



The development of political participation of Thai youth Wang Thonglang District Bangkok (CF17)

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Abstract

The objective of the study on “The development of political participation of Thai youth Wang Thonglang District Bangkok” was to study on level of Development of Public Participation Thai youth Wang Thonglang District Bangkok. A Mixed Method approach was used for this research, starting from researching documents and related literature. After a conceptual framework has been determined, the Quantitative research method was applied. The group of people selected for the sample consists of Thai youth aged between 18-30 years from Wang Thonglang District Bangkok. A sample size of 400 people was calculated using Taro Yamane’s formula at reliability 95% for 400 samples and the simple random sampling method. Data was collected using Questionnaires and In-depth interviews. The interviewees were selected using Purposive Sampling Method and consisted of 10 people divided into 2 groups of male and female. The qualitative research methods including Textual Analysis, Contextual Analysis and Content Analysis were used to support the Quantitative Data.

The results from the analysis was then used to synthesize a Model which the researcher has named “Development participation of people on political conflict crisis of Thailand during 2549-2557 BE” and consist of 8 factors; 1) Membership of social group, 2) Political cognition, 3) Political development, 4) Political information perception, 5) Political conscious, 6) Political ideology, 7) Political participation and 8) Political conflict. The body of knowledge gained from this research could be applied to the current political situation at the time for maximum efficiency in reducing damage and creating harmony to benefit the people, society and nation in the future.

Keywords: Development of Public Participation

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Introduction

Before the regime change on 24 June 1932 (2475 BE), Thailand has been ruled under a “Democratic Monarchy”. For 87 years from that day up until now, the majority of Thai people have had very little knowledge about the Democratic system, because it was only democratic in its power structure, whereas the people did not truly have political power, especially during the revolution.)Sombat Thomrongthanyawong, 2549: 706) That is why the people have not been properly instructed nor encouraged to learn about democracy as consistently as they should have been. Thus, they are unable to appreciate the true value of democracy. Even though more Thai people have become interested in democracy and Thailand has become more democratic compared to the past, it still appears that political development is very slow compared to changing global environment. The current globalized society has brought foreign culture from the outside world into Thailand, which has resulted in certain advantages such as increased economic prosperity and a higher rate of national growth.)Surapong Chainam, 2545: 27) However, there are also disadvantages. For instance, participation in political activity is being overshadowed by capitalistic gains, and the sense of “Thainess” along with the appreciation of Thai traditions and culture cannot pass down to the younger generation. Moreover, the fact that Thailand is a member of ASEAN has brought in immigrants from neighboring countries making Thailand more culturally diverse.)Narong Phophueksanand, 2556 : 60). Most importantly is the fact that the current political participation in Thailand has caused some youth groups to become annoyed, bored, and disinterested in politics. Even so, some youth still recognize the importance of politics and keep themselves informed of political news who may receive inaccurate information from non-credible sources, including some of the youth have voted for the first time. Thanks to globalization, Social

Media has become the main source of information for Thai youth which can help foster understanding about the duty and responsibility under a “Democratic Monarchy”

In order to encourage the Thai population, especially youth, to become more aware of the importance of duty, rights and responsibility, to become informed about the democratic regime that it supports a culture of democratic political participation. The researcher intends to study the form of political develop among youth, the level of development of political participation, and related factors that cause youth to become interested in political participation.

Research Objective

1. To study the level of development of participation of Thai Youth.
2. To study the influence of development of participation of Thai Youth.

Literature Review

The widespread political awakening and participation of people happened on 14 October 1973 (2516 BE). Students joined together to call for a constitution to oppose the government of Thanom Kittikachorn, Praphas Charusathien and Narong Kittikachorn.) Thinapan Nakata: 2545, Thongchai Winichakul, 2548). In a cross-sectional study investigating the time period throughout the development of democracy in Thailand, an interesting issue regarding political awakening was discovered. That is how The Red Shirt uprising has had a significant role in awakening political awareness within the rural population. However, it was achieved through illegal methods such as overthrowing the government, political system, economy and society with the use of violence, and yet it was found that the participation of the people still lacks political power.) Nattapoll Chaiching, 2551: 16)



Research Method

This research was conducted using mixed method, employing theoretical study to analyze and synthesize the Theoretical Framework as well as the Quantitative Research Methodology using Survey Research.

