JOPAG

ISSN 2697-3790 (Online)

JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Volume 15 No.2, May – August 2025

Editorial Team

Editor-in-Chief:

Sanyarat Meesuwan, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Associate Editors:

Cheerawat Charoensuk, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Kuboon Charumanee, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Wanida Phromlah, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Journal's Advisor:

Dean of College of Politics and Governance, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Sida Sonsri, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Manipur University, India

Editorial Board:

Ahmad Aldrie Amir, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

Amanda L.Kennedy, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia

Antonio P. Contreras, University of the Philippines Los Bano

Eko Priyo Purnomo, University Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Gamolporn Sonsri, Mahidol University, Thailand

Godwin Ehiarekhian Oboh, Benson Idahosa University, Nigeria

Hidayat Ullah Khan, National University of Modern Languages, Pakistan

Imon Chowdhooree, BRAC University, Bangladesh

James Ockey, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

Jenn-Jaw Soong, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan

Kristoffer B. Berse, University of the Philippines, Philippines

Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan, American International University, Bangladesh

Muhammad Kashan Surahio, Hefei University of Technology, China

Park Eun-Hong, Sungkonghoe University, South Korea

Prasongchai Setthasuravich, University of Tokyo, Japan

Poowin Bunyavejchewin, Thammasat University, Thailand

Sharima Ruwaida Abbas, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

Somboon Sirisunhirun, Mahidol University, Thailand

Somchai Phatharathananunth, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Editorial Assistants:

Kawin Pimjanna, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Worachat Rungwiriyawanich, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Contents

Research Articles:

Policy Models on the Development of Intellectual Capital and Creative Economy to Strengthen Tourist Attractions in the Lower Northeastern Province, Thailand 1-14

Dasarinpat Suthamdee, Chinnawat Chueasraku

The Exploration of Challenges Concerning Combat against Illegal Transboundary Movement of Plastic Waste in Thailand 15-28

Phatsaporn Suwannakart, Rachtipan Pitiwararom, Nichabha Pumjit

Family Property Law: A Comparative Case Study between Lao PDR and Thailand 29-39

Khamphiou Vilayphone, Chitaporn Pisolyabutratovisetkul, Daranee Saengnil

Puzzle of Media and Citizens Over Democracy in Nigeria 40-56

Godwin Ehiarekhian Oboh

Academic Articles

Thailand's Rural Doctor Movement and Democratization of Public Health 57-70

Gil Turingan

Temporal Development Patterns of Inner Solar System Colonization in Comparativist 71-86

Marian Ehret, Phanrajit Havarangsi

JOPAG
JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Journal of Politics and Governance
15(2), May – August 2025

Policy Models on the Development of Intellectual Capital and Creative Economy to Strengthen Tourist Attractions in the Lower Northeastern Province, Thailand

Dasarinpat Suthamdee [1], **Chinnawat Chueasraku** [1*]

[1] College of Politics and Governance, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

[*] Corresponding Author, chinnawat.c@msu.ac.th , © Authors

Article history:

Received Date: May 18, 2024

Revised Date: October 17, 2024

Accepted Date: October 28, 2024

Keywords:

Policy Models,
Intellectual Capital,
Creative Economy,
Tourist Attractions

Abstract

Due to Thailand's abundant natural resources and rich cultural heritage, it presents a significant opportunity for further investigation into policy models aimed at enhancing intellectual capital and promoting the creative economy to elevate tourist attractions within the "Nakhon Chai Burin provincial group". The objectives of this study were twofold: firstly, to explore the relationship between intellectual capital and the creative economy in the enhancement of tourist attractions within the Nakhon Chai Burin provincial group, and secondly, to devise a policy model for the development of intellectual capital and the creative economy to uplift tourist destinations in this provincial group. This research employed qualitative methodologies, including documented research methods, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, to gather and analyze data. The findings were presented through analytical and synthetic means, with interpretative inductive conclusions drawn from the results. The research findings unveiled significant relationships between intellectual capital—encompassing human, relationship, and structural capital—and the creative economy, leading to the enhancement of tourist attractions within the Nakhon Chaiburin provincial group. Notably, a statistically significant positive correlation was observed between these variables and the upgrading of tourist destinations in the Nakhon Chaiburin provincial group. Various factors pertaining to the development of intellectual capital and the principles of the creative economy were identified as influential in the enhancement of tourist attractions within this region. These factors encompass human capital elements, relationship capital dynamics, structural capital components, and concepts intrinsic to the creative economy. Policy models designed to foster intellectual capital development and promote the creative economy for the advancement of tourist attractions in the Nakhon Chaiburin provincial group were delineated as follows: firstly, the promotion of human capital factors through initiatives aimed at nurturing talent, enhancing skills, fostering adaptability, bolstering communication proficiencies, cultivating interpersonal relationships, and nurturing effective leadership; secondly, the promotion of relationship capital factors, entailing activities such as public relations endeavors, promotional campaigns, and the establishment of local networks; thirdly, the encouragement of structural capital development, emphasizing the establishment of clear objectives, the cultivation of a culture of collaborative effort, and the enhancement of operational efficiency; fourthly, the advocacy for integrating the principles of the creative economy into operational frameworks, with an emphasis on fostering innovation and uniqueness. Consequently, it is imperative to prioritize the preservation and cultivation of elements related to intellectual capital and the creative economy to optimize the efficacy of upgrading tourist attractions within the Nakhon Chaiburin provincial group.

