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## **Political Participation Instruction for Monk and Novice Students in Thailand**

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**Abstract**--This research aimed (1) to study the political participation of the monk and novice students in MCUKK as the guideline to develop the political participation instruction for MCUKK students, (2) to suggest the ways to promote the political participation instruction of the monk and novice students. The population of the research was the bachelor degree students: monks and novices ( $n = 266$ ) of MCUKK. The key informants (15) including 1 educational administrator, 2 directors of Political Science Programs (Bachelor and Master), and 2

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lecturers, 10 students selected by Purposive Sampling. This study was conducted by means of the mixed research methodology: quantitative research and qualitative research. The tools used in this research were the five-rating scale questionnaire and an in-depth interview. The research findings indicated that (1) the political participation of the students in four studied aspects were statistically rated at the moderate level; (2) the university lecturers should pay attention to educating the legal rights and importance of political participation in terms of voting, political news, political campaign and political rally for the students. The finding suggested that teaching political participation should be managed properly, although there is the law that prohibits monks or novices to get involved in politics.

**Keywords**---instruction, monks, novices, political issue, political participation, Thailand.

## Introduction

The public participation is considered the key to strengthening the democratic system by giving people the opportunity to express their opinions and participate in decision-making on politics and governance at the local and national level. Most importantly, the political participation of the people is a good examination on the use of state power and control over the work of government officials (Sakdaphon Khem et al., 2021; Kim & Chen, 2016). This statement is generalized as the main democratic principle in the world. As seen in many countries, youth is seen to be a last group of people who want to get involved in politics. The political participation of youth have been studied all over the world such as the studies of Levy & Akiva (2019) in midwestern united states, Saud et al. (2020) in Pakistan, Kitanova (2020) in EU Pfanzelt & Spies (2019) in Germany, Pickard (2019) in Britain.

At present, Thailand has a weak democratic political system and structure, and democracy has not grown and been disrupted in Thai society (Chambers, 2020; Ginsburg, 2020; Lertchoosakul, 2021), caused by several coups that alternated between the democratically elected government and the constituted government, forming an undesirable cycle in the Thai political system (Balima, 2020; Hearn-Branaman, 2020). In early period, the coup occurred because of the political power conflicts, but in the latter time, the cause of the coup is a result of the conflict between political parties (Balima, 2020; Hearn-Branaman, 2020; Pongsudhirak, 2020). There have been divisions resulted in a split of thinking among the people (Pathmanand, 2021; Pongsudhirak, 2020; Riggs, 2021), which is a major obstacle to the development of democracy in Thailand. Besides this, political culture that has not yet been fully democratic is also the issue (Chatchorfa, 2020; Wirojano, 2017; Pongsudhirak, 2020).

In fact, the political participation is a key factor in economic and social development (Levenda et al., 2020; Ockey, 2004; Pakkawat Plongsuwan & Worapun Thongmun, 2020), as same as economy and society are key mechanisms for political participation at all levels (Sarawut Khanthavichai et al., 2021). Accordingly,

to promote the democracy in this developing country, the government has supported both governmental and private sectors particularly educational institutions to create the political participation of people. Based on the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2560 (2017), there are several articles that promote the political participation of its citizens according to the original intention of the People's Party and the way of government in democracy equally granting this right to the people, and designating it as a duty of Thais (Vecchione & Caprara, 2009; Grasso, 2014). For example, the content of the Constitution of Chapter III on the rights and liberties of the Thai people, (Article 34) states that a person shall have the freedom of expression, speech, writing, printing, advertising and other interpretations. Restrictions on this freedom cannot be made except by virtue of the provisions of laws enacted specifically to maintain the security of the state, to protect the rights or freedom of another person, to maintain order or the good morals of the people, to protect public health. Academic freedom will be protected but the use of that freedom must not contradict the duties of the Thai people or the good morals, and must respect and not block the opinions of other persons', Office of the Constitutional Court, 2017, (Phisitphong Sidao & Jagraval Sukmaitree, 2019). In addition, Article 44 states that 'A person shall enjoy the freedom of assembly calmly and unarmed. The restriction of the liberty under paragraph 01 is not permitted except by virtue of the provisions of the law enacted to maintain the security of the state, public safety, public order or good morals or to protect the rights or liberties of others', including in Section 49 of which 'No person may exercise his right or liberty to overthrow the democratic regime of government with the King as Head of State' (The Constitutional Court of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2017).

