

THAILAND

Dozens of explosive devices targeted government security forces who had been tasked with protecting teachers and schools, putting educators and students at risk and, in some cases, killing or injuring them. Dozens of schools in Thailand were deliberately damaged or destroyed, or unintentionally caught in crossfire. University students and academics were arrested and detained in the context of expanded restrictions on freedom of expression and political opposition.

Context

From early 2004 through the current reporting period, separatists launched an armed insurgency to seek autonomy for Songkhla, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces.²²⁷⁸ In February 2013, negotiations facilitated by the Malaysian government began between the Thai government and representatives of Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani (BRN) (Patani-Malay National Revolutionary Front), the principal non-state armed group in the country, and other separatist groups in the loose network of Majlis Syura Patani (Mara Patani). At the time of writing, these talks were ongoing but unfruitful.²²⁷⁹

After staging a coup that overthrew the elected Thai government on May 22, 2014, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) junta intensified its counterinsurgency measures in the deep south, which created a major obstacle for efforts to seek a political solution to the conflict.²²⁸⁰ Government security sweeps pushed back the separatists, but they were able to maintain a presence in hundreds of ethnic Malay Muslim villages.²²⁸¹

In addition to intensifying operations in the deep south, the junta imposed restrictions on freedom of expression across the country, enforcing a ban on public discussions about decentralization and self-governance.²²⁸² In June 2017, the UN expressed concern about the number of prosecutions under the *lèse-majesté* laws, which outlawed insulting the monarchy but did not define what constituted such an insult.²²⁸³

The insurgency in the deep south and nationwide restrictions on freedom of expression negatively affected education. In the deep south, Malay Muslim insurgents directly targeted government-funded education, as they viewed government teachers as representatives of the Thai government and government schools as vehicles for assimilating the Malay Muslim community.²²⁸⁴ Conversely, security forces raided madrassas while searching for insurgents, and insurgents targeted madrassas and Islamic teachers who cooperated with the Thai government.²²⁸⁵ In 2017, CEDAW noted that the ongoing conflict impeded the rights of ethnic Malay Muslim women in the deep south, including their right to education, and that there were gender bias and stereotypes in the curriculum.²²⁸⁶ Meanwhile, nationwide enforcement of the *lèse-majesté* laws primarily affected higher education by limiting student protests and activism.²²⁸⁷

The different types of attacks on education demonstrated diverse trends during the 2013-2017 reporting period. Reports of attacks on higher education increased, reports of attacks on primary and secondary schools began to decrease after 2015, and attacks on primary and secondary school students and teachers fluctuated throughout the reporting period.

Attacks on schools

Non-state armed groups and unidentified perpetrators were suspected of having bombed or set on fire dozens of schools, along with other government offices and state-related bodies, all of which were perceived by some ethnic Malay Muslims as instruments of Thai domination and assimilation policies.²²⁸⁸ Many of these attacks targeted government security forces who were protecting schools or teachers, but the violence damaged schools and harmed students and teachers in the process. These attacks on schools continued to be reported throughout 2014 at rates similar to those recorded in the 2009-2013 reporting period, with a decrease in reported attacks starting in 2015.

GCPEA collected information on eight attacks on schools in 2013, a level similar to reports found for the previous year.²²⁸⁹ The UN reported that, in 2013, armed groups used IEDs to attack state armed forces who were stationed to protect schools in several cases, thereby putting school children and teachers at risk.²²⁹⁰ More than half of the reported incidents identified by GCPEA directly targeted security forces. Media and UN sources reported six incidents that harmed security forces or volunteers as they were protecting schools. There were also at least two reported incidents of arson that affected schools. For example:

- Unknown perpetrators carried out an attack on an army ranger who was protecting a school in Cho Ai Rong district on January 30, 2013, in Narathiwat province. The attack injured the ranger.²²⁹¹
- Local media also reported two arson attacks on schools in February 2013, both carried out by unidentified assailants. One occurred in Narathiwat province on February 13, 2013, and a second took place in Pattani province on February 23, 2013.²²⁹²
- On July 31, 2013, an armed separatist group detonated an IED at a school in Yala province, injuring a security volunteer.²²⁹³
- A bomb planted behind the guard booth at a school in Yala province killed two soldiers and injured a 12-year-old school boy on September 10, 2013. Government authorities believed that a BRN splinter group was responsible for the attack.²²⁹⁴

