

THAILAND

While attacks on schools decreased between 2017 and 2019, attacks on school personnel continued at a similar rate to the 2013-2017 reporting period, including during the period leading up to the March 2019 general elections. Attacks on higher education students, personnel, and facilities also occurred sporadically.

Context

An armed separatist insurgency in Thailand's four southernmost provinces continued during this reporting period. Although violent attacks decreased between 2013 and 2017, the reporting period of *Education under Attack 2018*, a spike in armed clashes and bombings occurred in the southern border provinces in 2018 and 2019.²⁰³² Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), an ethnic Malay Muslim armed group, continued to carry out attacks on the police, military, and civilians associated with the state, including teachers, as well as Buddhist monks and institutions.²⁰³³

In 2019, Human Rights Watch estimated that civilians constituted approximately 90 percent of the over 7,000 casualties that resulted from conflict in the southern provinces since 2004.²⁰³⁴ For example, between May 6 and June 5, 2019, Human Rights Watch documented 21 attacks that killed and wounded both ethnic Thai Buddhists and ethnic Malay Muslims in the four southern provinces. One such attack, an insurgent bombing at a market in Pattani province on May 27, 2019, killed two civilians, including a 14-year-old boy, and injured 18 people, among them four paramilitary rangers.²⁰³⁵ While attacks are generally limited to the southernmost border provinces, insurgents carried out isolated bombings further north, in Satun and Phatthalung provinces, in March 2019, as well as in the Bangkok metropolitan area in August 2019.²⁰³⁶

On August 2, 2019, a series of small bombs exploded outside Thai government offices in Bangkok, allegedly to coincide with the annual ASEAN foreign ministerial meeting hosted by Thailand.²⁰³⁷ In September 2019, the Thai special branch police ordered all universities to provide authorities with information about Muslim students at their institutions. Police also required universities to provide details about clubs and associations run by those students, including leaders' names, organization objectives, and the number of members.²⁰³⁸ The order was withdrawn, however, in early October 2019, after public outcry and parliamentary review.²⁰³⁹

During this reporting period, Thai security forces and civilian militias reportedly committed human rights abuses, including torture, killings, and forced disappearances, against ethnic Malay Muslims.²⁰⁴⁰ In June 2019, state authorities arrested Hakeem Darase, a militia member accused of murdering ethnic Malay Muslims and suspected of belonging to BRN.²⁰⁴¹ BRN has also targeted ethnic Malay Muslims suspected of supporting dialogue with or collaborating with the government.²⁰⁴²

Academic freedom was also limited.²⁰⁴³ For instance, in June 2018, administrators at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok demanded students cancel an on-campus event after hearing they planned to translate an English-language article that criticized Prime Minister Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha into Thai.²⁰⁴⁴ However, in December 2018, the government lifted a ban on political gatherings, which allowed student protests to occur more freely during the election period.²⁰⁴⁵

Attacks on schools

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected approximately nine reports of attacks on schools. Non-state armed groups used explosive devices and arson attacks to target schools in the 2013-2017 reporting period, during which attacks on schools peaked in 2014, with 14 attacks that year.²⁰⁴⁶ However, the frequency of attacks decreased in the 2017-2019 reporting period; approximately two reports of attacks on schools were collected in both 2017 and 2018, followed by an increase in 2019, when five such attacks were identified.

In 2017, GCPEA identified two reported attacks on schools,²⁰⁴⁷ which were identified after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*. In one such attack, two explosive devices were allegedly planted near Ban Parih School in Muang Pattani district, Pattani province, on April 7, 2017. One of the devices, located in front of the school, detonated, while the other was discovered and defused, as reported in local media; school was not in session and there were no reported casualties.²⁰⁴⁸

Local media reported at least two alleged attacks on schools in 2018.²⁰⁴⁹ Additionally, the UN documented one attack against a school during the same year,²⁰⁵⁰ although it remains unclear whether that attack overlaps with those reported in the media and collected by GCPEA. In one of the 2018 attacks covered by the media, two bombs reportedly exploded near the Yaring School, in Yaring district, Pattani province, during the morning of February 11, 2018, a Sunday, when school was not in session. According to *Bangkok Post* and *Post Today*, one of the bombs was planted at the sign in front of the school; a district officer and a woman reportedly received minor injuries in the blasts.²⁰⁵¹

