

# Does Social Capital Work in Thai Politics?

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## Abstract

The study employed Robert D. Putnam's concept of social capital to study Thai politics. It had three main objectives: to investigate the capacity of social capital in Thai society to increase people's political participation in local government, to examine whether social capital improves the institutional performance of local government, and to explore both the impact of people's political participation in local government on the institutional performance of local governments, and the impact of institutional performance on people's political participation, in the north of Thailand.

There were three main findings in which emerged from the research. Firstly, it was found that social capital does not promote people's participation in local politics. Secondly, it was evident that not all components of social capital can enhance the institutional performance of local government. Networks of civic engagement and generalized trust fail to increase the effective institutional performance of local government. Lastly, it was discovered that political participation by citizens and institutional performance has no positive effect on each other. It can be concluded that Putnam's concept of social capital shows clear limitations and cannot be employed effectively in the context of Thai politics.

**Key Words:** Social Capital; Political Participation; Thai politics; Local Government

## Introduction

According to the Thailand Human Development Report 2003 (pp. 112-115), the Participation Index<sup>1</sup> shows that the north region achieves the highest index score (0.6525) of all 6 regions, while the average of all regions is 0.5758. Similarly, and more recently, the Thailand Human Development Report 2007 (pp. 2-17) shows that the north region achieves a high rank in the participation index. It is very interesting to consider why this region presents such high levels of participation in community, social and political affairs.

Lamphun province achieves the highest ranking on both the Human Achievement Index (HAI)<sup>2</sup> and the Participation Index. Phichit and Tak, with similar population sizes, are provinces with lower ranking regarding both HAI and the Participation Index. Concerning the participation ranking, Phichit is a middle ranking province. The local residents in Phichit spend much smaller amounts of time in social service and unpaid services to other households. More importantly, Tak province has a very low ranking on HAI both and participation.

Why do provinces that are situated in the same region and with similar size of population have such large differences both in terms of human achievement and public participation? This is the central question which will be explored in this study. In seeking to answer this central question, this study will focus particular attention on the role played by social capital in promoting political participation in, and improving the institutional performance of, local governments.

In order to investigate the role of social capital in promoting political participation and institutional performance in the Thai context, this study

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<sup>1</sup> The Participation Index was constructed from data on voter turnout, community groups, participation in local groups, and participation in social services.

<sup>2</sup> Indicators of human achievement index are health, education, employment, income, housing and living environment, family and community, transportation and communication, and participation

employs Robert D. Putnam's (1993) definition of social capital as a principle theoretical framework. Therefore, the concepts of trust, norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement so central to Putnam's work were studied in the Thai context. Putnam argues that strong networks of civic engagement offer three advantages which both directly and indirectly relate to government performance: they 1) promote norms of reciprocity, 2) assist coordination and communication, and 3) generate collaboration (Putnam 1994, pp. 9-10).

Therefore, since it is suggested that social capital has an ability to encourage individuals to contribute in public affairs, to the benefit of governance performance; this study argues that it is important to study the impact of social capital in the Thai context. This is primarily because the findings of this study, for practical reasons, may benefit the policies government make and/or which may lead to the implantation of public policies which increase strong networks of civic engagement. In turn, this may intensify levels of generalized trust and norms of reciprocity in Thai society.

Within each of the provinces which were selected for study, this study chose to focus on the activities of municipal governments. Local governments are the central focus of this study because they are widely accepted as grass-roots governmental institutions (Kauzya 2003; Lin, Tao et al. 2003). The provision of public services to local residents, affording a better quality of life for local residents is one of the main tasks of local government of all types and levels (Ballard and Warner 2000)

### **Research Questions**

Does social capital increase people's political participation in, and improve the institutional performance of, local governments in Thailand? If not, what explains the different levels?