In addition, The Constitutional Court of the Kingdom of Thailand 2017 in Section 4: Duties of the Thai people in Section 51 states that 'A person has a duty to exercise the right to vote or to hold an independent referendum by taking into account the common interests of the country as importance'. Finally, in Chapter 6, State Policy Directive, Article 78 states that 'The State should encourage people and communities to have correct knowledge and understanding about democratic government with the King as Head of State, and take part in the development of the country in various fields, establishing public services both at the national and local levels, examining of the Exercise of State Power, anti-corruption and misconduct including all political decisions and any other activities that may affect people or communities' (Phisitphong Sidao & Jagraval Sukmaitree, 2019). Moreover, the provisions of the said constitution have pointed out that the government and people are the key mechanisms in driving politics and government in democracy at the same time in any form through political activities as provided by the constitution.

For promoting political participation of the educational institutions, there is a primary goal of education in political sciences as to educate students to understand the origins and phenomena of political events in order to find an explanation and forecast future political trends (Sarawut Khanthavichai et al., 2021; Theodsak Yosangrat & Waraporn Tepsamritporn, 2017; Thongchai Singudom, 2020; Udom Inta et al., 2019). To have a clear understanding of the political situation requires a method of analysis as a tool for determining the political situation. This is important because the analysis categorizes things

related to the manifestation by pointing out the degree, type and direction of the relationship to understand what the political situation is, why it happened and how it happened (Wirojano, 2017). In regards to the political instruction in educational institutions, one of the most important political participation activities is voting (Boontinand, 2021; Watanavisit & Vorakulpipat, 2020). Because of voting is regarded as a concrete exercise of rights in the universality (Print, 2020; Thoyibi et al., 2021). This activity has been applied to promote democracy in Thai educational institutions throughout (Patcharee Silarat et al., 2017; Udom Inta et al., 2019). Today, this activity has been in the focus of Thais as seen in the elections of members of the House of Representatives of Thailand in the last four times (February 6, 2005, December 23, 2008, July 3, 2011 and March 24, 2019), more than 70 percent of population came to exercise their rights (Election Commission of Thailand, 2021).

However, in Thailand, voting is not for everyone. It is limited to monks and novices even if it is said in the Thai Constitution that there is no provision mentioning that the status of monks and novices is different from ordinary citizens. It sounds unreasonably, even if Buddhism is the main institution of the country, monks and novices are prohibited to exercise their rights, and they are not allowed to participate even in legislative hearings, and of course to vote (Siripanyo et al., 2020) even if the 2017 Constitution, Article 95 clearly states that a person who has the following qualifications is be a voter: (1) having Thai nationality, but a person who has Thai nationality by naturalization must have obtained Thai nationality for not less than five years; (2) be at least 18 years of age on the election day; (3) having been named in the house registration in the constituency for not less than 90 days up to the election date. However, a person with no right to vote in Section 96 is a person who have the following characteristics: being in the process of revocation of the right to vote, regardless of whether the case is final or not; being detained by a court warrant or by a lawful order; unsound mind or mental infirmity; being a monk, novice, ascetic or priest; (The Constitutional Court of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2017).

As mentioned above, political participation is promoted in all educational institutions at all levels of the country (Schelkunov et al., 2021). It raises the question that how do the Buddhist monks or novices in the Buddhist universities participate in politics when there is the legal prohibition to get involved in political actions? In Thailand, there are two Buddhist Universities: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya (MCU) or Mahamakut Buddhist Universities (MBU). Both universities have been managing the Buddhist education for Mahā-Nikāya and Dhammayutta-Nikāya monks, novices and laypeople for 135 years (Ho, 2001; Jarodzka et al., 2010). With thousands of students, MCU and MBU have established new campuses throughout the country to provide educational opportunities for all, particularly the underprivileged with the initiative that all of people have right to get education according to the basic education principles (Homsombat, 2021; Khammag, 2021). MCU is managed under the educational quality assurance supervision of Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA). In order to follow the determined guidelines appeared on the Royal Decree on Principle and Procedure for Good Public Governance B.E. 2546 (2003), the institution set the 12<sup>th</sup> phase of higher

education development plan B.E. 2560 – 2564 (2017-2021) by determining its vision as “World leading Buddhist University”.