The sample used for this research consists of 400 male and female Thai youth aged between 18-30 years old in Wang Thonglang District. The questionnaires have been tested for quality using 2 methods: Content Validity test using 5 experts and Reliability test using 30 people with similar qualifications as the selected samples. A confidence value of 0.7 was achieved for all categories.

Qualitative Research Methodology through in-depth interviews of 10 interviewees.

1. Key informants used for selecting specific groups of people involved in political activity and are willing to provide information, consisting of Thai youth, most of which are University Students.

2. In-depth Interview from the concept of studying political participation and socialization through family, community, religion and school institution. Data was collected by entering the location selected for the research to interview the respondents about the meaning, characteristics and attitudes towards political participation and the ideal form of political participation desired by youth.

3. Descriptive Analysis. The data collected from interview and observation was divided into categories based on objectives. Next, the data is linked to concepts and

theories and other related studies along with the context that is consisted with the study. Then, successive approximation method is used to analyze and separate the data collected from interviews into categories based on different topics. Finally, the data is interpreted to develop an understanding about the attitude of Thai Youth who have been exposed to participation and socialization.

Research Scope

1. Content Scope: The Characteristics and Attitudes towards the political participation of Thai youth so that the information can be used to create guidelines for promoting political participation.

2. Research Area Scope: Wang Thonglang district, Bangkok. The study is about the development of political participation of Thai youth in Wang Thonglang District, Bangkok. The respondents consists of Thai Youth aged between 18-30 years old who are interested in politics with 400 questionnaires distributed and then the data collected to be processed and divided into categories for basic information , attitude and opinions about political participation , as well as influential factors such as family , religion , society and educational institutions.

The results are as follows:

Objective 1 : To study the development of political participation of Thai Youth van be concluded as follows.



Table 1 : The level of political participation of Thai Youth in each category

The level of political participation of Thai Youth in each category	Average mean	Sequence
1. Membership in a Social Group: Overall level Average	3.54	4
2. Political Cognition: Overall level Average	3.23	7
3. Political Development: Overall level Average	3.21	5
4. Political Information Perception: Overall level High	3.63	3
5. Political Conscious: Overall level Average	3.29	6
6. Political Ideology: Overall level High	3.67	1
7. Political Participation: Overall level High	3.65	2
8. Political Participation: Overall level Average	3.23	8

Political Ideology scored at the highest level, which shows that the respondents, who are mostly youth, highly prioritize the development of political participation. That is because youth is considered the future of the nation with the potential to bring a great change to the country. Therefore, the right of each and every youth should be used responsibly in order to truly reflect the will of the people. All of this would be impossible if the Thai youth still lack knowledge and understanding about the problems in Thai society, especially when it comes to politics. Thus, it is the responsibility of family and educational institutions to provide that knowledge for the youth.

The second highest is Political participation, which shows that youth give considerable importance to political participation, whether it would be expressing political opinions to friends and family, using their right to vote which is equally given to everyone. Even receiving accurate information about politics is not much less important, because unfiltered information

and distorted facts could lead to incorrect perceptions and attitudes.

Objectives 2: To study the influence of developing political participation.

According to the Multiple Linear Regression Coefficient between the 8 variables, it was found that all 8 variables can be predicted, which can then be written in a Standard Equation form. Based on the analysis of the results, the researcher has analyzed and synthesized a model which was named “The development of political participation of Thai youth who have different political views in Thailand.”

- The development of political participation of Thai youth who have different political views in Thailand knowledge and understanding, ideology, social groups, political development, political consciousness, political perception.

Discussion of the Results

The results from the study of “political participation of Thai youth can be discussed under these topics.



1.) Membership of social groups.