### **Study Area**

As mentioned, UNDP statistics present the major differences in the Human Achievement Index (HAI) and the Participation Index among three provinces with roughly equal populations in the north of Thailand. Lamphun

is the province that achieves the highest ranking on both indices, whereas Phichit has low ranking on both indices. Tak has a very low ranking on both the HAI and participation Index. Indeed, it was the striking differences in ranking that encouraged this study to select the three provinces as broadly representative of different categories of provincial government in the north of Thailand. Additionally, a municipality in each region was targeted for study because the functions of municipalities are clearly associated with the HAI. Also, because the population of the municipalities had to be of a roughly equal size, the municipalities targeted in Lamphun, Phichit and Tak satisfied the requirements of this study

### **Data Collection**

In order to explain the relationships between social capital, political participation and institutional performance of local government, a number of data gathering techniques were employed. In general, research data were collected by employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. This is primarily because these two methods complement each other<sup>3</sup> (Neuman 2003). As previously stated, the relationships between social capital, political participation and institutional performance of local government in Thailand are to be assessed in relation to eight hypotheses. Therefore, significant emphasis was given to quantitative information because this allows all hypotheses to be tested, research results to be discussed; and the relevant information to be presented both systematically and statistically (Neuman 2003). Consequently, the research data came from a variety of sources and instruments including a survey, interviews and discussions, observations, official statistics and written documents. Generally, the process of data collection in this study was conducted in the north of Thailand during April to October 2008. Most importantly, it needs to be underlined that the data

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<sup>3</sup> The quantitative method is used to create systematic data collecting and qualitative method is for collecting data in forms of words and images which can be used to describe some specific cases and related contexts (Neuman, 2003, pp. 139, 145).

collection was done before the period of political uncertainty and social division of 2009-2010.

## **Population**

The selection of respondents for the survey was restricted to people of voting age (18 years old and older) who were registered in Tak, Phicit and Lamphun town municipalities. Such a restriction was required because people of this age are obligated to vote at every election — both at a national and local level.

## **Sample**

The sample studied was intended to be representative of the entire population in the three municipalities. A combination of four sampling techniques was used: proportionate stratified sampling (PSS)<sup>4</sup>, quota sampling<sup>5</sup>; probabilities proportional to size measures (PPS)<sup>6</sup>; and purposive sampling<sup>7</sup>. The sampling was organized as follows:

Step one: to utilize proportionate stratified sampling, samples were drawn from the entire population from each municipality. The result of the sampling set a total number of interviews at 1,174, which should have been conducted with 393, 392 and 389 residents in the Tak, Phichit and Lamphun municipalities respectively. Nevertheless, due to all desired samplings being very close to 400, the decision was made to collect data from 400 interviewees in each municipality.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias (1996, p. 189), proportionate stratified sampling (PSS) is a technique that select the same number of sampling units from the different strata.

<sup>5</sup> According to Vuuren and Maree (2002, p. 280), the principle used in selecting a sample of the quota sampling technique is the identifying “distinguishable subgroups of individual in the population”. After that the research then selects non-random samples from each subgroup.

<sup>6</sup> Probabilities proportional to size measures (PPS) is one of the sampling techniques that used to “select sampling units according to predetermined probabilities” (Grant, 1998, p. 148).

<sup>7</sup> Purposive sampling is used when researcher use “their own judgment or intuition” to select the best people or groups to be studied (Bouma & Ling, 2004, p. 117)

Step two: quota sampling was used by specifying the gender characteristics of the respondents and giving the quota to all respondents in three municipalities. According to the gender ratio from all provinces, 198 males and 202 females from the Tak; 195 males and 205 females from the Lamphun, and 196 males and 204 females from the Phichit Town municipality were selected. Following this procedure, PPS was employed to select the sample. The communities in every municipality were divided into three strata levels — small, medium and large — depending on the population size<sup>8</sup>, and then four small, five medium and two large communities were randomly selected from the municipalities. According to the results of the PSS and PPS, four per cent of the population was then randomly chosen from the selected communities in all municipalities<sup>9</sup>. As mentioned earlier, because housing block maps could not be found, streets were randomly selected in each community to create the housing blocks.