Attacks affecting schools appeared to accelerate in 2014, with at least 14 attacks reported. In several cases, the attacks targeted security forces providing protection for schools, students, and teachers on or near school grounds.²²⁹⁵ For example:

- Media sources recorded one IED attack in Narathiwat province on March 10, 2014, when unidentified assailants threw a grenade at a school.²²⁹⁶
- Two arson attacks occurred in Narathiwat province on May 11, 2014, when unknown perpetrators reportedly set fire to two schools in one night. Local sources attributed the attacks to armed separatists.²²⁹⁷
- The UN reported that, in October 2014, nighttime arson attacks targeted eight schools in Pattani and Narathiwat provinces. According to the UN, these attacks may have been retaliation by an armed group for attacks by the Thai army. While no group claimed responsibility for the attacks, the UN stated that some reports indicated that the incidents constituted retaliation by a BRN-led armed group for attacks by government security forces.²²⁹⁸ Media sources reported six arson attacks in Pattani province on October 12, 2014.²²⁹⁹ It was not clear how much overlap there was between the two lists of attacks.
- Local media also reported that an armed separatist group detonated an IED near an Islamic school in Pattani province on December 5, 2014, possibly targeting a group of soldiers nearby, which damaged the school.²³⁰⁰

Reports of attacks on schools appeared to decrease in 2015, with only two incidents documented that year, both perpetrated by unidentified assailants:

- On September 11, 2015, a bomb planted by unknown assailants exploded at the entrance of a community school in Pattani province, according to the UN. The attack injured five students between the ages of 3 and 15.²³⁰¹
- Local media reported that two months later, on November 19, 2015, unidentified assailants opened fire on a school in Yala province, injuring the security guard.²³⁰²

In 2016, reports of attacks on schools again occurred sporadically. Unknown attackers and alleged non-state armed groups were responsible for the attacks, with five such incidents found by GCPEA:

- On February 12, 2016, unidentified assailants set fire to Ban Khai School in Pulo Puyo, Nong Chik district, Pattani province, causing no casualties, according to local media.²³⁰³
- In an attack on August 6, 2016, an IED planted by unknown perpetrators exploded at Bannangsetar Intharachat School in Bannang Sata district, Yala province. There were no injuries in the blast, and it was not clear if the school was damaged, according to local media.²³⁰⁴
- Local media also reported that on August 7, 2016, an IED exploded at the entrance to a school, targeting a convoy carrying referendum ballots in Pattani province. A school official, who sources reported was serving as director of the local voting station, was killed in the blast.²³⁰⁵
- The UN, Human Rights Watch, Save the Children, and other sources reported that on September 6, 2016, alleged members of a non-state armed group detonated a bomb in front of a school in Tak Bai district, Narathiwat

province, as parents were dropping their children off in the morning. A father and his daughter were killed in the blast and at least 10 people were injured, including teachers.²³⁰⁶

- On August 2, 2016, an explosive device planted near Solihyah School in Khok Pho district, Pattani province, detonated, slightly wounding two security volunteers. The school was closed for the day as a result.²³⁰⁷

At the time of writing, GCPEA had not identified any attacks on schools in 2017.

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

Most of the attacks that affected teachers targeted government security forces responsible for forming teacher-protection units that escorted teachers to school, putting the teachers at risk and in some cases resulting in their deaths. Notably, however, casualties among civilian government employees—such as civil servants and teachers—outnumbered casualties among government security forces.²³⁰⁸

Reports of attacks on teachers and other education personnel remained at the same level in 2013 as in previous years, then peaked in both 2014 and 2016, with apparent lulls in 2015 and 2017. Reported incidents affecting students remained at levels similar to the 2009-2013 reporting period, between one and three per year, through 2015, with no reports of attacks on students identified in 2016 and one in 2017.

Attacks on teachers and education personnel were more frequent than those on students, and the UN reported that, according to the Ministry of Education, at least seven teachers and three education-related personnel were killed in 2013.²³⁰⁹ Media sources reported that at least 12 attacks affecting teachers and education personnel involved assailants targeting government security forces who were escorting teachers to school as part of a broad teacher-protection program.²³¹⁰ In nine additional incidents recorded by media sources throughout the year—five in Pattani province, two in Narathiwat, one in Yala province, and one in an unknown location—unidentified assailants opened fire on teachers or education personnel.²³¹¹ It was unclear whether government security forces were escorting these teachers at the time the attacks occurred, nor was it clear how many of these 21 media-reported attacks overlapped with the 10 incidents documented by the UN. In contrast to reported attacks on teachers, GCPEA identified only one attack on students.