It was found that attitudes towards political participation can be divided into “Roles in political participation” and “Support for Participation from Societal Institutions”. According to key informants, there are 5 main Societal Institutions: Family, Educational Institutions, Community, Governmental Institutions, and Religion. The Institution with the most influence, based on the opinion of youth, is Family. The family is the closest to an individual youth and is the first institution to develop knowledge, values and beliefs, which gives it the most influence. Second largest influence is Educational Institutions by providing knowledge and holding activities regarding participation

Support for participation from societal institutions can be represented as follows: The largest form of political participation is “using the right to vote” (87%) according to respondents, but even though it is indeed an important form of participation in which everyone has equal rights, it is only short term and happens during election period. Second largest is discussing political issues (53%). Most youth say that is something that can be done anytime, but mostly only within a family or small social group that there are familiar with. The smallest form of political participation, which doesn’t happen very often, is expressing political expression with protests due to the fear of violence from political opposition.

2.) Political Cognition

It was found that more than half of the respondents play their part in political participation by providing knowledge and understanding in politics to others (66.66%), which would be by talking to close acquaintances only because word-of-mouth is the easiest and most convenient form. Second is by also creating political motivation. Besides simply talking, they can also persuade others to share the same

political belief as them. Most people, however, wouldn’t want to become an advocate of a political belief because of fear of violence.

It should be noted children who grow up in Thai society tend to start becoming interested in politics in their University years; it is the age when they start doing activities, opening the door to society, and becoming interested in political news and other affairs not taught in textbooks. The problem is the time frame when the children start entering society. For those who entered university and became interested in politics in the year 2557 BE. when politics was closed due to a seizure of power, or for graduates in 2561 BE. , these groups of people have never lived under an open political system. They have only seen a parliament with only a legislative branch, no political parties, and have never witnessed earnest scrutiny of the government. How would such a closed political environment have an impact on such children? Up until then, most political activities have already received much attention. Despite the military surveillance and people occasionally being taken into custody to have their attitude readjusted, political activities still happened on a regular basis. Children who grew up in a closed political system will have different opinions from that of the younger generation, which have caused the latter to become so fed up with and detached from politics that they don’t want to get involved. On election days they might feel indifferent and refrain from voting. For instance if the voting day is close to their exam they would rather concentrate on studying than go out to vote, or if they are required to vote in their home province they might not want to spend the time and money just to travel back.

Therefore, election commission needs to reiterate to the children that voting is a responsibility of all Thai citizens. In addition, educational institutions need to encourage voting at a more practical level by providing detailed information about the



election process and teach children step-by-step. Social media may also be helpful in presenting such information in a way that concise and easy to understand.

3.) Political Development.

There is a huge difference when comparing the roles of Youth in the Era of May 1992 (2535 BE). Most of the core leaders are from the middle class which are called the “Mobile Phone Mob” who grew up during the era of 14 October 1973 (2516 BE) or 6 October 1976 (2519 BE), while the students became the sub-core group. Nowadays, the student movement is not as powerful as in the past when the Yellow and Red Shirt protests took place, and without a central leadership or organization to assemble the students or organize rallies, they have become even less unified than before. Educational institutions should provide understanding about democracy which the students are already interested in. But the main reason that they’re not participating in activities is that they want to be their own leaders. They want to have their own roles and personal space rather than following others even if they have the same political views and objectives.

Therefore, political movements need to engage with students and create a network system of representatives in which they can have their own roles to fulfill. The new generation of youth yearn for respect and recognition from people around them, for instance, they might want to get more likes on their Facebook or Instagram for participating in public activities. The power that students have is limited and not clearly consolidated as before, rather it is fragmented into each of their own personal spaces, which is vastly different from the student movement back in 14 October 1973 (2516 BE) or 6 October 1976 (2519 BE). Participation in political movements for the new generation needs to create a sense of individuality, joint partnership, or even a full ownership of the movement. Political movements need to

have a more equal, horizontal network rather than a vertical chain of command. There is no need for club leader or president, but rather activities held together for themselves, not in the name of faculties or universities. They could come up with a topic or public policy and push for its implementation by proposing them to political parties.