Households from each block were then used in the last step of sampling. People were purposefully selected from each household according to their gender. If s/he declined to participate in the interview, or could not finish the interview for some reason, another family member of the same gender was asked to be the interview respondent. If there was no one who could meet this criterion, the study then moved to the next household.

It is important to highlight that there are many Myanmar migrants in Tak province including in the area of Tak municipality. However, in this study only Thai citizens were interviewed; any Myanmar migrants were specifically excluded. Notably, it was unproblematic for this study to identify who are Myanmar migrants since their Thai pronunciation is different from Thai people. Therefore, the data were collected from only Thai people.

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<sup>8</sup> This study employed a standard of the Thai government's SML project to categorize level of community: population 251-500 = small community, 501-1,000 medium community and  $\geq 1,001$  = large community (Pimolsathian, 2004, p. 8).

<sup>9</sup> There are 25 communities in Tak, 20 communities in Phichit and 17 communities in Lamphun town municipality respectively.

## Testing Hypotheses

The discussion now turns to focus on testing hypotheses. As noted, a theoretical framework was used as a guideline and all variables within the framework were processed in the analyses. In addition, the use of stepwise regression analysis with backward exclusion of variables was utilized as a tool. To process the analysis, the study was divided into two parts:

(1) All components of social capital and satisfaction with the institutional performance of local government were simultaneously determined as exogenous variables and ‘political participation’ was determined as an endogenous variable; and

(2) The components of social capital and political participation were simultaneously determined as exogenous variables and ‘satisfaction with the institutional performance of local government’ was determined as the endogenous variable.

**Table 1** Correlation between all exogenous variables and endogenous variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Political Par	1						
2 Networks	.397**	1					
3 Gen trust	.114	-.404	1				
4 Institutions	.234**	.276**	.310**	1			
5 Incumbents	.304**	-.267*	.259**	.000	1		
6 Norms	.298**	.300	.529**	.219**	.271**	1	
7 Performance	.179	-.306	.375**	.444**	.310	.357**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Generally, the correlations between all exogenous and endogenous variables fall within an acceptable level. However, it is clear that the correlation between political participation and institutional performance is fairly low. This indicates a very weak impact of political participation on

institutional performance and vice versa.

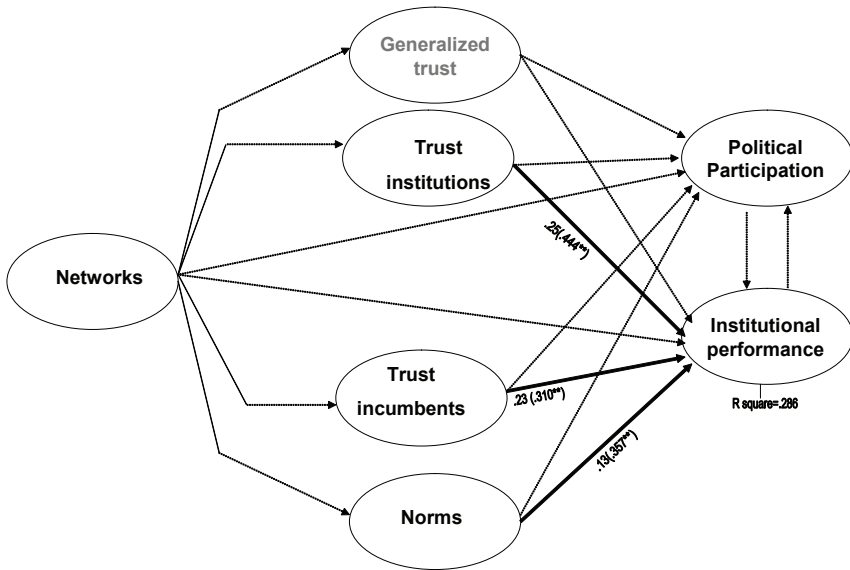
The results of multiple regression analysis are surprising in that the majority of hypothesized exogenous variables show only weak influences on both endogenous variables. This is demonstrated by very low values of  $R^2$ . Moreover, the Significance of F value for political participation is higher than 0.05 (see Table 2).

