

## Political Participation Factors Influence Mode of Participation of Students in Thailand

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research is to study the factors of political participation those are psychological cognitive trait, social environment, political environment, modernization and urbanization and political socialization influence the mode of participation in Thailand. This research was a quantitative research. Population were the students from 5 universities in Thailand, 697 students were randomly selected from the population. The result of the research indicated that five factors of political participation there are psychological cognitive trait, social environment, political environment, modernization and urbanization and political socialization influenced mode of political participation 66.2% ( $R^2=.662$ ) statically significance at .01

**Keywords** : political participation; mode of participation

### Introduction

Political Participation and Engagement in the Early Years of Thai Democracy. On June of 24<sup>th</sup>, 1932, small group of military and civilian officials calling themselves the People's Party, seized control of the government and brought an end the 800 years absolute monarchy in Siam known as Thailand since 1939. Thailand began its democratization process since then, particularly after King Prajadhipok (King Rama VII) signed Thailand's first permanent written constitution on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1932. However, the effects of the change on Thai people were not immediately apparent, and successive shifts in power did not greatly disturb the placid surface of daily life. In order to minimize internal resistance and avoid the dangers of foreign intervention that they thought civil discord might invite, the People's Party initially stayed in the background and drew up long-term program for political development. According to the political development program, half of the member of National Assembly would be selected and appointed by the People's Party promised to allow a fully elected democracy only when at least half of the population had completed primary education or ten years had passed, whichever came first REF. As a result, the first National Assembly election was held in November 1993 through an indirect electoral system in which the voters at the sub district (Tambon) level elected local representatives who

would then choose between candidates for the National Assembly. As the outcome of this electoral process, the first national assembly included numerous senior officials of the old regime, amounting to approximately one-third of the total membership.

Thailand held its first direct election in November 1937, and only 40.2 percent of the electorate participated in choosing half of the National Assembly. The second direct election was held a year later in the same month, but still the National Assembly remained half-appointed and the voter turnout dropped to only about 35 percent. No new election was held until 1946 due to World War II. Prime Minister Plaek Pibunsongkhram, during this period, experimented with Italian Fascism and mixture of elements of the Japanese bushido, trying to organize, discipline, and militarize Thai society, which was carried out in a highly authoritarian manner. Thus, during the first two decades of constitutional monarchy, the concept of democracy remained alien to the majority of Thai people for much of that time. Democracy in Thailand has undergone a long process of refinement and adjustment in order to produce a political system specific to the needs of establishing the Thai nation rather than of providing the ordinary citizens with the rights to govern or at least, opportunities for political participation.

Thailand then experienced a short period of democracy during the postwar era, when the 1964 Constitution provided for a fully elected House of Representatives and a Senate chosen by the House. Nevertheless, on November 8, 1947, amid internal conflict between parliamentarians and the political chaos that followed the mysterious death of King Ananda Mahidol (King Rama VIII), the military overthrew the elected government of Admiral Thawal Thamrongnavasawat prime minister, 1946-1947, and restored power to Pibun. Thai institutions, during 1947-1958, were held in the hands of elitists with great support from the military. Even though the House of Representatives elections were held four times in January 1948, February 1952, February 1957, and December 1957, public participation in these elections remained low with approximately 40 percent on average voter turnout. Moreover, the election results were criticized by the public, particularly middle classes in Bangkok, as the product of a 'dirty' electoral process. (Suchit, 1996) Following the 1957 election, there was considerable public dissatisfaction and even demonstrations against the election results. This kind of instable event did not lead to the improvement of election; in contrast, it created another coup led by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who abolished the parliament and the constitution, placed

a ban on political parties and unions, and established the 'Revolutionary Party' and a highly authoritarian regime. An external threat by Communism allowed the military government of Sarit prime minister, 1959-1963 and Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn prime minister, 1963-1973 to develop and maintain a series of authoritarian governments for the next fourteen years with strong support from the US government and the World Bank.

Citizens Uprisings: The two Turning Points of Thai Public Participation. The first stage of a turning point in the Thai democratization process was reached in October 1973, when the student-led popular uprising overthrew the corrupt and unpopular military government of Field Marshal Thanom. A coalition of workers, farmers, students, and members of the middle class began to mobilize for democracy, clearly demonstrating the potential for political change at the grassroots level. Legitimacy was withdrawn from the nation's top military leaders, who were forced to go into exile, after the use of violence to attack masses of Thai citizens in the streets of Bangkok. Without its authoritarian leaders, Thailand's military returned to its barracks, at least temporarily, permitting the expansion of democratic space in which human rights become more respected, the media received more freedom to criticize politicians and governments, and political parties had greater opportunity to form and play an expensive role in Thai parliamentary politics. However, the 1973-76 period of civilian rule did not provide harmonious politics and widespread public participation. Rather, it was a period of great political conflict and competition among polarized people at the top of society who split into two ideological camps-left, progressive, and right, conservative.

