



Populism in Southern Border Provinces: Case Study of Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani, and Songkhla

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore the opinions of voters in four southern border provinces towards populism on issues of populist policies, policies implementation, and future effects on the nation. Data of this survey research were obtained by a set of questionnaire through 400 voters resided at Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani, and Songkhla Provinces. The study revealed that the voters truly agreed with the future effects of populism on the nation. The opinions towards populist policies and policies implementation were at an uncertain level. The voters varied by careers had different opinions on populist policies and policies implementation statically significant. The voters with different levels of education had different opinions on the future effects of populism on the nation statically significant. Researchers had to use this study model to do further studies on different groups of population in other regions of Thailand such as voters in the North, Central, East, and West by making the comparison with the results of this study.

Keywords: Populism/ Southern Border Provinces

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Introduction

The election of Thailand in the past was carried out through a patron-client system. People voted for an individual rather than policies of political parties. The situation and the behaviors of voters in the election were changed when populist policies were introduced to the public by the Thai Lak Thai Party. As a new political phenomenon, it made a dramatic change on the Thai election, and it became a new dimension in the Thai politics as well. The populist policies were intendedly formulated for the so-called the grass roots such as the poor and agriculturists who played important roles on the democracy of Thailand in rural areas. The introduction of those policies was significantly important for the economy, society, and politics. This could be reiterated that the populist policies was totally different from other policies of political parties in Thailand in the past which were emphasized the development of macroeconomics. The previous policies were created under the concept that the growth of the economy of the nation would stimulate large businesses to produce more products and attract more foreign investors, and when productivity was encouraged, jobs, incomes, and opportunities would be available for many people in the country. This top-down policies and development were different from the populist policies under the concept of “new thought and new creation,” which was focused on the internal economic strength, and it was begun with the grass roots as the bottom up development. Whenever the local people had higher incomes, they would be healthier and have better quality of lives, leading to have the sustainable democracy (Tanyasanchai, 2004). However, new political changes of Thailand were progressively developed, as well as the varieties of freedom and political expressions of people. The people had more concrete political behaviors, networks, allies, and they were legitimate to set up political organizations with the local people as a mechanism to make changes on both the local and national levels of politics through the democratic system.

The areas of four southern border provinces: Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani, and Songkhla were the important strongholds of the Democrat Party, the oldest political party of Thailand and ASEAN. The Democrat Party always had the main strongholds and members of parliament from the south. The political campaigns launched by both the Democrat Party and the Thai Lak Thai Party in the election of 3rd July 2011 were created under the concept of the populism. The overall picture of policies of both political parties was interesting and fabulous, but the ways of management those policies were just different. For example, the policy on the health care of the Democrat Party had been highly praised because it focused on the contents of works and processes and had more coverages than the one of the Thai Lak Thai Party. In fact, if the policy of the Democrat Party was implemented, it would be more potentially beneficial for people because it also educated people about health care which was claimed as “protection rather than treatment”. Its policy would reduce the rate of diseases, which were from consumption behaviors of people, under a-three-



good policy: good atmosphere, good standard, and good management; together with increasing better measures on taking care and prevention of the spread of diseases in case of emergency effectively. Hence, the policies of the Democrat Party were averagely successful while the management of the Thai Lak Thai Party emphasized the monetary management and professional businesses under the concept of statistics and numbers. On the other hand, the policies of the Thai Lak Thai Party were more correlated, concise, careful, and clearer in administration. Thus, these strengths were more advanced than the policies of the Democrat Party. For instance, the policy of increasing 25 percent of wages within two years of the Democrat Party and 300 Baht/day of the Thai Lak Thai Party both were really criticized by scholars because such policy would increase the public debt and accelerate inflation, especially the 300 Baht/day policy of the Thai Lak Thai Party. This policy had driven prices of goods higher, according to the economic principle, but it was later insisted as a practical policy because the prices of some goods were not increase much as concerned. However, the comparison of the populist policies between both political parties was found that the policies of the Democrat Party had lower risk because of the conservative patterns of administration, having more disciplines, while the ones of the Thai Lak Thai Party might look more professional but with higher risk (Sangpong, 2014).