**Table 2** Results of multiple regression analysis (testing by hypothesized variables)

Endogenous Variable	Exogenous Variable	$\beta$	Goodness of fit statistics	Endogenous Variable	Exogenous Variable	$\beta$	Goodness of fit statistics
Political Participation	Networks	.20**	$R^2 = .208$ , sig. = .180	Performance	Networks	.03	$R^2 = .286$ , sig. = .030
	Gen trust	.03			Gen trust	.10	
	Institutions	.19**			Institutions	.25**	
	Incumbents	.18**			Incumbents	.23**	
	Norms of reciprocity	.09			Norms of reciprocity	.13**	
	Performance	-.02			Pol Participation	.01	

The results are graphically demonstrated in a path diagram.





**Figure 1** A path diagram showing causal relationships between all potential exogenous variables and two endogenous variables (political participation and institutional performance)

Note: Thick solid lines indicate significant paths from exogenous variables to endogenous variables. The arrows indicate the paths that exogenous variables have effect on endogenous variables. Parameters outside bracket represent standardized coefficients Beta value and parameters inside the bracket represent correlations between a pair of variables.

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

On the basis of the results presented above, it can be concluded that:

(1) By focusing on the analysis of political participation, it is clearly evident that a combination of the hypothesized exogenous variables does not make a statistically significant contribution to, and does not well explain the emergence of, political participation. Therefore, the null hypotheses were rejected since it is manifest that social capital does not promote political participation in local governments in northern Thailand. However, when isolating each core component of social capital, it is discovered that two factors — (political) trust and networks of civic engagement — do in fact

promote political participation. In contrast, generalized trust and norms of reciprocity fail to promote political participation.

(2) When isolating the focus on the institutional performance of local government, it can be argued that there is a significant association between levels of trust (political trust) and norms of reciprocity, and people's satisfaction with the institutional performance of local government. In contrast, networks of civic engagement and generalized trust fail to enhance the institutional performance of local government.

(3) There is a no significant correlation between the level of people's political participation and people's satisfaction with the institutional performance of local government, and vice versa.

Furthermore and most significantly, it is clear that Putnam's theory cannot be applied generally across all circumstances, particularly in the context of the north of Thailand. In this case, the combination of all components of social capital fails to promote citizen political contribution in local government. Therefore, the universal applicability of Putnam's theory can be challenged on the grounds that social capital cannot be regarded as the main factor supporting people's contribution in political affairs in the north of Thailand.

Additionally, it is evident that only political trust and norms of reciprocity are able to enhance the institutional performance of government. Generalized trust and networks of civic engagement, in contrast, fail to enhance the institutional performance. Therefore, Putnam's premise that a healthy civic society has a strong correlation with effective performance of governments seems to be problematic in this context.

Furthermore, this study also found that political participation by citizens and institutional performances have no positive effect on each other. Importantly, these findings leave enormous scope for further questions and analyses.

### **Further Analyses**

In order to answer the big puzzle and provide a better understanding of Thai politics, it is now imperative to investigate and discuss the following issues:

If social capital has *no* impact on promoting people's political participation, it is important to conduct further analysis into what factors do promote political participation.

Apart from political trust and norms of reciprocity, it is crucial to find out whether there are any other factors that enable local governments to perform more effectively.

It is also important that there be a model created that depicts a general representation of political participation and institutional performance across all three municipalities.

