

THE LOGICAL FALLACIES IN THAILAND POLITICAL CRISIS (2013-2014)*

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Abstract

Since 2006 coup by Thai military to oust the government of Thaksin Shinawatra, Thailand has been seriously divided by two political ideas, pro-liberal democracy and pro Thai style democracy. Both sides have been using many explanations to persuade people and discredit each other. The purpose of this article is to study reasons used by both sides in order to bring to light their logical fallacies and will use the People's Democratic Reform Committee (คปภ.) era to study the fallacies of both sides. There are possibly up to 300 logical fallacies but 7 Kind of logical fallacies are presented in this article because these 7 fallacies are used often and heard.

Keywords: Logical Fallacy, Thailand Political Crisis

Introduction

Logic can be defined as “the science that evaluates arguments” (Hurley, 2000: 1). Argument is a “group of statements, one or more of which (the premises) are claimed to provide support for, or reasons to believe, one of the others (the conclusion)” (Hurley, 2000: 1). In other word, Logic is a science that evaluates if the said cause (premises) leads to the said effect (conclusion). The argument is a bad one if there is no connection between the premises and conclusion and so it’s a bad logic.

This article will evaluate arguments used by people supporting an election (pro-election camp/PEC) and people supporting a reform before election (pro-reform camp/PRC) during the political crisis in Thailand from November 2013 onward.

The perspective of the two camps are very different that the compromise is almost impossible. The people supporting the election such as Yingluck Shinawatra, Thai PM at that time, “believes” that “This election is one (of) the most meaningful ones because it will be the guiding light to determine the future of our country under the democratic system.” (Chomchuen, 2014) While the people supporting reform before election such as Suthep Thaugsuban, the protest leader, “believes” that “we are not against election, in fact we want election but it must be fair and just one.” (RSUTV)

The reason that the article uses the word “believe” in the quotation mark is because this article won’t judge anyone if he/she is sincere or not. The Article’s main objective is to evaluate arguments in term of logical quality regardless of the speaker/writer’ sincerity.

Logical fallacies

The logical book called *logically fallacious* (Bennett, 2012) will be used as a main tool studying the arguments. While the writer of the book is by no means famous, the world of logic doesn’t need anything other than a validity of argument.

* A paper presented in the 1st International Conference on Security Studies held on 25th June 2014 at Town in Town Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

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Let's start by looking at the first logical fallacy of the article. I will start by evaluating the argument of the PEC first. The classic argument from PEC is that "election=solution, unlawful PM= Dead End (Prachatai, 2014) In term of logical fallacy, this argument possibly falls under the "Accident Fallacy". Here is the definition from the book "When an attempt is made to apply a general rule to all situations, when clearly there are exceptions to the rule. Simplistic rules or laws rarely take into consideration legitimate exceptions, and to ignore these exceptions is to bypass reason to preserve the illusion of a perfect law. People like simplicity and would often rather keep simplicity at the cost of rationality."

Easily speaking, it means that you are so strict that you don't accept any legitimate exception. Which brings us to another complicated debate if the "reform before election (no election for now)" is legitimate exception or not. But the definition of legitimacy is very problematic one so this article will not go that far but I want to clarify that if the reform is indeed legitimate, the view that argues "election=solution, unlawful PM= Dead End" is a logical fallacy. But if the reform is not legitimate and can't be seen as an exception then the argument is not a fallacy.

Another logical fallacy is "Personal Inconsistency" (Ad Hominem (Tu quoque)). Here is the definition from the book. "Claiming the argument is flawed by pointing out that the one making the argument is not acting consistently with the claims of the argument." (ว่าแต่เขาอิหนา เป็นอย่าง)

A good example of "personal inconsistency" used against Suthep Thaugsuban (prominent figure of the PRC) is that Suthep is also an dishonest/dirty politician so his anti-Thaksin campaign is unacceptable. (Kapook, 2014) Calling it a logical fallacy may sound weird because we are used to rely on this kind of logically fallacy and it's actually acceptable by our common sense. The main weak point of the "personal inconsistency" is that the truth of the statement, aimed against a "bad" guy, is often neglected just because the offender, Suthep Thaugsuban, is also a "bad" guy. It doesn't matter if Suthep is bad or not but it does matter if Thaksin/Red Shirt/Election before Reform is as bad as what Suthep has said.

We have already evaluated some of the arguments of the PEC as logical fallacies. Now let's take a look at the logical fallacy from the PRC. The first obvious fallacy is the fallacy of "Appeal to Fear".

Here is the definition from the book "When fear, not based on evidence or reason, is being used as the primary motivator to get others to accept an idea, proposition, or conclusion."