Attacks on students and teachers in 2013 included the following:

- Two unidentified motorcyclists opened fire on a bus that was transporting seven kindergarten students to school in Rueso district, Narathiwat province, on January 23, 2013, according to local media. None of the passengers was injured in the attack.²³¹²
- The UN and local media found that on January 23, 2013, four unidentified gunmen entered a school cafeteria in Narathiwat province and shot a teacher in front of dozens of children, including his 7-year-old daughter.²³¹³ Most of these attacks occurred in Pattani and Narathiwat provinces.
- News sources reported that on June 20, 2013, a roadside IED detonated as a teacher security patrol was passing by, injuring five soldiers. No teachers were reported injured.²³¹⁴
- On August 21, 2013, gunmen shot and killed a teacher from the Islam Community Foundation School in Moo 5, Pattani province. Authorities reportedly attributed the attack to separatists.²³¹⁵
- On December 12, 2013, a bomb placed in front of a school targeted a military convoy providing protection for teachers, reportedly injuring two workers and six members of the government security forces. Local news media attributed this attack to a separatist group.²³¹⁶

Attacks on personnel appeared to be more frequent in 2014, mainly due to an increase in attacks on teacher-protection units, while reports of attacks on students remained consistent at one per year. In more than 30 incidents reported by local media, explosives and gunfire targeted teacher-protection units as they accompanied teachers to school.²³¹⁷ For example, local media reported that on August 28, 2014, a gas cylinder bomb was used to attack a motorcycle convoy of teachers and their soldier escorts in Pattani province. The explosion on the side of the road reportedly killed one female teacher and injured another.²³¹⁸ In addition to being affected by incidents directed at their protection units, teachers were also directly targeted and received threats, and students were attacked. For example:

- Human Rights Watch reported that on January 14, 2014, unknown assailants shot a teacher in Yala province while he rode home from his school on a motorcycle.²³¹⁹

- The UN and international media reported that on March 14, 2014, assailants shot dead a female teacher riding a motorcycle to school, then poured gasoline on her body and set it on fire. A pamphlet with the words, “This attack is in revenge for the killing of innocent people,” was found near her body.²³²⁰
- Less than one week later, unidentified perpetrators reportedly shot and killed a teacher in Narathiwat province, according to Human Rights Watch.²³²¹
- The UN reported that banners threatening teachers were hung in parts of Yala province in November.²³²²
- Local media sources recorded two incidents, one each on November 12 and 15, 2014, when unknown gunmen opened fire on two teachers, one in Yala province and one in Pattani province.²³²³
- News sources also reported an incident on November 27, 2014, in which assailants opened fire on high school students in Tanyong Talo area, Pattani province, killing one and injuring another.²³²⁴

Reports of attacks on teachers decreased in frequency in 2015, while attacks on students remained at a level similar to previous years. According to the UN, the Ministry of Education reported that two teachers and one student were killed in attacks, and one teacher and two students were injured.²³²⁵ Meanwhile, local media documented five explosions targeting teacher-protection units, three in Pattani province and two in Narathiwat province.²³²⁶ Gun attacks on teachers reported by local news sources in 2015 included the following:

- On May 9, 2015, unknown assailants shot and killed two teachers in the street in Narathiwat province.²³²⁷
- On May 26, 2015, assailants started shooting at a car carrying a teacher and a community leader in Pattani province, killing them both.²³²⁸
- On July 13, 2015, a physical education teacher was shot and killed by unknown perpetrators in Pattani province.²³²⁹

Reported attacks targeting teacher-protection units increased again in 2016, when local media sources documented 22 such incidents: 12 in Narathiwat province, 8 in Pattani province, and 2 in Yala province. Of these attacks, 19 involved IEDs planted by the side of the road or elsewhere near the patrols, and three used gunfire to target teachers and their protection units.²³³⁰ The teachers were largely uninjured in these attacks. In addition, local and international media reported that on October 28, 2016, two unidentified assailants on motorbikes shot and killed a teacher in Pattani province as she parked her car outside the school where she worked.²³³¹ GCPEA did not identify reports of attacks on students in 2016.

GCPEA identified one recorded incident of an attack on students in 2017. *Reuters* reported that on March 2, 2017, assailants opened fire on a village deputy leader’s car as he was transporting several children to a village school in Rue Soh district, Narathiwat province. An 8-year-old boy was killed instantly and two other children were wounded.²³³² There were no reported attacks targeting teachers. It was not clear whether this reduction was related to a change in the security environment or to a lack of information at the time of writing.