However, before shedding light on further discussions it needs to be noted that to undertake further analyses, multiple regression analysis was reutilized to test the dynamics of two relationships: the first being between hypothesized and additional variables, and both political participation and institutional performance. The results show that there are an additional five variables that impact political participation and/or institutional performance. Details of all variables are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3** Additional variables

variables	Term used	Municipality	Mean	N	SD
Concern about self-interest	Self-interest	Tak	.036	400	1.102
		Lamphun	-.033	396	.927
		Phichit	.002	397	.965
		<b>Total</b>	.000	1193	1.001
Concern about public interest	Public interest	Tak	.046	400	1.257
		Lamphun	-.014	396	.873
		Phichit	-.017	397	.818
		<b>Total</b>	.000	1193	1.002
Political satisfaction	Pol Sat	Tak	-.274	400	1.026
		Lamphun	.215	400	.919
		Phichit	.050	400	.989
		<b>Total</b>	.000	1200	1.000
Political self-confidence	PSC	Tak	.231	400	1.129
		Lamphun	-.254	400	.849
		Phichit	.022	400	.944
		<b>Total</b>	.000	1200	1.000
Trust in authorities	Authorities	Tak	.274	400	.874
		Lamphun	-.244	400	1.073
		Phichit	-.022	400	.975
		<b>Total</b>	.000	1200	1.000

## Analysis on Political Participation

**Table 4** Correlations between exogenous variables and political participation

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Pol Par	1								
2 Networks	.397**	1							
3 Institutions	.234**	.276*	1						
4 Incumbents	.304**	-.267*	.000	1					
5 Pol Sat	.216**	.354	.206**	.243**	1				
6 Authorities	.425**	.290	.396**	.232**	.218**	1			
7 PSC	-.320**	-.270*	-.365**	-.216*	-.302**	-.335*	1		
8 Self-interest	.122	.516**	.186*	-.213	.090*	.058*	-.112**	1	
9 Public interest	.152*	.336**	-.254	.306	.041	.030	-.015	.000	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Generally, the correlations between all exogenous variables and political participation are at a satisfactory level and represent a positive trend (except for some correlations where the values are negative). Only exogenous variables that meet prior standards were included in the multiple regression analysis.

**Table 5** Results of multiple regression analyses of political participation (testing by both hypothesized and additional variables)

Endogenous Variable	Exogenous variables	$\beta$
<b>Pol Par</b>	Authorities	.31**
	Networks	.20**
	Incumbents	.19**
	Institutions	.18**
	Pol Sat	.15**
R <sup>2</sup> = .495, Sig. = .000		
<b>Authorities</b>	Institutions	.30**
	Incumbents	.27**
	Pol Sat	.11**
R <sup>2</sup> = .449, Sig. = .000		
<b>Network</b>	Self-interest	.52**
	Public interest	.54**
R <sup>2</sup> = .435, Sig. = .000		
<b>Incumbents</b>	Authorities	.11**
	Pol Sat	.11**
	PSC	-.17*
R <sup>2</sup> = .237, Sig. = .000		
<b>Institutions</b>	Authorities	.12**
	Pol Sat	.14**
	PSC	-.11**
R <sup>2</sup> = .251, Sig. = .000		
<b>Pol Sat</b>	Institutions	.19**
	Incumbents	.12**
	Authorities	.11**
R <sup>2</sup> = .317, Sig. = .000		