© Authors

Introduction

The 2nd National Tourism Development Plan (2017-2021) articulates the vision for Thai tourism in 2036 as aiming for Thailand to become one of the world's premier destinations for quality tourism, characterized by balanced growth grounded in Thai cultural identity. This vision aims to foster economic and social development while ensuring equitable income distribution across all sectors in a sustainable manner. Key strategies outlined in the plan include the conservation and restoration of tourist attractions susceptible to degradation, the management of tourist capacity, the cultivation of environmental consciousness, and the promotion of cultural sustainability, all while upholding and safeguarding Thai identity, traditional values, and local wisdom. However, various environmental factors and changing contexts, both domestically and internationally, present risks to this vision. These include the liberalization of the economy, the challenges posed by new technologies, and the societal transition to an aging demographic. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019 further exacerbated these challenges, resulting in a severe contraction of global tourism due to restrictions on international travel. Consequently, the number of foreign tourists visiting Thailand has seen a significant decline over the past decade.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the number of foreign tourists entering Thailand plummeted from 6,692,775 in 2020 to just 106,117 in 2021 (January – October), marking a staggering 98% decrease compared to the previous period. However, in contrast to international tourism, revenue from domestic tourism in secondary cities witnessed a notable increase of 24.91% in 2021 compared to 2020. This surge can be attributed to a blend of cultural diversity, Thai traditions, and local customs that create unique experiences for tourists. Consequently, Thai tourists have shown a heightened interest in exploring tourism opportunities in secondary cities during this period. In response to the decline in international tourism and the growing emphasis on domestic travel, the government has implemented measures to support and stimulate tourism among Thai nationals. These measures include initiatives such as the "Traveling Together" campaign, backed by 1,500 million baht, and the "Pansuk Tourism" initiative, supported by 2,400 million baht. While these initiatives aim to promote domestic tourism on a broad scale, they do not specifically target the resolution and revitalization of the tourism sector and its associated businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The northeastern region of Thailand spans an extensive area of approximately 160,000 square kilometers, constituting half of the country's landmass. Within this region lie several provinces, including Nakhon Ratchasima, Chaiyaphum, Buriram, and Surin, which share similar lifestyles and cultural characteristics. These provinces boast a diverse array of tourist attractions, such as sites imbued with the legacy of Khmer civilization, encompassing religious and ancient landmarks that span across all four provinces. Additionally, the region offers opportunities for ecotourism and sports tourism, among other pursuits. Despite its rich offerings, Thailand's northeastern region continues to grapple with a relatively low influx of tourists. Moreover, a notable segment of tourists visiting the region fails to contribute effectively to the tourism sector's economic growth (Kanok Boonsak, 2018). Moreover, currently in Thailand, tourism is a strategic issue for the country's economic development, which is considered a creative economy. Tourism has been included in the National Economic and Social Development Plan in the form of creative tourism activities, focusing on social development that emphasizes the creation of virtues and ethics, reducing social inequality, and linking to a creative economy,

 © Authors

especially in the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan. (2023-2027) which focuses on a creative economy that promotes the production of goods and services by leveraging comparative advantages, utilizing cultural tourism resources. This presents a great opportunity to promote creative tourism as a sustainable model for the development of Thai tourism (Thiranont, S. & Soponjaratsakul, P., 2016).

Given the aforementioned significance, there arises a necessity to undertake a correlation study to explore the influence of each component of human capital, structural capital, and relational capital on sustainable tourism within the "Nakhon Chaiburin Provincial Group." This examination encompasses both direct and indirect impacts facilitated through the intermediary role of the Creative Economy. This framework enables the creation of diverse tourism activities aimed at enticing various categories of tourists to explore the region. Furthermore, it advocates for the promotion of creative and cultural tourism by orchestrating Thai arts and cultural events to distinguish the area and allure visitors. Additionally, it supports tourism models that foster connectivity between communities and the tourism sector via the Creative Economy, thereby enhancing the potential of local human resources to drive sustainable and innovative community—based tourism development. This approach is anchored on the preservation of natural resources and the environment, alongside the promotion of social and community identity, arts, culture, and the sustainable management of tourism resources.

Research Objectives

1) To investigate the correlation between intellectual capital and the creative economy concerning the enhancement of tourist attractions within the Nakhon Chaiburin Provincial group.

2) To formulate a policy model aimed at fostering the development of intellectual capital and the creative economy to uplift tourist attractions within the Nakhon Chaiburin Provincial group.

Literature Review

1. Concepts of Public Policy

1.1 The Meaning of Public Policy

From the study of concepts related to public policy, it is found that scholars have provided interesting definitions of public policy. For example, Ira Sharkansky (1970, p.1) defines public policy as activities undertaken by the government, encompassing all activities of the government. Dye, Thomas R. (1984, p.1) Public policy is what the government chooses to do or not to do. The part that is done encompasses all activities of the government, both routine activities and activities that occur on certain occasions.

Anderson, James E. (1994, p. 5-6) Public policy is a course of action or conduct that has several components, including the practitioners or a set of actors who are responsible for addressing social issues. The clear objective is to achieve specific outcomes, not merely what the government intends to do or proposes to do. This distinguishes clearly between policy and government decisions, which is a crucial issue in comparing competing alternatives, as noted by scholars from Thailand.

Vorathepputhipong, T. (1993, p. 2) stated that public policy is a course of action by the government with specific objectives, either one or several, to solve current problems, prevent future issues, and achieve desired outcomes.

In summary, public policy is considered a tool that the government uses to set the direction and guidelines for societal development. These directions or guidelines may originate from the initiatives of the government, the private sector, or the public. The process of creating good public policy must involve participation from all relevant parties in society, working together by

 © Authors

policy, implementing those policies, monitoring the results, and reviewing public policy to continuously improve and develop.

1.2 The Importance of Public Policy

From the meaning of public policy, which is characterized by the government's intention to use it as a guideline for the development of the country and its people, the author has summarized the importance of public policy as follows: Public policy serves as a framework for the management of government affairs to solve problems for the public. This is because public policy affects various aspects of people's lives, such as public health policy, education welfare, taxation, foreign trade, immigration, civil rights, environmental protection, local government expenditures, and national defense. Additionally, public policy acts as a compass for the work of government officials, who adhere to it as a guideline. Public policy specifies what actions, how, and when relevant government officials must take to align with that public policy.