With the social context of this religious educational institution on political practices, it makes Buddhist University as an interesting setting to test the generalization of the research findings related to the political participation (Lewerissa et al., 2021). The researchers were interested in studying the political participation of monks and novices in MCU, Khon Kaen Campus (MCUKK) in terms of 1) voting, 2) following political news, 3) political campaign and 4) political rally. The results of this finding may shed the light on the ways or practices monks and novices get involved in politics under the restriction mentioned in the Constitution of Thailand. The result of this research is beneficial to the stakeholders: government, educational administrators, lecturers, etc. in managing education for this special group of Thai citizens.

### **Objectives**

This study was carried out utilizing the mixed method research: quantitative and qualitative in order to (1) to study the political participation of the monk and novice students in MCUKK as the guideline to develop the political participation instruction for MCUKK students, (2) to suggest the ways to promote the political participation instruction of monk and novice students in MCUKK.

### **Research Methodology**

The population of the research was the bachelor degree students: monks and novices ( $N=587$ ) of MCUKK. The sample' size ( $n=226$ ) was calculated by using the calculation formula of Taro Yamane. The key informants (15) including 1 educational administrator, 2 directors of Political Science Programs (Bachelor and Master), and 2 lecturers, 10 students selected by Purposive Sampling.

The research process began with studying concepts, theories, principles and research work related to the political participation of students at all levels of education in Thailand as the guideline for constructing the questionnaires and interviews; after that created a conceptual framework to study the political participation behaviors of students in various areas, and to create the questionnaire and the in-depth interview form. They were then created to cover the scope of the research using two types of questions, both Closed-Ended and Open-ended Questionnaires.

After that, the completed questionnaire and the in-depth interview form were presented to the experts for further improvement, and submitted the revised questionnaire and the in-depth interview to five experts with at least three years of research experience and doctoral degrees (Research Methodology, Educational Assessment, Political Sciences, Statistics and Social Studies) to evaluate their content validity and improve the completeness of the content. Thereafter, they were revised according to the advice of experts and used to find the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC), and revised according to the expert's recommendation before they were tried out with 30 non-sample students in area with characteristics similar to the research population. Then the results of the

questionnaire responses were used to find the Reliability Value of the tool using Cronbach's Alpha-Coefficient Analysis. Finally, the complete instruments were then used to collect data with the target samples for further research.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts as follows: Part 1: the check-list questionnaire about general information of the respondents, i.e., gender, age, program and year level (4 items); Part 2: questionnaires about political participation of students (20 items). The in-depth interview was divided into 2 parts: part 1, general information of respondents and part 2, questions related to guidelines for the development of political participation instruction for the students in Buddhist University (4 items) (Hänze & Berger, 2007; Spörer et al., 2009). The interview was conducted in the following processes: Plan: to identify stakeholders, needed information, potential of the sources; Develop Instruments: (1) to develop an interview protocol-the rules that guide the administration and implementation of the interviews-these are the instructions that are followed for each interview, to ensure consistency between interviews, and thus increase the reliability of the findings; (2) to develop the interview guide or issue to be explored the interview and includes an informed consent form; Train Data Collectors: identify and train interviewers; Collect Data: (1) set up interviews with stockholders, (2) seek the informed consent of the interviewee (written or documented oral), (3) re-explain the purpose of the interview and use of a note-taker and/or tape recorder, (4) summarize key data immediately following the interview, (5) verify information given in interviews as necessary; Analyze Data: transcribe and/or review data and analyze all interview data; Disseminate Findings: (1) write a report, (2) solicit feedback from interviewees and stakeholders, (3) revise the report according to the feedback, (3) disseminate to interviewees, stakeholders, funders, and community as appropriate.