Note \*\* p&lt;.001, \*p&lt; .05

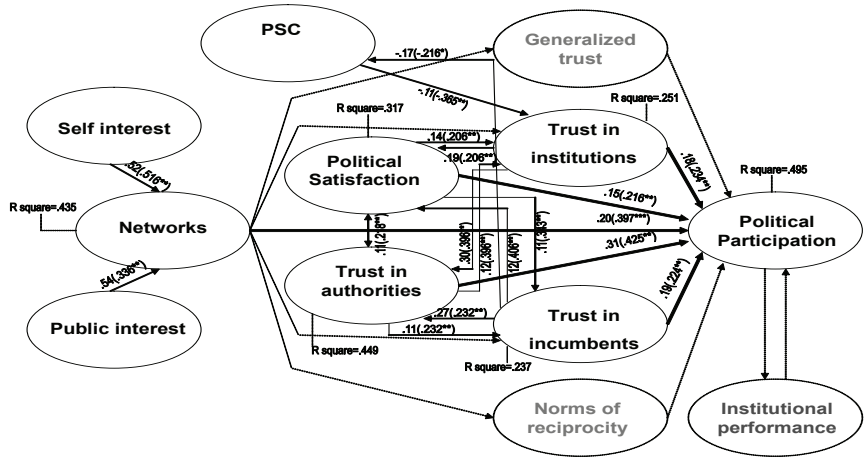
According to the results of the analysis, it is clear that using a combination of the five stated variables — trust in authorities, networks of civic engagement, trust in incumbents, trust in institutions, and political satisfaction — more effectively predicts levels of political participation. Importantly, the analysis confirms that norms of reciprocity, generalized trust and institutional performance of local government have no impact on political participation. Notably, the existence of networks of civic engagement fails to support the emergence of trust and norms of reciprocity in these three municipalities. Consequently, it is worth stating that even if Putnam’s claim about the importance of social capital in Italy has been generally accepted around the world, it is not all clear that social capital has any significance in other contexts, particularly in the context of northern Thailand.

Moreover, in order to investigate which variable plays the strongest role in promoting political participation in these three municipalities, both direct and indirect effects of all variables on political participation are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6** Effects of exogenous variables on political participation

Exogenous variables	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total causal effect (TCF)
Authorities	.31	.06	.37
Incumbents	.19	.11	.30
Institutions	.18	.12	.30
Networks	.20	.00	.20
Pol Sat	.15	.08	.23
PSC	0	-.05	-.05
Public interest	0	.01	.01
Self-interest	0	.01	.01

Additionally, results of multiple regression analysis are graphically demonstrated in a path diagram (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2** A path diagram showing causal relationships between all exogenous variables and political participation

Note: Thick solid lines indicate significant paths from exogenous variables to political participation. Thin solid lines signify significant paths from an exogenous variable to another exogenous variable. Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant paths. The arrows indicate the paths that independent variables have effect on dependent variables. Parameters outside bracket represent standardized coefficients Beta value and parameters inside the bracket represent correlations between a pair of variables. (\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)).

To summarize, according to the results of multiple regression analysis, it is evident that the findings seem to contradict Putnam’s theory. The three most important factors that promote political participation in these three municipalities are trust in authorities, trust in incumbents, and trust in institutions. This confirms the previous finding generalized trust and norms of reciprocity have no impact on promoting people’s political participation.

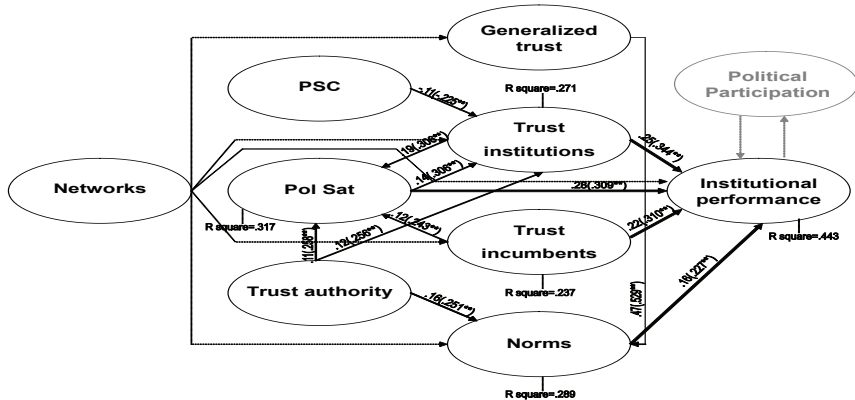
**Analysis of Institutional Performance**

An important element of this study is an investigation into the additional factors that impact the institutional performance of local government in the three municipalities and each municipality.