In summary, public policy is considered the most important part of government administration because it is related to the government's intentions from the time of election campaigning to the announcement of policy statements. Moreover, public policy itself is significant in terms of the development of the country in all aspects.

2. Intellectual capital (L. Edvinsson, and Malone, 1997)

Intellectual capital encompasses the intellectual content and cognitive processes, comprising knowledge, information, intellectual property, and experiential insights, which are inherently challenging to articulate directly from the mind (Edvinsson, 1997). It represents a valuable but often elusive resource; once identified and effectively harnessed, it can confer a distinct competitive edge upon organizations (Bontis, N., 1996). This form of capital aggregates human expertise, structural resources, and experiential wisdom deployed within organizational frameworks, thereby furnishing entities with a foundation for competitive advantage, reputation enhancement, and sustainable competitiveness (Roos & Roos, 1997). Moreover, intellectual capital is construed as the culmination of individuals' developmental endeavors aimed at leveraging their potential to generate income autonomously (Stewart, 2010). Consequently, intellectual capital can be delineated as a reservoir of knowledge, information, and expertise rooted in community or local wisdom. It emerges from the process of knowledge transformation and is disseminated through intellectual endeavors, furnishing communities or localities with the capacity to cultivate competitive advantages and generate income autonomously. Utilizing their professional competencies and technological acumen, individuals within these communities or localities forge meaningful relationships with clientele, thereby fostering sustainable competitive dynamics.

2.1 The composition of Intellectual capital

Based on the pertinent literature review concerning intellectual capital, the constituent elements of intellectual capital can be delineated as follows: Human capital, Structural capital, and Relationship capital (Sveiby, 1997).

2.1.1 Human Capital pertains to the capacity of individuals to act effectively across diverse contexts, generating both tangible and intangible assets (Sveiby, 1997). It stands as a primary dimension of intellectual capital, representing the boundary of cognitive competency (Curado et al., 2011). Human capital may be construed as the economic value intrinsic to human resources, encompassing individuals' abilities, knowledge, ideas, skills, innovation, energy, and resolve to fulfill their responsibilities and create value toward accomplishing organizational objectives (Schermerhorn, 2005).

 © Authors

2.1.2 Structural Capital constitutes an integral facet of intellectual capital, cultivated by organizations to convert human capital, an intangible asset, into virtually tangible capital. It encompasses assets such as patents, concepts, models, computer systems, and administrative frameworks (Sveiby, 1997). Serving as a foundational infrastructure, structural capital comprises systems, procedures, and processes that enable employees to function effectively (Bontis, N., 2002). It encompasses all facets of organizational structure that facilitate employees' capacity to generate wealth for the organization and its stakeholders. Structural capital assumes paramount importance as it encompasses internal systems that underpin wealth creation within the organization (Zablah et al., 2004).

2.1.3 Relationship Capital denotes the network of relationships between an organization and its customers and suppliers (Sveiby, 1997). This external form of capital holds significant relevance for organizations, encompassing relationships with external entities such as customers or business associates (Hardeep et al., 2013). These relationships play a pivotal role in organizational success by fostering collaboration, trust, and mutual benefit between the organization and its external stakeholders.

In summary, Human capital encompasses both tangible (physical) and intangible (non-physical) assets, with their assessment necessitating a measurement model grounded in individual capabilities. Structural capital embodies the organized knowledge within a system and encompasses the value derived from an organization's entire network of relationships with its external environment. This includes applied expertise, corporate technologies, customer relations, and professional competencies, all of which contribute to establishing a competitive advantage in the market (Edvinsson & Malone, 1997). Additionally, Intellectual capital encapsulates the entirety of an organization's knowledge repository, as articulated in the works of Bontis (1999) and Bontis et al. (2002).

3. Creative Economy Concept

The creative economy represents a burgeoning sector within the global market. Hawkins (2010) utilized the creative ecology theory to examine human creativity and creative prowess. Within this framework, creative ecosystems are conceptualized as conduits wherein diverse individuals systematically and adaptively express themselves, utilizing ideas to engender novel concepts. Hawkins (2007) introduced the concept of creative development, underlining three pivotal conditions:

Amplified Personality: Creativity may not invariably stem from individual ingenuity alone; collaborative efforts can foster creative development.

Originality: This facet emphasizes improvement upon existing similarities, delineated by two key attributes:

3.1. Novelty denotes concepts that are absent from the creator's previous repertoire, although they need not be entirely unique.

3.2. Uniqueness signifies creations that diverge from prior manifestations, thereby possessing inherent novelty.

3.3 Significance: Products must not only exhibit creativity but also distinguish themselves from other commodities, thereby establishing a unique identity and imbuing the product with meaningful value.

In essence, the creative economy amalgamates intellectual capital, knowledge, communal identity, and diverse skill sets to foster innovation. This integration facilitates commercial diversification, resulting in value creation and maximal economic output. The creative economy encompasses transactions associated with the creation of goods or outcomes, each embodying two complementary values: the intangible worth of intellectual property and the tangible value of the service provider or platform, if applicable. Notably, certain industries prioritize the valuation of intellectual property over physical assets.

 © Authors

4. Concepts for enhancing tourist attractions

Jitthakhanwattana, B. (2005, p. 9) Factors affecting the development of tourism management. Members of the World Tourism Organization adhere to sustainable tourism development, which means that all stakeholders in tourism should protect the natural environment to achieve economic growth fully, continuously, and sustainably, in order to meet the needs and aspirations of both current and future generations equally. Additionally, it points out that all forms of tourism development that lead to the conservation of valuable and scarce resources, especially water and energy, as well as the avoidance of waste production as much as possible, should be prioritized and promoted by countries, regions, and local public organizations.