After the 1973 student upheaval, the 1974 Constitution was promulgated, applying several new electoral rules, including a rule that made membership in a political party a requirement for election to the House of Representatives. When the House of Representatives election was held in January 1975, 42 political parties and 2,199 candidates contested for 269 seats, while 47.17 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots. Another house election under the 1974 Constitution was held on April 4, 1976, and the voter turnout dropped to 43.99 percent. Moreover, ordinary people, whose participation improved very little in the 1975 and 1976 House of Representatives elections, were mobilized and brought into the left-right conflict. The time that the political space was opened (Girling, 1981; Morell and Chai-Anan, 1981; and Hewison, 1997) was short and ended in October 1976 when protesting students, who gathered to oppose Field Marshal Thanom's return from his exile,

were killed or imprisoned by the right-wing Village Scouts and the military. An inability of the government to control the situation provided a perfect opportunity for the military to step in again. This bloody restoration of authoritarianism not only brought armed forces back into power but also illustrated the residual strength of conservative forces (McCargo, 2002)

However, as it had mobilized several group of Thai people (not only residents of Bangkok, laborers, taxi drivers, and businessmen but also ordinary villagers, farmers, and provincial elites), political conflict during the 1973-1976 period indicated an imperative task facing Thailand, to devise political system that can balance participation with stability, change with order (Morell and Chai-Anan, 1981). Unlike strong authoritarian era, the military was now force to share some of its absolute political power with elected members of Parliament (Kobkua, 2003), thereby proposed a new form of military's control over the government. From late 1977 to 1988, there was an evolution of constitutional and parliamentary regime under several government led by former military leaders.

In order to loosen the authoritarianism, the government of General Kriangsak Chamanan prime minister, 1977-1980 and General Prem Tinsulanonda prime minister 1980-1988 allowed the expansion of the role of the parliament and political parties. Three consecutive House of Representatives election to 50.8 percent in 1983 and 61.3 percent in the 1986 election. Nevertheless, during their twelve years in power, both Kriangsak and Prem were never once running in an election, and it soon became clear that the polity established under both of them was one which appealed to conservatives, as decision making policy were not entrusted to popularly elected politicians but remained with an elite of civil and military bureaucrats and technocrats (Hewison, 1997). Many Thai scholars therefore labeled the form of government in this period as a 'half a page democracy' (prachathipatai khreung cai) (Kobkua, 2003), or 'semidemocracy' (Case 1996; Chai-anan, 1989; Neher, 1987) which is basically one form of limited/guided democracy. The major characteristic of the semidemocratic government of Thailand is that it is the form of government in which the prime minister, regardless of whether member of the House of Representatives, is elected by a coalition of parties, and major ministries are given to retired military figures, famous politicians, or high-level bureaucrats. Under this form of government, participation of many groups within the society is allowed but the military and top level bureaucrats continue to play most important role in determining the direction of country's politics. (Neher, 1987)

However, after the House of Representatives election on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1988, General Prem was forced by thousands of protesters integrated surrounding his house against the prospect of unelected premier. As a result, he decides to step aside, permitting a full-fledged civilian government of elected Chatchai Choonhawan prime minister 1988-1991, leader of Chart Thai Party, to be formed in August 1988.

The second stage of a turning point in Thai democratization process was reached on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1991, when the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC), led by General Sundhon Kongsompong, the Supreme Commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, took over the administration of the country. Instead of retaining power, as had happened in the event of military interventions in the past, the NPKC promulgated a provisional constitution and after a brief period, paved the way for a civilian interim government headed by Anand Panyarachun (prime minister 1991-1992), bureaucrat turned businessman. A majority of the new cabinet was composed of well-respected, experienced technocrats who were known for liberal thinking and belief in democracy. The interim government was entrusted with administering the country until a new constitution was promulgated and a general election held, scheduled for early 1992.

After the general election in March 1992, five political parties Rassadorn Party, Samkhee Dhamma Party, Social Action Party, Thai Citizens Party, and Chart Thai Party designed General Suchinda Kraprayun (prime minister, April-May 1992), a leading member of the NPKC who promised that he would not seek political power after the election, as the prime minister accompanied by the appointment to his cabinet of almost the same corrupt politicians who were ousted in the 1991 coup resulted in massive demonstrations in Bangkok and a few other cities in May 1992. Due to Suchinda's use of violence against the demonstrators, many prodemocracy campaigners died in the uprising. 'Black May' become a common name for the 17-20 May 1992 bloody confrontation between the unarmed prodemocracy demonstrators and the NPKC, backed by tanks and modern ammunition. In response to negative sentiments against the armed forces being used as political instruments, the military, since the end of the Black May event, decided to withdraw and disengage itself from active politics (Kobkua, 2003).