The data analysis was divided into two types as follows. (1) Quantitative Research, the data were analyzed according to personal factors classified by gender, age, program and year level by the basic statistics: Frequency and Percentage. The levels of political participation of students were analyzed by finding Mean and Standard Deviation (SD). The results were compared with the evaluation criteria as follows:

- 4.51 -5.00 refers to the highest level, (Strongly agree);
- 3.51 -4.50 refers to the high level, (Agree);
- 2.51 -3.50 refers to the moderate level (Undecide);
- 1.51 -2.50 refers to low level (Disagree);
- -1.50 refers to lowest level (Strongly disagree).

(2) Qualitative Research, the data obtained from the in-depth interview was interpreted by means of the Descriptive Analysis based on the principle of the Inductive Reasoning Method.

## Results

(1) From the statistical analysis, the level of political participation of MCU monk and novice students in overall was at the moderate level ( $\bar{X}$ = 2.80, SD. = 0.51), detailed as follows:

- Following the political news ( $\bar{X}$ = 4.45, SD. = 0.43): this aspect was statistically rated at a high level. In this aspect, the highest mean was seen in the item of 'following political news through various media such as radio, newspaper, television, internet', followed by 'studying foreign political news to compare with Thai politics, and the lowest means was that of 'participating in political rallies to listen to various facts as information for decision-making'.
- Political campaign ( $\bar{X}$ = 2.50, SD. = 0.55): this aspect was statistically rated at a moderate level. In this aspect, the highest mean was seen in the item of 'presentation of the interesting political news to the others', followed by that of 'persuading others to vote for your favourite person or political party' and the least was 'participation in organizing meetings, training, giving advice on promoting political participation'.
- Participation in political rally ( $\bar{X}$ = 1.42, SD. = 0.55): this aspect was statistically rated at a lowest level. In this aspect, the highest mean was seen in the item of 'participation in symbolic expressions', followed by that of 'participating in the solicitation of people to join a rally or protest' and the least was the item of 'Signing of the removal of political officer or politician'.
- Voting ( $\bar{X}$ = 2.83, SD. = 0.50): this aspect also was at a moderate level. In this aspect, the highest mean was seen in the item of 'voting because it was the right of the people according to the constitution', followed by that of 'going to vote whenever they can' and the least was the item of 'persuading others to vote'.

Table 1  
Students' political participation

Students' Political Participation	Current Conditions			Order
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Level	
1. Following Political News	4.45	.43	high	1
2. Political Campaign	2.50	.55	moderate	3
3. Participating in Political Rally	1.42	.55	lowest	4
4. Voting	2.83	.50	moderate	2
Sum	2.80	.51	high	

(2) From the response to the interviews, the results of analysis of guidelines for the development of political participation instruction can be summarized that the university lecturers should pay attention more in educating the legal rights and importance on political participation in terms of voting, political news, political campaign and political rally for the monk and novice students by organizing the short-term course or training for students except those studying in the political science or public administration programs. Also, it was suggested that teaching political participation should be managed properly, although there is the law that monks or novices should not be involved in politics (Litalien, 2021). In terms of political news following, some Buddhist principles such as the Four Noble Truths (determine the problem, find causes of the problem, set the goal and follow the paths to achieve the goal) (Sawaddi, 2021; Somaratne, 2021) should be used to analyse the political facts in the news. In addition, monk or novice students are advised to learn political theories and they can participate in the political

campaign as a part of learning process. Participation the political campaign, rally or voting outside the university is not advised for monks or novices as it is illegal.

## Discussion

The results of the research revealed that students' participation in politics in all four areas was at a moderate level. That can be discussed that in the political situation for the past five years since 2014, there has been a 2014 coup d'état in Thailand and this resulted in limitation of political participation in many activities of students and the public (Suksamran, 2021). This is in line with the research of Phisitphong Sidao & Jagraval Sukmaitree (2019), 'Political Participation of Students in Vocational School in Samutsakhon Province', also that of Theodsak Yosangrat & Waraporn Tepsamritporn (2017), 'The Attitudes in Political Participation by Students of Phuket Rajabhat University', Pakkawat Plongsuwan & Worapun Thongmun (2020), 'Political Participation of the Students in Mahamakut Buddhist University, Sridhammasokkarat Campus, Surat Thani Education Center'. In this point, it is interesting that the students in different status: secular and monastic in Buddhist and Non-Buddhist universities have participated in the political activities at the same level.