Therefore, the key issues for reform or development must aim to ensure that Thai tourism is of high quality and sustainable, to enhance the efficiency of tourism management by the government, private sector, and communities. This will impact tourism development and increase the country's competitiveness in tourism. The approach should follow the guidelines presented by the National Reform Council (2015, pp.1-12) to achieve the goals of tourism development. It is advisable to propose three reform and development issues: reforming the vision of tourism development, restructuring tourism management, and enhancing competitiveness. This is expected to lead to economic growth, reduction of environmental and social issues caused by current tourism development, income distribution and development, reduction of inequality, strengthening of society, and reduction of conflicts through sustainable learning and development.

5. Sustainable Tourism

Tourism serves as a pivotal mechanism for satisfying the contemporary demands of travelers, while concurrently ensuring the preservation of resources for future generations (Weaver, 2006). Sustainable environmental management within the tourism sector necessitates the establishment of realistic and measurable objectives pertaining to energy consumption, waste generation, resource utilization, renewable energy adoption, and recycling initiatives (Kapiki et al., 2012). This approach advocates for tourism practices that cater to the needs of both tourists and local communities, while safeguarding environmental integrity for posterity. Consequently, the tourism industry assumes a critical role within the global economy, generating economic dividends for localities, fostering the growth of the creative economy, bolstering small and medium-sized enterprises, and engendering employment opportunities on a large scale. Additionally, tourism promotes the economic advancement of developing nations (Robin, Pedroche, & Astorga, 2017; Boluk, Cavaliere, & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2019; Batle, Orfila-Sintes, & Moon, 2018).

Sustainable development, as conceptualized by Brundtland et al. (1987), entails the pursuit of development that fulfills present needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to fulfill their own needs. This paradigm aligns economic growth with social advancement and environmental stewardship (Brundtland et al., 1987), as depicted in Figure 1.

 © Authors

Figure 1

Sustainability Dimension (Purvis et al., 2018)



Research Methods

There are three distinct groups of informants involved in this study. The first group comprises government officials in tourism and academics specializing in tourism management. The second group consists of community leaders and residents residing within the Nakhon Chai Burin Provincial group. Lastly, the third group pertains to tourists visiting the aforementioned four cities.

Qualitative data collection methods entail conducting in-depth interviews with representatives from each of the three aforementioned groups. Specifically, interviews are conducted with government officials in tourism and academics engaged in tourism management, community leaders, and residents of the Nakhon Chai Burin provinces, as well as tourists visiting the region. The focus of these interviews centers on exploring concepts related to intellectual capital (e.g., human capital, relationship capital, and structural capital) and the creative economy (e.g., privacy, imperfection, and significance). A total of 24 individuals participate in these interviews, comprising eight government officials and academics involved in tourism management, eight community leaders and residents of the Nakhon Chai Burin province, and eight tourists visiting the region. The aim of these interviews is to analyze both the internal and external environments, delineating strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges within the community. Additionally, participants are encouraged to propose strategies for promoting tourism within the Nakhon Chai Burin Provincial group.

© Authors

Figure 2

Nakhon Chai Burin provincial group

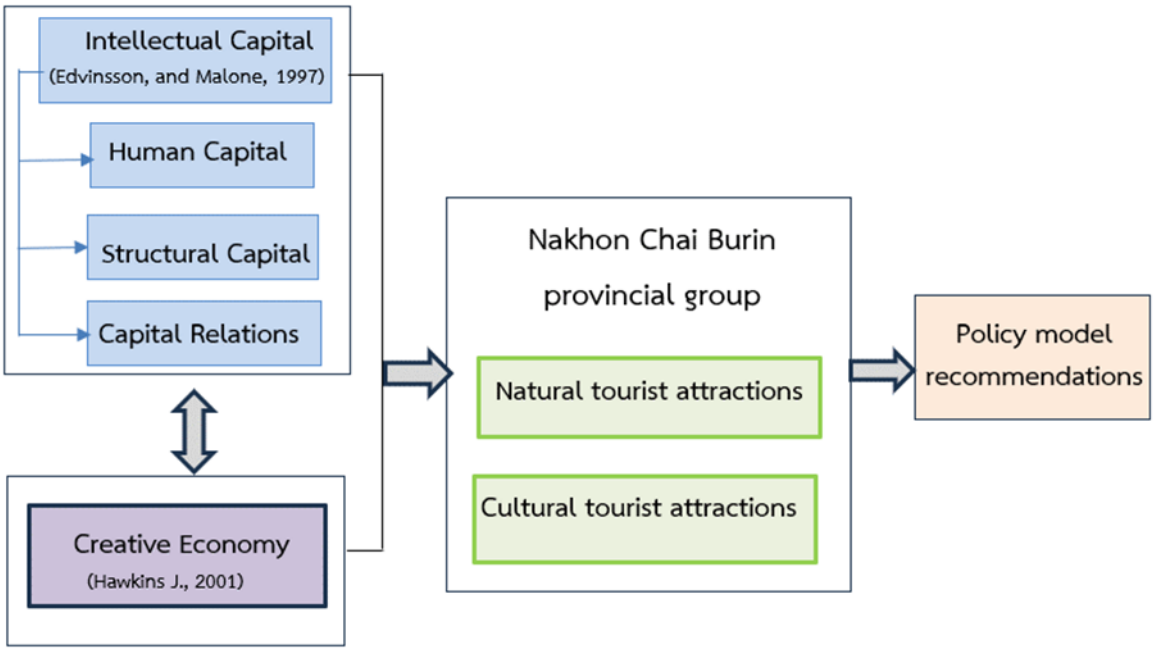


The map of Thailand delineates four provinces highlighted in purple, denoted as the Lower Northeastern Provinces, comprising Nakhon Ratchasima, Chaiyaphum, Burin, and Sisaket, collectively recognized as the Nakhon Chai Burin Provincial group. The 4 provinces shown in the map of Thailand are highlighted in purple, namely the Lower Northeastern Provinces consisting of Nakhon Ratchasima, Chaiyaphum, Burin and Sisaket, also known as Nakhon Chai Burin Provincial group.