In 2019, GCPEA collected reports of five attacks on schools, in Pattani and Phatthalung provinces, the latter of which is located to the north of the four most-affected southern provinces.²⁰⁵² For instance:

- On January 8, 2019, insurgents reportedly detonated an explosive device outside Thairath Wittaya School, a non-formal education center in Yarang district, Pattani province. The explosion severely injured a 12-year-old schoolchild and a soldier guarding the school, according to local media sources and Human Rights Watch.²⁰⁵³
- Local media reported allegations that on March 10, 2019, an explosive device detonated in a trash can behind Pak Payoon Nursery School, in a series of nine explosions throughout Pak Payoon district, Phatthalung province. *Daily News* and *The Nation Thailand* reported that no injuries or death resulted from the explosions, which occurred in the middle of the night.²⁰⁵⁴
- Alleged members of a non-state armed group reportedly detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) at the entrance of a school in Khok Pho district, Pattani province, on September 16, 2019. The explosion reportedly injured members of a teacher security convoy, who then exchanged fire with the attackers. According to local media sources, no teachers or students were injured.²⁰⁵⁵

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected at least 20 reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and education personnel. As in the previous reporting period, many attacks affecting students and teachers involved the targeting of police or volunteer defense guards tasked with protecting teachers, students, and schools. While many of these attacks targeted the police or volunteer defense guards, they put teachers and students at risk, in some cases resulting in their injury or death. At least ten attacks of this kind occurred per year between 2013 and 2017, peaking in 2014 when over 30 attacks on teacher protection units occurred while they accompanied teachers to or from school.²⁰⁵⁶

In 2017, GCPEA documented five incidents affecting school students, teachers, and security personnel; four of the incidents allegedly targeted security forces protecting teachers, while the fifth attack reportedly targeted a teacher directly.²⁰⁵⁷ Several of these attacks were identified after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*, for instance:

- On June 20, 2017, an Islamic teacher was reportedly killed while leaving a mosque with his family in Nong Chik district, Pattani province. *Bangkok Post* reported the teacher was well-known for having worked with the government and community towards the restoration of peace in the far south.²⁰⁵⁸
- According to local media, an IED targeting a Territorial Defense Volunteers patrol detonated while the unit provided protection for a school in Mai Kaen district, Pattani province, on August 1, 2017. Two security volunteers were reportedly killed in the blast while four received minor injuries; no teachers or students were reported harmed.²⁰⁵⁹

GCPEA identified ten attacks in 2018,²⁰⁶⁰ an increase in the number of reported incidents compared to 2017. The UN also noted that in 2018 some attacks were launched near schools, including incidents targeting security forces that were protecting teachers.²⁰⁶¹ Examples included:

- Local media outlet *The Nation* reported that on June 6, 2018, unidentified actors allegedly detonated an explosive device near Ban Sa Kho school in Muang district, Yala province, when the school's teacher protection unit arrived. One defense volunteer was reportedly injured and transported to Yala Hospital for treatment.²⁰⁶²
- On August 8, 2018, alleged separatists shot and killed a school security guard in Khok Pho district, Pattani province, according to local media reports.²⁰⁶³
- Local media outlet *The Nation* reported that on October 1, 2018, four unidentified assailants on motorcycles

allegedly fired AK-47 assault rifles at a school principal in Panareh district, Pattani province, on October 1, 2018. The school director escaped without injury.²⁰⁶⁴

- On December 23, 2018, six unidentified armed individuals allegedly attacked ten village defense volunteers protecting a school in Sai Buri, Pattani province, as reported in local media. The attackers reportedly gagged and tied up the volunteers before stealing their weapons and ammunition. For the safety of students and teachers, and so that police would have unencumbered access to the area, the school was closed for a day.²⁰⁶⁵
- Local media sources reported that on December 24, 2018, an explosive device allegedly planted by separatists detonated near eight police officers guarding teachers, injuring four officers, in Yaha district, Yala province.²⁰⁶⁶