One of the reason is that everyone has the power of Social Media in their hands; they have channels for spreading their views online so that followers can share their views, which is can be similar to Viral marketing but for politics. It seems as if the student movement does retain some latent power, only it is now scattered throughout society. If any political party could come up with a new form of communication to reach these target groups, that power could be used to their advantage such as by influencing voting scores. However, the major challenge is that modern political research cannot keep up with the changing behavior of the new generation. That is because Thai society has become more complicated than in the past and the fact that technology is advancing rapidly, whereas many political researchers and analysts are still concentrating philosophical thought and others more interested in institutional research (such as constitutional drafting or election rules). Both of these groups of researchers still rely on old methods of research design and data collection, making them unable to keep up with the behaviors of the newer generation.

There needs to be a promotion of shared understanding among youth about legal principles by creating a public platform for discussion to encourage debate and understanding about ideal form of political participation.

1.) Youth need a space and channel for expressing political views (such as a platform for exchanging views about various political issues because as of now there is no public space open for them to discuss openly and concretely.



2.) Youth still believe that election is important in a democracy because it's the way to select a true representative of the people who can solve their problems.

3.) Participation in selection their own local governor such as a community leader, because they believe that a representative selected from within their own community will be able to solve their problems more efficiently than someone selected from outside. A local leader would have a better understanding of local problems as well as the solution rather than acting according to policies from the central government.

This view is in line with that of Brambor, Thomas, Clark and Golder (2005) who suggests that Political development is the objective, and the political processes that societies desires is the society that have a high political development of a society that is successful in political development. It could help promote the participation of Thai youth and increase potential of the civil society in overseeing and scrutinizing the use of power by all 3 branches of government (Executive, Judicial, and Legislative). All parties invoke the rule of law and fair justice system as a pretense for their own benefits, which risks eroding the reliability of the justice system in the long run, so it need to be addressed to resolve conflict and create sustainable harmony within the nation.

4. Political Information Perception

Media portrayal of news is a significant factor that can leads to disunity and escalation of conflict in society. Presenting information with provocative language to stir up anger, or using propaganda to encourage violence can further widen the rift within Thai society. Spreading false, distorted, or partial information can cause misunderstanding. Not to mention the increasing number of channels for receiving information as well as media organizations that lack sense of ethics or social responsibility being negligent about presenting accurate information to the public. This is in line with (Lerpop Sorat et al 2554)

who found that the role of social of media in encouraging political participation has clearly represented how information and political news can be a tool for investigating politics and a space for weaving political understanding.

However, how well the media carries out its responsibilities depend on different political eras, when political power comes from different sources. Whether power comes from a coup with military backing in a more volatile environment in the past, or even in the present when executive power is based on fair elections and the constitution, the media can still have problems fulfilling its role due to other interfering factors. For instance, a media organization that focuses on commercial gain or new media channels created by technology makes it difficult to control with the current available mechanism. Government media especially needs to maintain neutrality to give everyone an equal opportunity, in turn all sides need to stop encouraging violence against each other through media. Presenting the news in a way that provokes or challenges the opponent should be avoided as it spoils the atmosphere of harmony. The media is still used as a tool for political gains by being a channel for spreading information for attacking the opposite side in a way that twists the facts rather than fulfilling duties ethically.

5. Political Conscious

Globalization has changed economics, politics and society, which has led to a major upheaval affecting the old foundations of society and escalating existing conflicts into violence. This is in line with Swindler (2005) who suggests that developing the political system into a democracy is related to the body of knowledge in the democratic system, political culture, and political development which needs to be integrated into harmoniously. A change in economics that enables the population to be independent can create a civil conscious better than simply waiting for order from the central



government, and even affects the feudalistic system in the past, as well as changing the role of the state into a welfare state which is viewed that rights provided by the government belongs to the people rather than to create a synthetic change in the Economic structure.