 © Authors

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework of the study



Results

From in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with experts involved in the development of tourism management in the lower northeastern provinces group, using purposive sampling methods, including 1) two representatives from tourism site management in the lower northeastern provinces group, and 2) representatives from the office of Tourism and Sports Group of Lower Northeastern Provinces, 2 representatives; 3) Tourism Academics, 2 representatives; 4) Cultural Academics and Local Politicians, 2 representatives; 5) Representatives of Natural and Cultural Tourism Operators, 2 representatives; and 6) Representatives of the Public, 2 representatives, totaling 12 people, to propose tourism promotion strategies for the Lower Northeastern Provinces. The strategies for enhancing tourist destinations to create a model for upgrading tourist sites include policy and operational approaches as follows:

1) The correlation between intellectual capital and the creative economy exhibited a similar association with the enhancement of tourist attractions in the Lower Northeastern Provinces.

2) The outcomes of the Policy Modelling to Enhance Tourist Attractions in the Lower Northeastern Provinces revealed the formulation of guidelines for upgrading tourist attractions, which subsequently led to the development of a modelling approach for enhancing tourist attractions. These guidelines encompass policy directives, operational strategies, and a policy model outlined as follows:

2.1) Policy Guidelines:

(1) Emphasis is placed on fostering intellectual capital factors, entailing initiatives to promote and facilitate the development of human capital. This involves implementing policies aimed at nurturing talent, enhancing skills, and fostering adaptability. Furthermore, it advocates for the promotion of effective communication skills among personnel within the tourism sector

 © Authors

and the continuous development of leadership skills among tourism executives.

(2) Promotion of capital relations factors entails fostering the development of robust public relations systems and strengthening networking initiatives with local administrative organizations. Additionally, it advocates for promoting public participation and fostering collaboration among personnel involved in tourism and various sectors to ensure effective integration and cooperation.

(3) Encouragement is provided for the development of capital structure, including initiatives to delineate clear objectives, support employee responsibilities, foster a culture of division of labor, enhance teamwork, and promote the development of efficient command systems. These efforts aim to promote unity of command and establish a structured framework for control.

(4) Promotion of the development of creative economy concepts in operational practices is underscored, emphasizing the importance of fostering innovation and uniqueness. This entails prioritizing the concept of privacy and embracing pioneering approaches. Thus, the policy framework for tourism development should prioritize the preservation, development, and promotion of elements related to intellectual capital and the creative economy to optimize the efficacy of upgrading tourist attractions in the Lower Northeastern Provinces.

The operational approaches, aimed at implementing the guidelines for upgrading tourist attractions to achieve the overarching objective of revenue generation by governmental organizations, are as follows:

2.2) Operational Approaches:

(1) Initiating the process entails formulating short - term strategies aimed at addressing external impediments or threats, which involves the development of strategic issues. In the short term (within 1 - 3 years), emphasis is placed on intellectual capital development to foster human capital enhancement. This involves initiatives such as talent development, skill enhancement, flexibility cultivation, and fostering communication skills among personnel engaged in the tourism sector. Additionally, it involves the establishment of relationship-building mechanisms and the cultivation of leadership skills among tourism executives. In the medium term (to be implemented within 4-6 years), the strategy focuses on promoting capital relations factors, including initiatives to enhance public relations systems, bolster networking initiatives with local administrative organizations, promote public engagement, and foster collaboration among personnel involved in tourism and various sectors to ensure seamless integration and cooperation.

(2) Short-term capital development strategy (to be implemented within 1 – 3 years) encompasses the establishment of work systems aligned with overarching objectives and the implementation of promotion systems to support exemplary performance among employees. This involves managing a culture of division of labor and fostering teamwork. The formulation of a medium-term development strategy (to be implemented within 4-6 years) revolves around promoting a command efficiency system aimed at fostering unity of command and establishing a structured framework for control.