The results of multiple regression analysis make it clear that that an analysis which combines the four variables — political satisfaction ( $\beta = 28$ ), trust in incumbents ( $\beta = 22$ ), trust in institutions ( $\beta = 25$ ), and norms of reciprocity ( $\beta = 16$ ) — provides a more efficacious prediction of institutional performance. Moreover, the analysis confirms that networks of civic engagement, generalized trust and political participation do not have any impact on institutional performance. Consequently, Putnam's claim that there is a positive association between social capital and effective institutional performance does not appear to apply to the political context in the north of Thailand.

In addition, the results clearly signify that the three prime factors that have the strongest impacts on institutional performance are (1) political satisfaction (TCF= .64), (2) trust in authorities (TCF= .50) and (3) trust in institutions (TCF= .48) respectively.



**Figure 3** A path diagram showing causal relationships between all potential exogenous variables and institutional performance

Note: Thick solid lines indicate significant paths from exogenous variables to institutional performance. Thin solid lines signify significant paths from an exogenous variable to another exogenous variable. Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant paths. The arrows indicate the paths that independent variables have effect on dependent variables. Parameters outside bracket represent standardized coefficients Beta value and parameters inside the bracket represent correlations between a pair of variables. ( \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)).

### **Capability of Trust in Authorities in Thai Local Politics**

The findings presented in this study lead to a significant question: why is trust in authorities an important factor in promoting political contribution and enhancing institutional performance in the north of part of Thailand?

This study argues that the concept of trust in authority in Thailand is different to the way that the concept is represented in the West. Western scholars explain that ‘trust’ in this sense is understood “in its relationship to the satisfactions that members of a [political system] feel they obtain from the perceived outputs and performance of the political authorities” (Easton 1975). Similarly, Cremer and Tyler (2007) explain that trust in authority is created when people perceive a trustworthy and productive performance by the political authorities. Furthermore, Finkel (1985) argues that trust in authority is closely linked to a belief that the authorities or political regime are receptive to people’s attempted influence. Therefore, on the basis of these explanations, if the performance by the authority fails to satisfy the public, or if the will of the people is disregarded by the authority, then the potential for trust in the authority to be created and/or promoted is severely diminished.

Importantly, this study argues that the Western representation of the concept of trust in authority is closely related to the concept of trust in incumbents employed in this study. Trust in incumbents is a type of political trust defined as a belief in the incumbent’s ability to perform their functions and responsibilities professionally and efficiently.

In contrast, even though the concept of trust in authority in Thailand may partly depend upon an evaluation of the performance of the political authority, this study argues that trust in authorities and trust in institutions are not the same. It can be argued that trust in authority originates from the people’s belief in, and surrendering to, the ‘power and authority’ of political institutions. However, this study argues that trust in authority in Thailand is more closely linked to a vertical patron-client relationship, and is built upon mutual reciprocity. This relationship has long been the principal foundation of Thai society, and has contributed to the establishment of an acceptance of social inequality and inequitable behavior in Thai society. Moreover, it

demonstrates that egalitarianism is not successfully employed in Thailand as almost all social relationships remain influenced and characterized by distinctions between rank and notions of supremacy and inferiority (Mulder, 2000a, p. 85).

In the past (and even nowadays), authority was associated with supremacy — and those in authority were people who had higher (social, economic or political) status, power, charisma and prestige. Thus, there is no doubt as to why university students in the 1970s aspired to be government officials upon graduation (Jumbala, 1974, p. 539; Darling, 1974, p. 9). Notably, the official's position of power and authority has the potential to provide positive or negative outcomes to the people of an inferior standing.