As the description above, therefore, the researchers were interested to conduct a study on “Populism in Southern Border Provinces” as to examine the opinions of voters towards the issues of populist policies, policies implementation, and future effects on the nation. The outcomes of this study then could be utilized in formulating policies, planning, and improving the ways of administration of Thai political parties more effectively.

Concepts of Populism

Boonmarat (2006) stated that populism was mainly adhered to the popularity of a leader or politician from people. It was constituted by the concepts of both people and popularity. The scope of populism was linked to the satisfaction of people in a particular country towards a political party or policy, and it was normally expressed through the number of votes in the election. Almost all governments or political parties, therefore, needed to formulate the policies that satisfied their people who would finally support them.

Laothamatas (2006) defined the meaning of populism in a border sense as a thought or an activity or a movement that focused on people. It was usually related to the lower class or ordinary people, giving values and importance to those people in order to seek for popularity and support. Sometimes, the people might criticize the elite groups, rulers, the rich, and even themselves.



Phipatseritham (2008) pointed out that populism was used for a very long time in the academic community on both social science and politics. It was mostly used to inform or explain about the ideas and political policies, especially the countries in Latin America where the poor were lured into supporting the politics for political power and advantages of the election. The meaning of populism was normally perceived negatively rather than a pleasant one, and it could be defined differently by the factors of time, places, and situations.

Roberts (2003) insisted that the meaning of populism was flexible, and it was defined widely among scholars from Latin America. Those scholars viewed populism as multidimensional phenomena that were connected with the political issues of a leader who emphasized personal relationship and requests of social groups—once used to be the lower class. In addition, populism was also related to a model for economic development; for example, the implementation of import substitution industrialization policy helped to boost up nationalism, intervention of the government, putting emphasis on income distribution, and allocation of natural resources.

Therefore, the core definition of populism could be concluded as the policy that put emphasis on the lower class, ordinary people, and the grass roots in order to seek for support and gain popularity.

Populist Policies in Thailand

Phipatseritham (2008) explained that the use of populist policies before the period of the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was not apparent in Thailand. The implementation of populist policies and expenses of budget that focused on the poor for a political agenda could be rarely found. Most of cases were in a pattern of budget distribution to the bastion of politicians or offering the social benefits instead. Such practices were still not concretely formulated as the main policies of all political parties. On the other hand, the phenomenon of using populist politics appeared vividly during the election on 6th January 2001 when the Thai Rak Thai Party, as a new political party led by former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, proposed several populist policies such as the Moratorium for Smallholder Agriculturers Project, the Village and Urban Fund Project, the Bank of People Project, 30 Baht Health Care Project etc. These policies were aimed to the low income people who were the majority as agriculturers or laborers. The campaign on those policies, the readiness of the Thai Rak Thai Party in terms of financial power, and recruiting popular politicians in the local areas to the party made highly successful election with 256 seats from the total of 500, 208 seats form the direct election and 48 seats form the party list. With the tremendous victory, the Thai Rak Thai Party was able to push and used those policies concretely, making them as the main policies of the coalition government at that time. Furthermore, during the administration of the Thai Rak Thai



Party, other additional new populist policies were also implemented, for instance, SML Project, Baan Eua Arthorn Project, and One District One Scholarship or ODOS Project. Hence, the implementation of these populist policies became the main factors that pushed the Thai Rak Thai Party to win another election on 6th February 2005 with the total of 377 seats, enabling Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra to become the Prime Minister for the second term.

The implementation of populist policies, on the one hand, could be crucial because it helped the low income people and built up the social safety network; but on the other hand there were a lot of skepticism and controversies over the possibility and sustainability of the proposed projects. The direct consequence of populist policies on the economy, politics, and the society could be discussed as the following explanation (Phipatseritham, 2551).