This is in line with Blais, Andre, and Simon Labb'e-St-Vincent (2011) who suggests that the political development of an industrial society is related to economic development. This will cause Thailand to fully become capitalist and creates a new capitalist group such as telecommunications, social media and entertainment, which can expand more than old capitalist groups such as commercial banks, financial institutions, retail businesses and major industrial groups.

6. Political Ideology

It's a factor that builds a connection between social groups that should cooperate in all sectors and create a motivational role to create peace and harmony which will be the first step in leading the country towards stability. Previous rivals who have one been at odds with each other will now need to negotiate and communicate more reasonably, reduce ill will and respect each other more, which will be a way of narrowing the gap and reducing obstacles towards peace within a society. The process of peace takes time, patience and cooperation from all sides. All sides need to stop actions that create conflict and ruin the atmosphere of harmony, using reason rather than emotions in considering various issues, respect each other's rights and liberties, and reducing the mindset of trying to defeat your opponent or viewing the problem from one side only.

Therefore, cooperation that leads to harmony is one of the conditions that lead to success in other dimensions. If we can't build peace and harmony in a society, we would lose time and opportunity to be free from conflict and leaser to competition in that international stage that has caused Thailand to stagnate for a long time.

A new constitution needs to set clear goals and prevent the seizure of power from the military. This is in line with Carroll, Susan (2006) who suggests that political participation of the people is the level in which the people are eagerly interested in politics, which creates a sense of people who are on different sides. Social procedures can help fill in for the parts where the law cannot reach and creates an environment that supports harmony. This can be achieved through purposeful reform to create balance in the dimensions (realms) of politics, economics and society in developing the country and encouraging mutual respect.

7. Political Participation

The researcher has categorized the types of political participation into 3 types, Characteristics of Political Participation, Factors Related to Participation, and Political Atmosphere

Characteristics of Political Participation, it was found that Thai youth participate by persuading people to use their right to vote as well as exchanging their views at the community and national level. Every time they vote they always keep in mind about the consequences of using their right and know of its significance that can affect themselves and the community. As for political movements, they are still afraid of influence or retaliation from their opponents.

Factors Related to Participation, it was found that most of the youth were taught and supported by families or experiences of relatives that have been passed down (80%) that is because the family is the closest and safest social institution for discussing politics, but it doesn't guarantee an understanding that leads to appropriate decisions in a social context.

Education is therefore the second most important in passing down accurate knowledge about rights and duties in a democracy. This will greatly affect their participation because when youth know about the effects of their participation, and



that it is what everyone does, it will make them more interested in participating.

However, when it comes to participation, the issue of economics needs to be considered as a priority. If families are facing economic problems, the youth are going to be more focus on making a stable living and have no leeway to think about political participation.

In terms of Political Atmosphere, it was found that (100%) of youth view that political atmosphere will affect their participation. If the political climate is peaceful, there will be more participation because they will have the space to use their right and call for various problems to be solved. If the political climate is not normal according to the democratic system¹, people will not have the space to use their rights or call for what they want.

Four Guidelines for promoting political participation of youth in various aspects as follows:

1.) Family has a large impact on creating political conscious to its members, so it should teach the importance of politics through family members

2.) Schools courses should contain lessons regarding politics from the basic level so that children can absorb the content.

3.) Community still has very little role in supporting political participation, so they should create a political culture so that youth can be instilled with values of protection one's own rights.

4.) Religion has a very small role, but it could at least provide teachings of being a good person or norms for selecting a good leader.

5.) Governmental agencies have an important role in promoting political knowledge, values and behaviors because they are directly responsible and involved in implementing government policies.

Five Problems and obstacles in political participation of youth in various aspects

1.) Education on politics is not sufficient that it causes a lack of knowledge

and understanding of politics and the civil duties of each person.

2.) Various outside factors have made youth so uneager and disinterested in politics until it becomes a social problem.

3.) The financial and economic issues of families have made Youth more concerned about making ends meet and getting a job more than political participation.

4.) They are afraid of the dangers of being involved with politics and become the target of an opponent.