In terms of following political news, it was found that students were involved in politics at a high level. This can be explained that even if the media that disseminate political information has been controlled by the government during the 2014 coup, and the students have their own ways to access the political information because of the advance of online social media the government cannot entirely control. Based on the results of the in-depth interviews, most of the students agreed that they follow political news through various media such as radio, newspaper, television and internet and did not study foreign political news to compare with Thai politics because of their language difficulty. Some students have participated in political rallies to listen to various facts as information for decision-making on site. Interestingly, monk and novice students preferred to participate in the political rallies online because both Buddhist discipline and law that do not allow such activity for Buddhist monks in this country. In terms of political campaign, the activities were found to be practiced at the moderate level. Some students presented of the political news to the others, persuaded others to vote for their favorite person or political party, resulted from the media influences such as television or internet. However, the students participated in organizing meetings, training and giving advice on promoting political participation only as a part of learning or campus activities such as students' president election. For voting, monks and novice students agreed that they cannot join the activities; however, many of them suggest that as they are one of Thai citizens, they should have the equal political rights. For participating in political rally, students participate in this kind of political activity at a lowest level. Besides, the Buddhist disciple. Finally, it was suggested that to promote political participation instruction in MCUKK, the instructors should have a clear direction in teaching and manage proper instruction for monks and novices.

However, organizing the proper instruction on political participation for the monks or novices in the higher education institutions is difficult due to the long history of Thai politics. Historically, the ban on monks and novices to involve in



politics was written in the supreme law of the country after the Siam Revolution of 1932, only 6 months. It is said that this 2<sup>nd</sup> constitution merely expressed a compromise between the People's Party and the royal court. This is completely different from the first constitution which was promulgated on June 27, 1932, which the People's Party wrote this first constitution without limiting the electoral rights of monks or novices. Now, it is 89<sup>th</sup> year of the enactment of the law limiting the electoral rights of monks and novices in the highest law. The prohibition in the constitution becomes a rule of the rulers that has changed itself as a tradition, custom, way of life, molded into a deeply rooted in a Thai democratic society to believe that 'the political participation is not the monastic duty'. Similarly, the constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2017, which was written by the Military Dictatorship contains 6 sections on religious issues which are contradictory in themselves (Dresner et al., 2006; Jones et al., 1999). Section 27: persons are equal in the law, have rights and liberties and are equally protected by law. Unfair discrimination against individuals regardless of reasons of differences in ...religious beliefs... cannot be done, but Section 96 prohibits only monks, novices, ascetics, or priests from exercising their right to vote, as well as those who are insane or mentally unstable, inmates, and those whose rights have been revoked (The Constitutional Court of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2017). The Thai parliament passed a law to govern the Sangha, specifically named The Sangha Act, B.E. 2505 to close the opportunity for monks and novices (more than 300,000) over the country to participate in the political activities, however, monks and novices have duties under section 50, just like the general public, ten duties that we are familiar with, such as (5) performing military service as provided by law, (9) paying taxes as provided by law, (3) strictly performing duties according to the law (The Constitutional Court of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

As mentioned above, the study on the political participation of monks and novices in MCUKK and (2) suggestions to promote the political participation instruction of monk and novice students in the higher education institutions. The research findings revealed the moderate level of the samples' political participation due the restriction caused by a long history of Thai politics and coup. The suggestion to promote the political participation instruction of monk and novice students in MCU is that the university lecturers should pay attention to educating the legal rights and importance of political participation in terms of voting, political news, political campaign and political rally for the students although there is the law that Buddhist monks should not be involved in politics. The proper instruction of political participation of monks and novice may first begin with learning the political history that has great impact on the electoral right of the monks and novices. This would lead them to understand their current positions in the society and act properly according to their social status.

### **Recommendation**

The next research should study the political participation levels of students in Buddhist Universities based on their personal factors such as secular or monastic status in order to create the Buddhist Based Instruction courses on political

science. In other words, the research on the Buddhist politics should be carried out in the Buddhist Universities.

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