

‘Stand, Stop, Imprison’: People’s Defiance against the Thai Establishment

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Protestors against the Thai establishment have found a new form of defiance: demanding offenders’ right to bail. The ‘Stand, Stop, Imprison’ campaign has spread far and wide, largely due to its less controversial nature.

The Thai authorities have been using legal instruments to ‘strike back’ against youth-led protests that had accelerated in 2020. Between July 2020 and January 2022, the [authorities charged at least 1,767 people](#) with violating the Emergency Decree, with lèse majesté and with sedition. Rather than being deterred, however, political dissidents have initiated new strategies. The foremost one has been the ‘Stand, Stop, Imprison’ campaign to fight for offenders to have access to bail.

The ‘Stand, Stop, Imprison’ campaign (Stand Stop Imprison) was initiated by the [Resistant Citizen](#) in March 2021. The political activist group contests the fact that the courts have denied bail to offenders, and hence violated their basic rights. Given its less controversial nature — educating citizens about their right to bail — it has become the dominant mode of defiance against the establishment across the country. Prior to its arrival on the scene, most other forms of protests against the establishment had been discontinued. The [Ratsadornprasong Fund](#) remains to financially support protestors facing charges.

The group held its first protest in front of the Supreme Court in Bangkok on 22 March 2021. The protests have continued daily since, except for the period between 2 June and 15 August 2021, when offenders were granted bail. The core activity involves standing still for 1 hour and 12 minutes (reduced from the previous 112 minutes) — a figure signifying Article 112 of the Thai criminal code on lèse majesté, with which many offenders have been charged. Participants stand from 5:30pm to 6:42 pm, during which they may perform other activities such as reading books.

The campaign is now co-organised with the [Assembly of the Poor, a grassroots organisation](#). ‘We are not demanding a new right, because it is already there. The problem is the court does not respect it. Society needs to be aware of this’, one organiser told the author. In addition to the right to bail, organisers of the campaign also demand the abolition of Article 112.

The activity usually draws tens of participants, mostly ordinary people. A middle-aged woman told the author that she had joined the activity since the first day so she could help detainees. Another woman said that she came to ‘shake’ the ‘unjust court’. The number of participants increases to 100 or more when groups such as academics, writers and artists join in and hold additional activities such as reading statements. Detainees’ mothers occasionally join the activity to demand the release on bail of their children, making the activity deeply emotional.

‘Stand, Stop, Imprison’ activities have spread beyond Bangkok. The first protests in the North started in Chiang Mai on 20 August 2021. The activity is held daily at Chiang Mai’s Tha Phae Gate except on Thursdays, when it is held in front of Chiang Mai University. It is organised by local

activists in consultation with Resistant Citizen and called [Stand, Stop, Dictators](#)'. In the minds of the organisers, unjust imprisonment will end when dictators are stopped in their tracks. The activity aims to keep public interest focused on the issue, to create means of participation, and to console detainees. It draws tens of participants, mostly [Red Shirt](#) supporters, but also activists, students and academics.

Given its low-key nature, the 'Stand, Stop, Imprison' campaign might well endure. While most of the youth-led protests of the past two years in Thailand were risky and have been discontinued, this alternate form of activist- and academic-initiated protest provides dissidents with a safe means of expression.

In the Northeast, the activity has been held most regularly in Ubon Ratchathani. It is organised by local academics and was first held on 8 April 2021 in front of the provincial court before moving to the front of Ubon Ratchathani University. It takes place twice a week — Wednesdays and Fridays — and occasionally involves the reading of poems and letters from detainees. It draws 10-20 participants, mostly local academics and students. Red Shirt supporters occasionally join. Initially, local politicians also joined in, but after the organisers moved to the university and focused on standing still rather than giving speeches, 'they gradually faded away', said an organiser in Ubon.

Although closely monitored, 'Stand, Stop, Imprison' activities have not been impeded or dispersed, unlike other forms of protest. Organisers and participants have not been prosecuted. A Northeastern academic said that she had once taunted police who came to monitor the activity by saying she hoped they would not prosecute her. Another woman participant in Bangkok said that she was together with other participants charged with violation of the Emergency Decree during the first round of activity in front of the Supreme Court. But they were not charged in the second round. This was because, she said, 'the police superintendent said he will not charge us again. Maybe he is ashamed.'

Given its low-key nature, the 'Stand, Stop, Imprison' campaign might well endure. While most of the youth-led protests of the past two years in Thailand were risky and have been discontinued, this alternate form of activist- and academic-initiated protest provides dissidents with a safe means of expression. A Northern academic said that many people joined the activity because it is safe and because it occurs continually. A Northeastern academic said that, Red Shirt supporters usually do not join the activity as they did not want to be targeted by the authorities. But they honked car horns and made three-finger salutes while passing by.

Although 'Stand, Stop, Imprison' might not lead to the immediate release of detainees on bail, it has become Thai dissidents' dominant mode of expression against the establishment. Importantly, as it grows in numbers and geographical scope, it solidifies defiance while simultaneously pillorying the judicial system. The establishment might need to reconsider employing legal tactics to put down political dissent.

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