In 2019, reported attacks affecting school students, teachers, and education personnel decreased compared to 2018. Five reports of such attacks were documented,²⁰⁶⁷ four of which involved defense volunteers, guards, or police protecting teachers and schools. Examples of these attacks included:

- Local media reported that on January 10, 2019, unidentified armed individuals allegedly shot and killed four defense volunteers inside Bukoh school, in Yarang district, Pattani province, during school hours. The UN reported to media sources that at least one child was injured, and many others were at risk of psychological harm after witnessing the violent event.²⁰⁶⁸
- On January 25, 2019, an explosive device allegedly detonated in Krong Pinang district, Yala province, injuring three police officers who were guarding teachers, as well as three civilians, according to the *Bangkok Post* and *Benar News*.²⁰⁶⁹
- Local media outlets the *Bangkok Post* and *Chiang Rai Times* reported that on June 30, 2019, an unidentified armed individual allegedly shot and injured a religious studies teacher in front of Watthanatham Islam Phor Ming School in Panareh district, Pattani province.²⁰⁷⁰
- On September 19, 2019, unidentified armed individuals reportedly fired on security guards at Baan Siyoh School, while teachers and students arrived at the school, in Yaha district, Yala Province, according to *Daily News*. No injuries were reported; however, the attack allegedly left the school with several bullet holes in the perimeter wall.²⁰⁷¹ The UN reported that an IED attack occurred 50 meters from the school on February 6, 2018.²⁰⁷²

Attacks on higher education

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA collected approximately nine reports of attacks on higher education. As in the previous reporting period, university faculty were arrested or temporarily held for perceived opposition to the government, particularly following the 2014 coup when the *lèse-majesté* laws criminalizing insults to the Thai monarchy were more rigidly enforced. The separatist conflict in the southern provinces also continued to sporadically affect higher education during this reporting period, as in the last, including through IED explosions and gunfire. Between 2014 and 2016, reported attacks on higher education occurred at a rate of between two and three incidents per year.²⁰⁷³ In the current reporting period, attacks occurred at a similar rate, although there was a slight increase in 2017.

In 2017, GCPEA recorded at least five reported attacks on higher education, including one attack on facilities.²⁰⁷⁴ Three of these attacks were identified after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*. One newly identified incident was the reported detonation of at least one explosive device, and tires lit on fire, in front of Kanchana Technical College in Nong Chik district, Pattani province, on April 7, 2017, as reported in local media.²⁰⁷⁵

In 2018, two attacks on higher education were documented by Scholars at Risk and media sources:

- During a peaceful protest on April 9, 2018, in a location where Prime Minister Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha made a public appearance, three students displayed signs stating that people of Chulalongkorn University loved the “Prayuth Dictator.” On April 11, three students involved in the protest reported being threatened and surveilled by undercover police, including visits to the homes of two students, where they issued warnings against further protests. The undercover police also reportedly visited university staff to ask for details and information about the students.²⁰⁷⁶
- Members of a suspected non-state armed group reportedly planted IEDs in four districts across Pattani province

on May 20, 2018, according to *The Nation Thailand*. One of the explosives was allegedly detonated at a bank in front of Pattani Technical College; no injuries were reported.²⁰⁷⁷

Two attacks on higher education were reported in 2019:

- As covered by Scholars at Risk, Thai immigration officers reportedly briefly held and interrogated a Princeton University professor on February 9, 2019, in relation to his academic research and activism, before releasing him.²⁰⁷⁸
- Scholars at Risk reported that members of a suspected non-state armed group planted a bomb near the entrance of Fatoni University on August 4, 2019. No injuries or deaths were reported, although campus property was damaged in the explosion.²⁰⁷⁹ *Bangkok Post* also covered the event but referred to “unidentified men” as having carried out the attack.²⁰⁸⁰

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