Child recruitment at, or en route to or from, school

Information on child recruitment from schools in Thailand was sparse, but anecdotal information indicated that it did occur. Three former child recruits reported to Child Soldiers International in 2014 that armed groups had used private Islamic schools to indoctrinate and recruit them and other students.²³³³

Attacks on higher education

During the reporting period, government security forces reportedly arrested university students and professors for their perceived opposition to the government. Many of these arrests took place under the *lèse-majesté* laws, which criminalized insulting the monarchy and were more actively and more broadly enforced after the May 2014 coup.²³³⁴ Reports of this form of attack were more frequent than in *Education under Attack 2014*.

The separatist conflict in the deep south affected higher education sporadically during the reporting period. There were reports of isolated incidents of IED explosions and gunfire affecting universities, students, and education personnel in the southern provinces.

Media sources and NGOs documented two incidents of government forces arresting higher education students and personnel on political grounds in 2014:

- Scholars at Risk reported an incident on September 18, 2014, in which government forces interrupted a forum on democracy at Thammasat University in Bangkok, titled “The Fall of Dictatorships.” They detained a group of four academics and three students, who were held at a local police station for a few hours and questioned before being released.²³³⁵
- Scholars at Risk also reported that on October 27, 2014, a student and a professor at Thammasat University in Bangkok were charged and jailed for insulting the monarchy when they staged a play called “The Wolf Bride,” which parodied the Thai political conflict of 2013.²³³⁶

There was one incident in Thailand’s deep south in 2014, in which suspected separatists shot and killed a university student. Local media reported that on November 2, 2014, unidentified assailants shot and killed a university student in Muang district, Narathiwat province. Local sources alleged that the perpetrators were members of an armed separatist group.²³³⁷

In 2015, the government’s crackdown on perceived student opposition continued with the reported arrest of at least 14 students in a single incident, representing a slight increase in the number of people affected during 2014. Scholars at Risk and Human Rights Watch found that on June 26, 2015, state police arrested 14 students from the New Democracy Movement for sedition and violating the junta government’s ban on public assembly. The students had led a nonviolent protest against the government the day before at Thammasat University in Bangkok. They were detained until July 8, 2015. The charges against them remained pending for an unknown period of time.²³³⁸

NGO reports indicated that student activists continued to be affected by restrictions on freedom of expression in 2016. GCPEA collected information on two incidents in which students were detained, arrested, or beaten:

- Human Rights Watch reported that on January 20, 2016, government security forces abducted a well-known student activist as he walked with friends outside Thammasat University’s Rangsit campus. The abductors grabbed him and pushed him into a truck with no license plates. Soldiers then handed him over to the police in the early morning of the next day. He later reported that he had been blindfolded, beaten, interrogated about his political affiliations, and accused of violating the ban on public assembly and political activity.²³³⁹
- According to Scholars at Risk, on June 24, 2016, police arrested a group of student activists who were returning to the campus of Phranakhon Rajbhat University in Bangkok after marching to Bangkok’s Laksi Monument, where they had distributed copies of *Kao Kham*, the New Democracy Movement’s newspaper. Police officers had asked the students to stop distributing the newspapers but the students refused. They were then arrested under a law banning political gatherings of five or more people. The students were released later in the day and were not formally charged with anything.²³⁴⁰

Rights groups reported two incidents in which academics were detained or arrested in 2017:

- On August 14, 2017, five academics were required to report to the police after they participated in the 13th International Conference at Chiang Mai University between July 15 and 18. At the conference, a group of Thai and foreign academics issued a statement that called on the government to restore freedom of expression in Thailand. Four of the academics were photographed holding a sign stating, “AN ACADEMIC FORUM IS NOT A MILITARY BARRACK.” The four academics and the conference organizer were accused of violating NCPO Order No. 3/2558, which banned political gatherings of five or more people. They faced up to six months in prison and up to a \$300 fine if convicted.²³⁴¹
- Thai authorities charged Sulak Sivaraksa, a Thai academic and activist on October 9, 2017, with *lèse majesté* after he made comments questioning a historical narrative about the 16th century royal elephant battle during an academic conference at Thammasat University. Sivaraksa.²³⁴² The prosecutor later dropped the charges on January 17, 2018.²³⁴³

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