The Black May event of 1992 contributed to the realization within government that calls from civil advocacy organizations to introduce genuine political reform could no longer

be ignored (Arghiros, 2001). The pressure and desire for a new constitution was felt and expressed level of Thai society, resulting in the promulgation of a new constitution in 1997. This constitution is said to be different both in intent and in the way it was drafted. It was drafted with the specific aim of political reform and unlike previous constitution, through widespread consultation with the Thai people.

The constitution of 1997 has been known as the ‘people’s constitution’ because it is the first Thai constitution in which ordinary people had opportunity to participate in various stages of drafting process. Several reasons can be applied to explain this notion. First, in the composition of the Constitution Drafting Assembly, seventy-three of ninety-nine members were provincial representatives who had been directly elected among citizens (who are willing to be a constitution drafter) of each province and then these representations were approved by the parliament. Second, during the drafting process, there was public consultation and debate, including a series of public hearings across the nation that was organized as a significant part of the Assembly’s decision making process. Finally, the green flag, leading by the group of 1997 Constitutional drafters and middle class in Bangkok, succeeded in pressuring the old paradigm parliament to vote to pass the Constitution.

### Research Objective

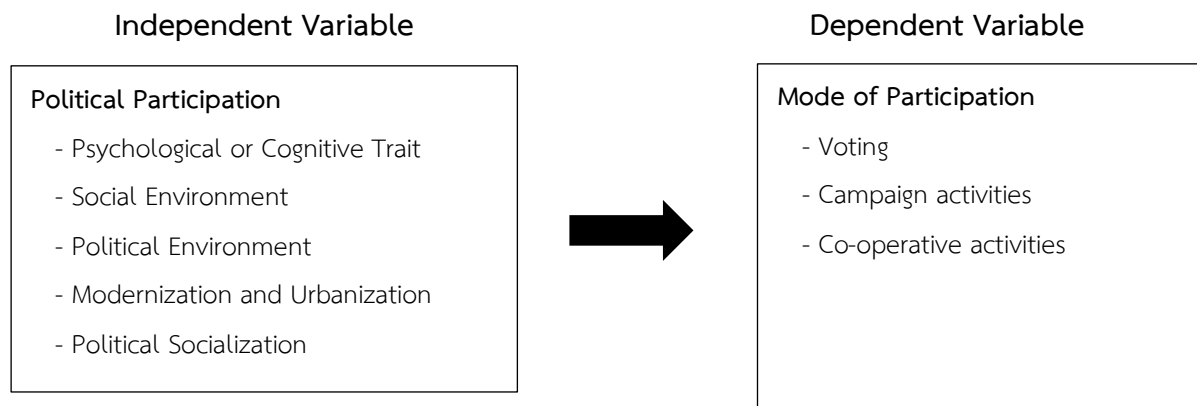
1. To study the level of opinion of 5 political participation factors and mode of participation.
2. To study the relationship between political participation factors and mode of participation.
3. To study the political participation factors influence the mode of participation.

### Hypothesis of Research

1. Political Participation factors correlate with Mode of Participation statistically significance at .05.
2. Political Participation factors predict the Mode of Participation statistically significance at .05.

### Research Framework

The researcher selected 6 components of Puja Mondal’s political participation (citation in Thananithicho, stithorn. (2011)) because considered that it was appropriated for the Thai politics and thought that the key element was the mode of participation therefore define it as a dependent variable and the other 5 elements as independent variable and also seen that independent variable and dependent variable are related.



## Research Methodology

### Population and Samples

Population is the students from Chaopraya University, Kasem Bundit University, Rangsit University, Kamphaeng Phet Rajabhat University and Songkla Rajabhat University. The samples were randomly selected by sending 150 questionnaires to each of 5 universities, totally 750 samples but 697 (92.7%) samples returned.

### Research Instrument

The questionnaires are consisted of 3 parts; personal data, Political Participation factors as the independent variable and Mode of Participation as the dependent variable. The validity of questionnaires are computed (IOC=0.50-1.00) and overall reliability is computed (cronbach's  $\alpha$  =0.93).

## Result

Data analysis as following: 1. Level of Political Participation and the Mode of Participation.

**Table 1** Shows Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ), standard deviation (SD) of the opinion on Psychological or Cognitive Traits (PC), Social Environment (SE), Political Environment (PE), Modernization and Urbanization (MU), Political Socialization (PS) and Mode of Participation (MP) of Political Participation

Political Participation	$\bar{X}$	SD	Level of opinion
Psychological or Cognitive Traits (PC)	4.33	0.73	Strongly agree
Social Environment (SE)	3.45	0.81	agree
Political Environment (PE)	4.08	0.76	agree
Modernization and Urbanization (MU)	3.89	0.77	agree
Political Socialization (PS)	4.16	0.71	agree
Mode of Participation (MP)	4.15	0.84	agree

From table 1 found that the level of opinion of the Psychological or Cognitive Traits is the highest one which is strongly degree ( $\bar{X}=4.33$ ), the Political Socialization is the medium one which is agree ( $\bar{X}=4.16$ ) and the Social Environment is the lowest one which is agree ( $\bar{X}=3.45$ ).