This is in line with Carney, Dana, Jost, Gosling, and Potter (2008) who suggest that political development will reinforce the nation-state. A society that reforms its politics from their old system to one that has the capacity to maintain social order will be able to mobilize resources to benefit society efficiently. Therefore, the attitudes of government agencies needs to change to satisfy the needs of people equally and efficiently, and to increase strength and potential for society and the community to be independent and self-sustaining. The government should reduce its administrative and executive roles, and decentralize power to the people so that they can be the initiators and operators. This will support the democratic regime and strengthen politics in the private sector.

8. Political Conflict.

The grassroots of conflicts in society often changes naturally and is unavoidable. Therefore, when a conflict does happen there needs to be methods for resolving such conflicts in order to sustain society and its development. Sometimes, a conflict can bring about positive outcomes such as being a catalyst for development in society, but without efficient conflict resolution mechanisms it could end in violence and disaster to society.

When conflict happens, there is a choice to either use violent or non-violent methods to achieve results. Furthermore, the longer a conflict drags on, the higher the stakes for victory and defeat becomes,



eventually leading to mobilization of force and manpower and making demands against the opponent in which neither side can compromise. Conflicts that persist can open up more issues for dispute. Attacking the behavior that represents the extremism of the opponent is one of the main strategies used to galvanize support and maintain the justification for one's own side. Each time there is a rally or assembly to demand for rights or push for changes by using the freedom of political assembly, weapons may be used to provoke anger, resentment and the use of force. The state may be required to retaliate in order to maintain the peace, yet the excessive use of force to disperse rallies can also cause damages and loss as well.

This is in line with Kenski and Jamieson (2000) who suggest that political development is the mobilization of force and potential power, having the ability to use executive power efficiently. Freedom of assembly is one of the basic rights in a democracy which needs approval and protection by the state, but it does not mean that people in an assembly are free to do whatever they please. Their actions need to be in accordance with the Constitution of Thailand, which states that assemblies must be done peacefully without weapons. Participants should strictly uphold the law and be considerate of the rights of other people who are not involved. They should also cooperate with officials such as medical agencies, security officers, media companies, and humanitarian officers so that they can operate freely.

Suggestions

1. All sides should have a basic understanding of the basic principles of Democratic regime, their rights and liberties under the constitution, and the main points of international obligations on human rights, support the transparent mechanism for investigating into corruption, maintain liberty and neutrality, and support the investigation of civil society.

2. Build awareness and create a reminder for society to learn from past civil conflicts and promote change at a structural level with the objective of balance in the realm of politics, economics, and society. Have a vision to develop the country based on the stability of humans and legal principles. Promote the values of a multicultural society where people can live together with respect and honor, without taking advantage of each other.

3. Establish measures to prevent incidents before it's too late, so that society can learn the lessons of political conflict. Create a society with the qualifications and skills in dealing with conflict and disputes through peaceful means.

4. Create a space for participation of people from all sectors and the sense of ownership of the process of reforming the country and create harmony. Set up rules for living together under a democratic monarchy.

5. Make harmony and reconciliation a national agenda in which all sectors need to cooperate to make it happen.

6. All politicians need to uphold moral and ethical principles in their job. The government should improve the process of recruiting appropriate people into the political system to prevent people who lack ethics and consciousness holding a status in politics, and incentivize ethical, skillful people into politics for the efficient development of Thailand.

7. The state needs to build confidence within agencies in the justice system and make sure they are operating without bias or interference. Agencies that enforce laws need to show their neutrality by strictly upholding legal principles, promote the mutual understanding of rule of law, and support research into maintaining rule of law in Thailand.

8. The Army should uphold democracy and solve problems peacefully, by not supporting and trying avoiding a coup at all costs, and protect the freedom of expression according to the legal framework



which includes protecting people from being violated by such freedoms.

9. The media needs to be careful and responsible to society by presenting accurate, complete, and impartial information for the public according to work-ethics. The state must also support a system for preventing interference of the media and refrain from using measures of suppressing or influencing the media, or other measures that affect the freedom of expression of the media.

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