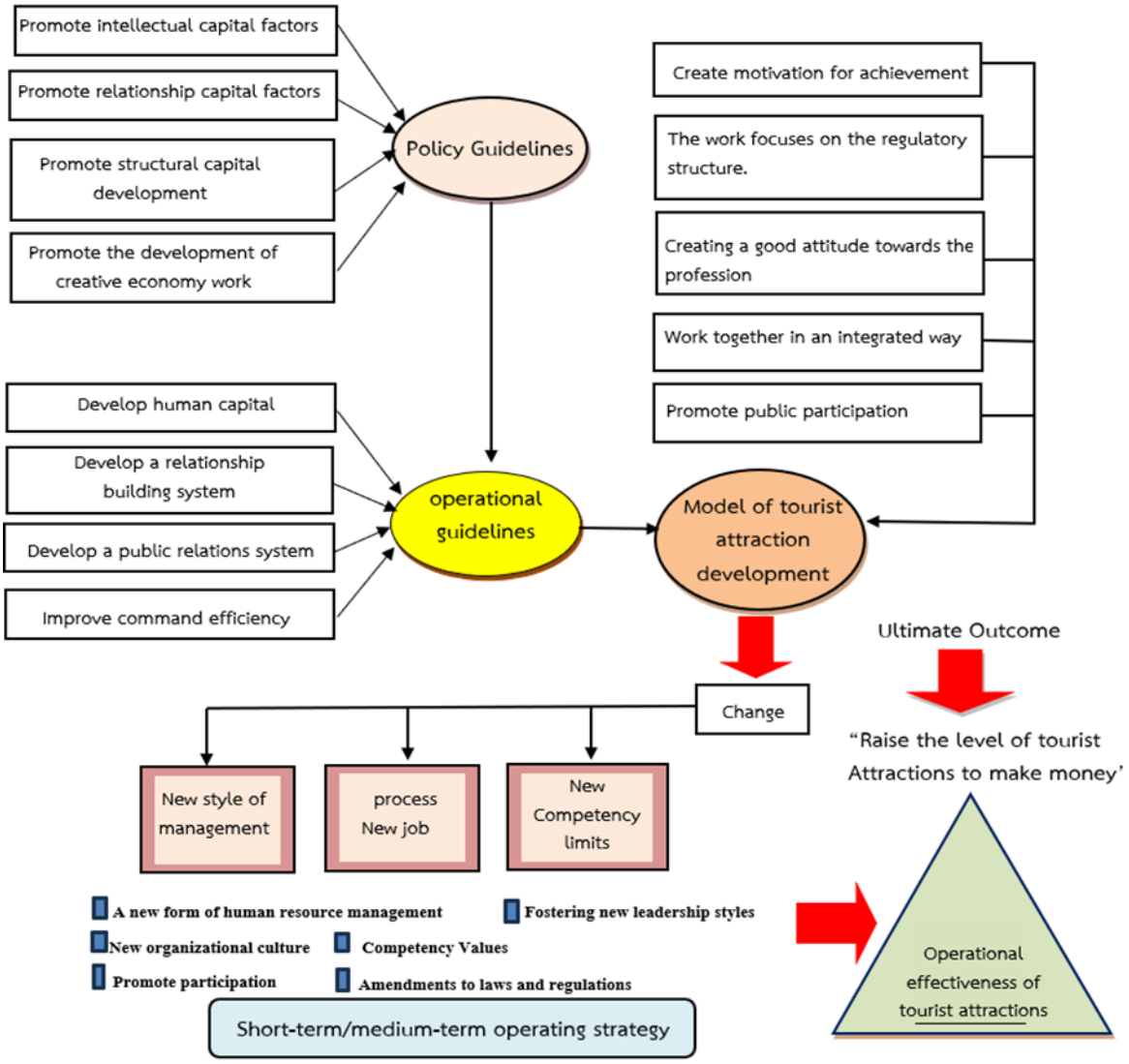
(3) The short-term capital development strategy (to be implemented within 1 – 3 years) entails the cultivation of creative economy concepts among tourism personnel. This involves fostering a work environment centered around the concept of privacy and emphasizing the creation of prototypes. The medium-term development strategy (to be implemented within 4 - 6 years) prioritizes the promotion of innovative practices. This includes the development and dissemination of elements related to intellectual capital and the creative economy.

 © Authors

2.3) Policy Model to Enhance Tourist Attractions in the Lower Northeastern Provinces: The policy model aimed at enhancing tourist attractions in the Lower Northeastern Provinces encompasses the relationship between intellectual capital and the creative economy. Each element within this model correlates with the enhancement of tourist attractions in the region, highlighting the factors influencing the development of intellectual capital and the creative economy. The model advocates for the promotion of capital structure development and the integration of creative economy concepts into operational frameworks. Emphasis is placed on operational approaches that leverage both short-term strategies (to be implemented within 1 - 3 years) and medium -term strategies (to be implemented within 4 - 6 years), as depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Policy Model to Enhance Tourist Attractions in Lower Northeastern Provinces



 © Authors

Conclusion and Discussion

Research on Policy Modelling to Enhance Tourist Attractions in the Lower Northeastern Provinces yields intriguing findings that prompt discussion as follows:

1) The relationship between intellectual capital and the creative economy mirrors the enhancement of tourist attractions in the Lower Northeastern Provinces. This correlation encompasses human capital, relationship capital, structural capital, and the creative economy, all exhibiting a positive correlation with the elevation of tourist attractions in the region. This underscores the imperative for tourism development initiatives to prioritize the promotion of elements and relationships associated with intellectual capital and the creative economy. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Hiroyoshi Sano (2016), which delved into theoretical considerations regarding creative tourism. Sano's study aimed to elucidate the genesis and evolution of creative tourism concepts, primarily through a comprehensive review of prior research. Creative tourism has emerged as a novel form of cultural tourism in the early 21st century, fueled by a desire to counteract the negative impacts associated with traditional mass tourism. In recent years, the discourse surrounding creative tourism has shifted from merely examining tourist behavior to exploring the dynamic interplay between tourists and destinations. The contemporary concept of creative tourism encompasses a diverse array of tourism activities and explores its impact on tourist attractions and the creative industries, thereby informing planning and policy formulation aimed at enhancing tourism destinations. As a result, a framework for catalyzing creative tourism has been proposed, with a focal point on fostering synergies between tourism and creative industries, drawing inspiration from Landry's 'cycle of urban creativity'.

