specific provinces. For instance, in Pattani, another significant group instigating violence is the "field armies". Likewise, in Yala, "criminal groups" and "security agencies" play a role in instigating violence.

3. Numbers of injuries and deaths

While the majority of violent incidents in the three southern border provinces between 2016 and 2022 resulted in between 1 and 10 injuries per event, these numbers should not be viewed in isolation. Although they might seem relatively "small" on a caseby-case basis, they add up to a significant toll when aggregated over time

4. "Risk Places" and "Safe Places"

From the MOVE's data, we summarize "risk places" and "safe places" in Table 7 below.

11

Table 7: "Risk Places" and "Safe Places" in the Southern Border Provinces			
Province			
Pattani	Open Areas, Street or Public Transport	Medical Facilities	
	Private Residential Premises	Government Offices	
	Commercial Premises	Religious Sites or Grounds	
Narathiwat	Open Areas, Street or Public Transport	Schools or Educational Institutions	
	Military or Police Premises	Others	
	Private Residential Premises	Government Offices	
Yala	Open Areas, Street or Public Transport	Medical Facilities	
	Private Residential Premises	Others	
	Military or Police Premises	Religious Sites or Grounds	
Source: https://movedata.knowmorenomoreviolence.com/			

It is evident that "risk places" encompass both public and private spaces, with "open areas, street or public transport" being particularly vulnerable. These public areas are accessible to everyone and, as stationary targets, cannot respond or move in the face of violence. On the other hand, even areas traditionally considered "safe places", such as "medical facilities", "schools or educational institutions", and "religious sites or grounds", have occasionally been sites of violent incidents, albeit infrequently. This data helps us discern between "risk places" and "safe places" in the southern border provinces.

The MOVE database has emerged as a crucial piece of the puzzle, aiding the understanding, and addressing violent issues in the southern border provinces. The database also beneficial for individuals planning to visit the area, as it provides insight into the in-risk and safe areas. At the very least, the information provided enhances our understanding of the situations, background, and the overall picture of violence in the southern border provinces. More importantly, various stakeholders can utilize this database for further analysis, which can lead to societal benefits, economic improvements, and increased resilience in living conditions amidst the violence.

Conclusion

MOVE has become a crucial resource for understanding the volatile situation in Thailand's southern border provinces. The Monitoring Centre of Organised Violence Events (MOVE) provides an essential database that deepens our comprehension of the region's dynamics of violence. By supporting the advancement of knowledge, MOVE serves as a platform for increasing societal understanding and awareness of the various violent trends in Thailand, including those in the southern border provinces. MOVE underscores its mission with the mantra "Know More No More Violence," positioning itself as a center for learning and fostering partnerships to prevent violence in Thailand.

While other databases, such as Deep South Watch, record violent incidents in the South, MOVE should be recognized as another robust resource that promotes an understanding of the southern border. Most importantly, MOVE elucidates the interconnected nature of different violent issues in Thailand.

MOVE distinguishes itself by placing a strong emphasis on comprehensiveness. The database does not exclusively focus on the "violence in the southern border provinces" but aims to record violent data from all regions of Thailand to create a new knowledge base. The ultimate goal is not only to strengthen understanding but also to formulate societal solutions for violence that is encountered on a daily basis.

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