The kind of statement that the reform is a necessary thing to do because it will prevent the disaster brought by election (Manager, 2014) is a good example for the fallacy of appeal to fear. While the disaster brought by election is probably true, the reform is executed out of fear not the evidence or reason. The reform is believed to be the only necessary tool available and it doesn't have any prior plan to support it. The protest starts from the anti-amnesty campaign not from the reform campaign per se. Easily speaking, How can PRC be certain that the reform will also prevent the disaster?

Let's take a look at another form of logical fallacy, "Causal Reductionism". It's the fallacy of "Assuming a single cause or reason when there were actually multiple causes or reasons." This fallacy is often associated with the reformists. The main objective of the reformists is to completely destroy the "Thaksin regime" (Manager, 2014). It's probably true many bad things have occurred during that Thaksin regime but it doesn't automatically mean that Thaksin regime is Thailand's sole political problem. Are Thaksin and his group the only dishonest/dirty politicians in Thailand? Are the reformists really want to reform Thailand's politics or just want to destroy Thaksin regime?

The article have now evaluated that both sides have a problem with their arguments. PEC can be associated with “Accident Fallacy” and “Personal Inconsistency” while PRC can be associated with “Appeal to Fear” and “Causal Reductionism”

But there is also a logical fallacy that is used by both sides. It is called the “Strawman Fallacy” which is “substituting a person’s actual position or argument with a distorted, exaggerated, or misrepresented version of the position of the argument.” Easily speaking, strawman fallacy is the attacking against the attacker’s distorted, exaggerated and misrepresented own version of target not the actual version of the target itself. One of the arguments used by PRC is that the people supporting election have a limited understanding of democracy because they (PEC) believe that democracy is election. (Manager, 2014) This is the distorted view regarding some of the PEC. One of the prominent figure of PEC regards election as a tool to counter the power of the traditional power such as the military and the bureaucracy. (Prachatai, 2014) From his point of view, it’s not that democracy is election but election is a tool to fight something that is obviously not democracy.

But the strawman fallacy is also committed by the PEC too. One of the good example is the believe that the PRC are trying to stop and destroy democracy. It’s the distorted view because from the PRC’ s point of view they are trying to make democracy a fair and quality democracy by reforming it first and they are also protecting democracy from bad politicians such as Thaksin.

Both sides probably believe in election but for the time being, PRC don’t believe it’s a good idea to support election while the PEC don’t believe it’s a good idea to halt election because it will give rise to the traditional power. The point is they have a different priority. What is the main problem in Thailand, Traditional power or Thaksin? The PRC thinks it’s Thaksin while some of the PEC think it’s traditional power.

Strawman Fallacy is not the only fallacy used by both sides. The fallacy of “Appeal to Popularity” is another one. The definition is “using the popularity of a premise or proposition as evidence for its truthfulness.” Easily speaking, something is good or true because of its popularity. This kind of logical fallacy can be easily associated with red shirt who thinks Thaksin is some kind of godfather (Matichon, 2011) just because a lot of people vote for someone or certain party doesn’t mean that popular person or party is automatically good. For example, the high popularity of whisky doesn’t make whisky better than unpopular fruit juice in term of healthy drink options. The PRC link the PEC with this kind of logical fallacy and logically the PRC are probably right since the PEC care the outcome of the election so much so that they don’t accept anything other than the election’s outcome. But the problem is the PRC also use the fallacy of “appeal to popularity” themselves.

They don’t believe in the quality of number but why do they always claim that there are many people support them? They don’t believe in the quality of the number of the PEC but they do believe in the quality of number of themselves. They use popularity to counter popularity.

The next logical fallacy, which is used by both sides, is called “Cherry Picking”, which happens “when only select evidence is presented in order to persuade the audience to accept a position, and evidence that would go against the position is withheld. The stronger the withheld evidence, the more fallacious the argument.” Look at the logical form below

“Evidence A and evidence B is available.

Evidence A supports the claim of person 1.

Evidence B supports the counter claim of person 2.

Therefore, person 1 presents only evidence A.”

This kind of fallacy is heavily used by both the PEC and PRC. The PEC, for example, uses this kind of fallacy by showing the violence caused by PRC without acknowledging the violence caused by themselves (Thai Democratic Movement in Scandinavia, 2014) The PRC

is no different though, They always show the violence caused by PEC without acknowledging the violence caused by themselves (Youtube, 2009)

Conclusion

In term of logical quality, this article shows that both PRC and PEC have a problem with their argument. It might be argued from the political perspective that this is a fight between good guy and bad guy by any available means. If that's the case, I am not going to argue. But from the logical perspective, It's just plain wrong.

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