2) Factors influencing the upgrading of tourist attractions in the Lower Northeastern Province encompass elements of intellectual capital development and the creative economy. These factors include Human Capital Factors, Relationship Capital Factors, Structural Capital Factors, and Creative Economy Factors. The study framework incorporates dimensions such as privacy, modeling, and meaning, which are in alignment with the research conducted by Maneewan et al. (2560). Their study investigated the influence of semiotics on the portrayal of memories within tourist attractions, focusing on the role of intellectual and cultural capital. The primary objective was to explore semiotic concepts and their application in the context of tourism, particularly examining semiotic patterns utilized through intellectual and cultural capital. The study elucidated the definition of semioticsthrough the perspectives of three semiographers, highlighting its significance in societal and environmental contexts. Furthermore, the article delved into the narrative of semiotics and tourism, employing an interpretive framework to aid in the development of cities, countries, and tourist attractions by leveraging symbols such as tourist attraction brands, language formats, symbols, signs, souvenirs, and mascots (such as lucky dolls). These elements, created through intellectual and cultural capital, have significantly influenced travelers' behaviors and serve as valuable tools for contemporary tourism developers, as evidenced by the findings of Arismayanti et al. (2017). Their study investigated the establishment of a creative economy rural tourism base in Kendran Village, Gianyar, revealing that the implementation of creative economy principles in rural tourism has facilitated the expansion of market share (Market Niche) without prior SWOT analysis. The research identified strengths within the internal environment, such as picturesque rice field scenery with jogging tracks, preserved traditional culture reflected in traditional Balinese architecture and

 © Authors

sacred sites, historical relics within the village area, Balinese-Hindu ritual activities, arts and culture, as well as community hospitality and accessible spaces. Conversely, weaknesses in infrastructure were identified, including inadequate public facilities, lack of tourism programming and management, and limited foreign language proficiency, particularly in English.

3) Policy models aimed at enhancing tourist attractions in the Lower Northeastern Provinces encompass several key initiatives. Firstly, there is a focus on promoting human capital factors, including talent development, skill enhancement, flexibility cultivation, promotion of communication skills, relationship building, and fostering executive leadership. Secondly, efforts are directed towards bolstering capital factors such as public relations, promotional activities, and local networking. Thirdly, emphasis is placed on fostering the development of structural capital, entailing the establishment of clear objectives, support for outstanding obligations, promotion of a culture of division of labor, and enhancement of command efficiency. This includes fostering unity of command and promoting a structured framework for control. Lastly, there is an encouragement of embracing the concept of the creative economy in operational practices, with a particular emphasis on privacy. Consequently, there is a concerted effort towards preserving and nurturing elements of intellectual capital and the creative economy to maximize the efficacy of upgrading tourist attractions in the Lower Northeastern Provinces. This underscores the necessity for aligning tourism development efforts in the Northeast region with policy guidelines and operational approaches geared towards enhancing intellectual capital factors among personnel involved in the tourism sector across all sectors. This approach corresponds with the principles outlined by Binns and Nel (2002). The study's findings suggest that the amalgamation of natural beauty, local entrepreneurship, and established community organizations can significantly contribute to the development of tourism and local economic growth in small towns. Moreover, redundant mining infrastructure can be repurposed for tourism development, such as creating mine museums or developing mine heritage trails, as exemplified by th e Horizon Tourism Route in Koffiefontein in the south. While tourism holds significant potential for rural development and revitalization, it is essential to manage expectations realistically, as aspirations often exceed practicalities. Consequently, many public and private institutions view tourism as an accessible pathway to economic development and national restructuring.

Practical recommendations

1.1 The governmental bodies overseeing tourism or relevant agencies tasked with tourism management should utilize policy guidelines to enhance tourist attractions in the Lower Northeastern provinces of Thailand. These guidelines should serve as foundational principles for devising strategies across various domains, including image enhancement strategies and service quality improvement strategies. Strategies aimed at cultivating positive experiences for tourists should be formulated with a keen consideration of the concepts of intellectual capital development and the promotion of the creative economy, among others.

1.2 The government should facilitate increased opportunities for communities to engage with diverse tourist demographics, such as through tourism fairs. Encouraging governmental agencies to showcase communities as tourist destinations and disseminating knowledge about community-based tourism initiatives would enhance visibility and understanding among tourists at large.

© Authors

1.3 Agricultural products could be cultivated and marketed as souvenirs for tourists visiting festivals. Leveraging local traditions can foster interconnectivity among different regions, thereby fostering development opportunities for each province within the area.

Suggestion for Future research

1) Research endeavors ought to be undertaken to explore the formulation of models that facilitate the distribution channels of goods within the tourism sector, both within the Tourist Market and the broader ASEAN Community.

2) It is imperative to conduct studies focusing on the enhancement of local administrative capacity and the management practices of store operators operating within the tourism industry.

3) The strategic blueprint delineating the development of model cities fostering the creative economy within the provinces situated in the lower Northeastern region warrants evaluation, both during the implementation phase and in its aftermath.

References

Anderson, J. E. (1994). *Public policy making: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Houghton Mifflin.

Batle, J., Orfila-Sintes, F., & Moon, C. (2018). Environmental management best practices: Towards social innovation. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.

Binns, T., & Nel, E. (2002). Tourism as a local development strategy in South Africa. *The Geographical Journal, 168*(3), 235–247.

Boluk, K., Cavaliere, C. T., & Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2019). A critical framework for interrogating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda in tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*.

Bontis, N. (1996). There's a price on your head: Managing intellectual capital strategically. *Business Quarterly*, Summer.

Bontis, N. (2002). National intellectual capital index: The benchmarking of Arab countries. *Journal of Business and Management, 4*(4). (Originally published August 19, 2016)

Brundtland Commission. (1987). Towards sustainable development. In *Our common future* (pp. 43–66). Oxford University Press.

Curado, C., Henriques, L., & Bontis, N. (2011). Intellectual capital disclosure payback. *Management Decision, 49*(7), 1080–1098.

Edvinsson, L., & Malone, M. S. (1997). *Intellectual capital: Realizing your company's true value by finding its hidden brainpower*. Harper Business.

Hardeep, C., & Purnima, B. (2013). Examining intellectual capital and competitive advantage relationship: Role of innovation and organizational learning. *International Journal of Bank Marketing, 33*(3), 376–399.

Hawkins, J. (2001). *About the creative economy: How people make money from ideas*. London.