## 2. The correlation between Political Factors and the Mode of Participation.

**Table 2** Shows Correlation Matrix among PC, SE, PE, MU, PS and MP

	PC	SE	PE	MU	PS	MP
PC	1					
SE	.176**	1				
PE	.654**	.400**	1			
MU	.530**	.523**	.691**	1		
PS	.740**	.320**	.714**	.668**	1	
MP	.662**	.283**	.721**	.668**	.744**	1

\*\* p < .01

From table 2 found the correlation between Psychological or Cognitive Traits (PC), Social Environment (SE), Political Environment (PE), Modernization and Urbanization (MU), Political Socialization (PS) and Mode of Participation (MP) is statistically significance at .01 ( $r=.662, .283, .721, .668$  and  $.744$  respectively), the maximum value is .744 but minimum value is .283.

## 3. Prediction Political Participation factors on Mode of Participation.

**Table 3** Show B, Beta, t and p of regression analysis of five factor of political participation and the mode of participation in political participation

Political Participation	B	Beta	t	p
Constant	.277	-	2.319*	.021
Psychological or Cognitive Traits (PC)	.318	.313	8.389**	.000
Social Environment (SE)	.279	.260	7.115**	.000
Political Environment (PE)	.248	.230	6.354**	.000
Modernization and Urbanization (MU)	.174	.163	4.904**	.000
Political Socialization (PS)	.071	0.71	-2.665**	.008
Constant ( $\beta_0$ ) = .277, R=.813, R square=.662, Adjusted R square= .659, F=270.407**				

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01



From table 3, found that five factors of political participation; Psychological or Cognitive Traits (PC), Social Environment (SE), Political Environment (PE), Modernization and Urbanization (MU), Political Socialization (PS) influenced Mode of participation (MP) 66.2% (R square=.662) statistically significance at .01 with Tolerance=.353-.697, VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) =1.435-2.836 and Dubin-Watson=1.902.

## Conclusion

The research found that five factors of political participation; psychological or cognitive traits, social environment, political environment, modernization and urbanization and political socialization correlated with mode of participation statistically significance at .01 and influenced mode of participation 66.2% (R square=.662) statistically significance at .01 with tolerance=.353-.697, VIF=1.435-2.836 and Dubin-Watson=1.902.

## Discussion

The discussion will concentrate only on why and how the relationship between 5 political participation factors with the mode of participation which is in the data analysis statistically significance at .01

### 1. Psychological or cognitive traits:

It is assumed that there is a relation between the cognitive status of low self-esteem and feeling of pessimism and alienation from society and political apathy. But this political apathy influences political participation it is not much clear and certain.

### 2. Social environment:

In this respect, educational institutions serve as the basic ground in the development of articulateness and skill of political participation through school/college/university unions. One learns here to join in an organization, fulfill duties, participation in meeting discuss social issue and organize to achieve group goals.

### 3. Political environment:

Political parties also have an important role to play in political participation. This role is party expressive and partly instrumental. The party inspires in its members a feeling of belongingness. It acts as a powerful reference group in its own right. The campaign and rally have their effects on polarizing party attachments and reinforcing candidate

preferences. A significant aspect of the relation of the individual to his/her political environment is his/her exposure to the influence of propaganda.

4. Level of modernization and urbanization:

Urbanization as the first stage of the modernization process tends to raise literacy; increase literacy tends to increase the media exposure; and increasing media exposure facilitates wider political participation. Economic modernization affects political participation through socio-economic status. High socio-economic status is conducive for an increase in the overall amount of political participation. Modernization not only tends to increase class-based participation but also decrease communal-based participation. A majority of the upper and middle class persons vote for the rightist parties.

5. Political socialization:

It affects both the quality and amount of participation. The political aware are usually better able to relate their social values to their political opinions, to achieve stable, internally consistent belief system.

## Research suggestions

### 1. Suggestions for application

1) Emphasize on psychological traits which stem from individual personality and cognitive structures which included sense of efficacy, sense of civic responsibility, sociability, sense of alienation and authoritarianism.

2) Emphasize on education, occupation, income, age, sex, race, caste, ethnicity, mobility and habitation.

3) Emphasize on political parties role in political participation such as inspiration, party contacts, registers voters, selects party nominees, organizes campaign activities, mobilizes rallies influence the electorate during elections to vote.

4) Emphasize on to increase the media exposure to political with political participation.

5) Emphasize on the mechanism by which people become aware about the issue and ideology and come to identify with a particular political party.

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