1. Economic Consequence

Inevitably, the implementation of each populist policy required the budget. The budget could be a domestic loan or international loan or from increasing the rate of taxes. Under these basic conditions, when the populist government had power, it would urgently implement its policies of economy that aimed to distribute income, build job, and accelerate the growth of the economy in many portions. The changes of the economy and effect of the populist policies were able to be divided into four periods.

In the first period, the populist policies for the macro economy were relevantly achieved. The economy was expanded; the rate of true wages was increased with no inflation because of price control. Productivities were fulfilled by importing. The decrease of inventories and imports fulfilled the need of expanded spending without altering the rate of inflation.

In the second period, the economy of the country started facing a problem which caused from the over domestic demand and devaluation of foreign currency. The government then needed to handle the problem by protecting the industry, devaluating the currency, and controlling currency exchanges; when the rate of inflation and wages got greatly high. Due to the subsidization for the populist policies by an enormous amount of the budget, the budget deficit finally turned to be a crisis.

In the third period, the insufficiency of the budget and rate of inflation went a lot higher. The foreign currency flowed out from the country, making the budget deficit worse. The government was not only unable to collect more taxes, but it also needed to support its populist projects. Eventually, the populist policies undermined the stability of the government because the government had to decrease the support for the populist projects.

In the fourth period, the populist government was collapsed. This crisis caused from using forces to topple the populist government. Later, the policies to maintain the economic stability were restored, and the interim government even entered to the



program of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the financial aid. The new government had to manage the country with difficulty because the rate of wages was dramatically decreased during the administration of the populist government. All of the problems required a long a term solution as the foreign currency was flowed from the country and a total lack of confidence from investors.

2. Political Consequence

The bastion of political parties was a main factor to make them step up to power and have legitimacy to administrate the nation, so the political parties tried to seek for all kinds of strategies to gain the voters' support in the election in order to have the majority in the parliament. In a developing country where the levels of education of people was still very low together with ineffectiveness of mass media, the implementation of the populist policies was easily successful because people didn't realize the negative results of the policies in the long term or lacked true media information to make a right decision.

The campaign of the populist policies of the Thai Rak Thai Party during the election on 6th January 2001 was a key factor to push the Thai Rak Thai Party win the election and make the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra stay in power. Normally, when the politicians were in power, they would like to maintain their power as long as possible. Therefore, the maintenance of popularity in order to keep the bastion and support from people was highly significant.

3. Social Consequence

The social consequence could be either a positive or negative pact. For the positive impact, the populist policies had left up the quality of life and the status in the society of the poor such as agriculturists and laborers. The Thai Rak Thai Party, therefore, used the populist policies to build up its bastion successfully, while other political parties imitated The Thai Rak Thai Party and proposed the policies that particularly aimed at these two groups of people. As a result, the poor were helped and paid more attention. For the drawback, the populist policies had weakened the society because the people would lack self-development and self-reliance; they just waited for the assist of the government. The main cause of the problems was mainly from the politicians who desired to have the support and immediate political victory. Hence, the populist policies were carelessly used, without any readiness and providing understanding to the people before implementing. Many projects just seemed like exchanges the budget with votes and creating the perception of waiting for help from the government as a receiver, for example, the Village and Urban Fund Project, the Bank of People Project, and the Moratorium for Smallholder Agriculturists Project. In fact these projects could probably enable opportunities for investment, increasing more income, reducing expenses, and building up learning in financial management in a community. However, in practice, those projects were implemented without



providing any knowledge for money management, and when the people easily received the money from the government, they spent carelessly. When money was run out, they just made a loan that caused a debt and a new problem.

Methodologies

The population of this survey research was 2,153,023 people settled in four southern border provinces: Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani, and Songkhla (Office of The Election Commission of Thailand, 2014). The samples, however, were 400 voters who were randomized by the Yamane formulation (Yamane, 1973) with the reliability at 95 percent. The proportion of voters was conducted by the Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling (Vanitbancha, 2007) as the following numbers: Yala = 59, Narathiwat = 80, Pattani = 78, and Songkhla = 183.