By investigating the concept of trust in authority in relation to the promotion of political participation and enhancement of institutional performance, this study argues that such trust — through its perpetuation of inequality and process of mutual reciprocity — links both authorities and local residents to each other. One incident that helps to clarify this point occurred during the data collection process when a man in his 60s said that he has taken part in the municipality's meeting in his community regularly because he loves and respects the Mayor. To him the Mayor is a good and hard-working man, and therefore he is willing to participate in political affairs. In turn, this example demonstrates that trust in authority correlates closely with an evaluation of the performance of the political authority. However, in contrast to this incident, another man in his 60s revealed that he often participated in the political activities because he received a monthly living allowance from the municipality. He therefore believed he should participate in municipal affairs as a show of gratitude. Arguably, this example demonstrates the mutual obligation between authorities and local residents in that the municipality provides service delivery to local residents and so local residents count it as their obligation to partake in municipal affairs. Interestingly, an unemployed woman in her 50s frankly explained that what encouraged her to participate in municipal meetings was that she was always asked to take part because the municipality needs to show a record of participation. Notably, when she was asked whether she defines

her involvement as ‘set up’ participation, she replied “something like that”.

The last example cited above gives further weight to the argument by Siroros and Haller (2000) that the platform for public participation in political affairs in Thailand, particularly the public hearing processes, is organized by the state as a tool for public relations rather than as a stage for meaningful involvement. This is probably because genuine public hearings in Thailand have the potential to create divergence and disagreement between government officials and villagers, and, in most cases, the state has already reached a decision prior to the public meeting (Siroros and Haller 2000). Subsequently, “the function of meetings is more often to communicate prior decisions to the attendees rather than to foster discussion and problem solving to reach a decision acceptable to all” (Siroros & Haller, 2000, p. 161).

People who regularly attend the perfunctory meetings are the ones who generally surrender to authorities. However, they generally attend the meetings to serve their own interests, believing that the official’s position of power and authority may be of benefit to them at some point in the future. Significantly, this study argues that the more people trust in authorities the more they will be unconditionally satisfied with the performance of political institutions and incumbents.

### **Suggestions for Public Policy**

In accordance with the findings presented in this study, the following is an outline of important issues for the Thai government to consider for future public policies.

With regard to state intervention and the process of social capital formation, the state can play an important part in building social and generalized trust by providing the support and opportunity for people to more actively participate in professional associations.

Significantly, the study finding that politically oriented associations in Pichit present as the most important factor promoting public participation in municipal government affairs reinforces the need for a practical strategy which aims to encourage people to become more politically involved. The findings suggest that the state increase public participation by establishing

more effective politically oriented activities and by encouraging people to more meaningfully participate in these types of associations.

Furthermore, the reluctance by local residents in Tak to interact with the migrants from neighboring countries negatively affects the development of norms of reciprocity and generalized trust in community. Therefore, even though the migrants have played an important role in supporting the growth of the Thai economy, to control social security and to building civic community, the state may need to reconsider its policy on limiting the number of migrants in Thailand.

Additionally, because the findings presented in the study reveal that trust in authority and political trust play a critical role in Thai politics, the Thai government should take this issue more seriously. Of course, fostering trust in authority and political trust can bring both positive and negative outcomes. However, if the government fosters such trust appropriately and makes a genuine attempt to overcome the negative attitude towards the Thai government and the incumbents that is felt by Thai people in general, this study argues that there is the opportunity to increase public participation in local government affairs.

## **Summary**

The study demonstrates the degree to which social capital, political participation and institutional performance vary from municipality to municipality. What became evident is that the people in Lamphun tend to have the highest levels of social capital, followed by the residents in Phichit and Tak respectively. Additionally, the Phichit municipality appears to achieve the highest level of political involvement from its constituents. Residents from the Lamphun municipality rate their local government as the best performer.

On the basis of the survey findings the study also makes clear that Putnam's concept of social capital cannot be applied effectively in the north of Thailand. It can be concluded that Putnam's concept of social capital shows clear limitations and cannot be employed effectively in the context of local government in Thai politics.

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