A set of questionnaires created by the researcher was used to collect the data, complying through reviewing literatures, related researches, designing, and reliability testing. Then, the research tool was designed into a format of open-ended questions and closed-ended questions.

To assess the quality of a set of questionnaires, the content validity, and accuracy analysis, use of language and questions correlation were examined by 5 experts by rating the weight of the relation between the objectives and the designed questions (Srisaard, 2002). The results indicated that all items in the questionnaire reached higher than 0.5; that was, the quality was between 0.6-1.0. However, the experts suggested improving the use of the language. The pilot test was conducted with 50 samples in Songkhla Province as to check out the reliability of the questionnaire through Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α). The result of the pilot test pointed out that the questionnaire had the values between $0 < \alpha < 1$. This meant the set of questionnaires had high reliability. When focusing on the issues of populist policies, policies implementation, and future effects on the nation, it was found out that the set of questionnaires had the reliability at 0.88.

The researcher collected the data throughout eight months from April 2015 to November 2015 by spending two months in each province until the samples were reached up at the total of 400.

SPSS for Windows (Statistical Package for Social Science) was used to analyze the data on the following points:

1. To analyze individual statuses: ages, careers, levels of education through the frequency and percentage
2. To analyze the opinions of voters in southern border provinces towards populism on the issues of populist policies, policies implementation, and future effects on the nation through the mean and standard deviation.



3. To analyze and compare the differences of average results of opinions of voters in southern border provinces towards the populism on the issues of populist policies, policies implementation, future effects on the nation, and individual statuses varied by two independent groups through T-test and One-way ANOVA.

Five-level rating scales of opinions of voters in southern border provinces towards populism on the issues of populist policies, policies implementation, and future effects on the nation were the following levels:

Strongly true	5 points
True	4 points
Uncertain	3 points
False	2 points
Strongly false	1 point

The ranges of criteria set up by the researchers were the following rates:

5	4.21 – 5.00	= Strongly true
4	3.41 – 4.20	= True
3	2.61 – 3.40	= Uncertain
2	1.81 – 2.60	= False
1	1.00 – 1.80	= Strongly false

Findings

In this study, the researchers collected the data from the voters in Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani, and Songkhla Provinces. The obtained data on general information of the participants, the opinions towards populism, the opinions towards populist policies, the implementation, and the future effects on the nation were analyzed and compared varied by the ranges of ages, careers, and levels of education as illustrated on Table 1-3.

1. General information of participants

Table 1: Frequency and percentage

General information	Numbers	Percentage
1. Ages		
18 - 25 years old	36	9.0
26 – 30 years old	70	17.5
31 – 35 years old	61	15.3
36 – 40 years old	63	15.8
41 – 45 years old	49	12.3



General information	Numbers	Percentage
46 – 50 years old	52	13.0
51 – 55 years old	37	9.3
56 – 60 years old	15	3.8
Upper 60 years old	17	4.3

2. Careers		
Freelancers/Staff	114	28.5
Agriculturer	81	20.3
Traders/own business	102	25.5
Government officers/Enterprise	62	15.5
others	41	10.3

3. Levels of education		
Primary schools and lower	48	12.0
Junior high school or equal to	54	13.5
Senior high school or equal to	71	17.8
High vocational or diploma	80	20.0
Bachelor degree	122	30.5
Higher than bachelor degree	25	6.3

The study on the general statuses of participants was found out that most voters in southern border provinces were between 26-30 years old at 17.5 percent, followed by 36-40 years old at 15.8 percent, 31-35 years old at 15.3 percent, 46-50 years old at 13.0 percent, 41-45 years old at 12.3 percent, 51-55 years old at 9.3 percent, 18 - 25 years old at 9.0 percent, upper 60 years old at 4.3 percent, and 56 – 60 years old at 3.8 percent. Most of them were freelancers/staff at 28.5 percent, followed by traders/ own business at 25.5 percent, agriculturists at 20.3 percent, government officers/enterprise at 15.5 percent, and others at 10.3 percent. And most of them had a bachelor degree at 30.5 percent, followed by high vocational or diploma or equal to at 20.0 percent, senior high school or equal to at 17.8 percent, junior high school or equal to at 13.5 percent, primary schools and lower at 12.0 percent, and higher than bachelor degree at 6.3 percent.



2. The overall picture of opinions of people in southern border provinces towards populism was shown on Table 2.

Table 2: Opinions of people in southern border provinces towards populism

Populism	\bar{X}	S.D.	Levels of opinions
Populist policy	3.24	0.64	uncertain
Implementation	3.17	0.70	uncertain
Future effects on the nation	3.95	0.83	true
Total	3.45	0.72	uncertain

The information of Table 2 demonstrated that the voters in southern border provinces had the uncertain level of opinions towards the populism at ($\bar{X} = 3.45$, S.D. = 0.72). Separately, the opinions towards the future effects of populism on the nation was at the “true” level at ($\bar{X} = 3.95$, S.D. = 0.83), while the opinions towards the policies and implementation were at the uncertain level at ($\bar{X} = 3.24$, S.D. = 0.64) and ($\bar{X} = 3.17$, S.D. = 0.70) respectively.

3. The comparison of opinions of the voters on the populist policies and the implementation, and the future effects on the nation varied by ages, careers and levels of education was shown on Table 3.

Table 3: The comparison of opinions of the voters on policies and the implementation, and the future effects on the nation varied by ages, careers and levels of education

	Ages		Careers		Levels of education	
	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Populist policies	1.285	0.250	9.046	0.000**	1.053	0.386
Implementation	0.507	0.851	5.945	0.000**	0.844	0.519
Effects on the nation	0.788	0.614	1.173	0.322	4.476	0.001**

* statically significant at 0.05

** statically significant at 0.01

From the figures on Table 3, (1) it was found out that the voters in the southern border provinces with different ages had different opinions towards the populist policies, the implementation, and the future effects on the nation statically significant. (2) The voters in the southern border provinces with different careers had different opinions towards the populist policies and implementation statically significant at 0.01, while the future effects on the nation were indifferent. (3) The



voters in the southern border provinces with different levels of education had different opinions towards the future effects on the nation statically significant at 0.01; whereas, the opinions towards the populist policies were insignificantly different.

Summary and Interpretation

From the study on the populism in the southern border provinces, the researcher found that the comparison between the voters with different ages and levels of education was insignificantly different, accorded to Voravan's study (Tanyasanchai, 2004). She conducted a study on "The Sustainable Development towards Populism: A Case Study of Senior Students of Kasetsart University", and she discovered that people with different personal statuses had different opinions towards the populism insignificantly different. However, due to having the positive opinions towards the populist policies, which stimulated the economy of the grass roots, the policies enabled Thailand to have more stability and the long term growth. Besides these, the populist policies which were based on the needs of people would help reduce poverty, build up opportunities, increase incomes, and encourage people to participate and have local self-reliance.

Suggestions

1. Suggestions for utilization

Government units such as the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Commerce, and political parties were able to utilize the results of this study in terms of policies and implementation as the following issues:

1.1 The populist policies had to be emphasized on the benefits of majority, helping the grass roots to escape from poverty, returning benefits from paying taxes, reducing domestic expenses, building opportunities for people to fully use their potentials and asset, reducing gaps between the rich and poor, and being beneficial to people concretely.

1.2 Implementing populist policies, the government had to have disciplines and steps for sharing benefits to people fairly and following up the implementation of the policies systematically in order to prevent the corruption by formulating more practical implementation and as a public policy in accordance with the democratic system of the country.

2. Suggestions for further studies

Researchers had to take the model of this study to further studies on different groups of population in each regional area of Thailand, for example, voters in the North, Central, East, and West; and made the comparison with the results of this study.

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