Jiranut, S., Rugsiri, C., & Kanjanarat, R. (2017). Development of participatory cultural tourism management strategies: A case study of Banhauydhindum, Dan Chang District, Suphan Buri Province. Suan Dusit University.

Jitthangwattana, B. (2005). *Sustainable tourism development*. Press and Design.

John Wiley & Sons. (2000). *Value-driven intellectual capital: How to convert intangible corporate assets into market value* (P. H. Sullivan, Ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Kanok, B., Sitthichai, P., Seri, W., & Wasana, K. (2018). The influential factors toward tourist loyalty to community-based tourism in the lower northeastern part of Thailand. *NNRU Community Research Journal, 12*(1), 10–28.

Maneewan, C., & Somphob, C. (2017). The influence of semiotics towards the memorable images of destination through the intellectual and cultural capital. *Dusit Thani College Journal, 12*(2), 434–445.

Ministry of Tourism and Sports. (2022, September 15). *Tourism statistics 2022*. https://www.mots.go.th/

Ni Ketut, A., I Gusti Ngurah, W., & I Wayan, W. (2017). The establishment of rural tourism-based creative economy in Kendran Village, Gianyar. *IRCS UNUD Journals, 1*(1), February.

 © Authors

Purvis, B., Mao, Y., & Robinson, D. (2018). Three pillars of sustainability: In search of conceptual origins. *Sustainability Science*.

Robin, C., Pedroche, M., & Astorga, R. A. (2017). Revisiting green practices in the hotel industry: A comparison between mature and emerging destinations. *Journal of Cleaner Production*.

Sano, H. (2016). Theoretical consideration on creative tourism. *Journal of Global Tourism Research, 1*(2), 127–132.

Thiranont, S., & Soponjaratsakul, P. (2016). Creative tourism: An alternative and a solution for Thai tourism. *Academic Journal of Pathumthani University, 8*(2), 206–215.

Tourism Authority of Thailand. (2018). *Link the main city, get secondary city back to the neighbors*. TAT Intelligence Center.

Vorathepputhipong, T. (1993). *Public policy and planning + public policy*. Faculty of Public Administration, National Institute of Development Administration.

Weaver, D. (2006). *Tourism management*. Queensland University of Technology.

 © Authors

JOPAG
JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Journal of Politics and Governance
15(2), May – August 2025

The Exploration of Challenges Concerning Combat against Illegal Transboundary Movement of Plastic Waste in Thailand

Phatsaporn Suwannakart [1*], Rachtipan Pitiwararom [2], and Nichabha Pumjit [3]

[1] Faculty of Criminology and Justice Administration, Rangsit University, Thailand
[2] Forensic Serology and DNA, King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospitaland Thai Red Cross Society, Thailand, rachtipan.pit@chulahospital.org
[3] Educational Evaluation Bureau, Office of The Education Council, Thailand, wpumjit@gmail.com
[*] Corresponding Author, phatsaporn.s@rsu.ac.th, © Authors

Article history:

Received: August 27, 2024
Revised: November 25, 2024
Accepted: November 26, 2024

Keywords:

Plastic Waste,
Plastic Scraps,
Hazardous Waste,
Environmental Crime,
Transboundary

Abstract

Thailand is one of the developing countries facing a major concern on environmental crime regarding illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste. This study sheds light on the challenges that law enforcement organizations encounter in dealing with this sort of crime. The data were collected through a qualitative approach: in-depth interviews with key informants consisting of customs officers, police, officers of the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), the Department of Industrial Works, the Pollution Control Department, legal experts, and non-governmental organizations. The findings reveal that the challenges in detecting environmental crime are linked to limited intelligence and technology for identifying data in the customs' risk management system for product scanning as well as delayed coordination among agencies, an inactivity in monitoring factories' importation and manufacturing in both free zone and general areas trapped by bureaucratic government procedure, officials' insufficient knowledge in implementing the Anti-Participation in Transnational Organized Crime Act B.E. 2556 (A.D.2013) for investigation and prosecution, and an unsynchronized criminal justice agencies framework particularly in establishing the environmental crime division institution from pretrial to trial. Additionally, this study provides guidance for policymakers to address law enforcement challenges and offers recommendations for combating illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste.

Introduction

Environmental crimes may have been neglected in discussions on crime prevention, despite their significant impact on the environment and the economy. According to UN Environment Programme report (2018), less than 10% of 7 billion tons of plastic waste is recycled. Millions of tons are either released into the environment or sent to be burnt or dumped in developing countries. An estimated annual loss of plastic packaging waste during sorting and processing is about US$ 80-120 billion. (UNEP environment programme, 2024)

Plastic waste is a major threat to the environment, and it has also led to illegal transboundary movement linked to other forms of crime, such as organized crime for business purposes. In 2018, China and several other countries implemented measures to ban the importation of solid waste (Sasaki, 2021). This led to a notable change, as more waste began to be sent to Southeast Asian countries, as a result, Thailand has become a major destination for plastic scraps and plastic waste importation with a high inflow of such waste (Rujivanarom, 2021). This has also led to the illegal importation of plastic waste, involving smuggling, false declarations, industrial wrongdoing, and lack of transparency in law enforcement. (Chokcharatsakun, 2021)

For over a decade, the Thai government has been working on policies to effectively manage plastic scraps since 1996. As part of its efforts, the Department of Industrial Works has established specific criteria for imported plastic scraps to ensure that they are not classified as plastic waste (Ministry of Industry, 2006). Thailand has ratified the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal are not allowed to import such waste. However, we still face plastic waste management issues and environmental crimes, making it one of the top ASEAN countries affected by these issues (Interpol, 2020).

Table 1

Import volume of plastic scrap HS-Code 3915.

Year	Tons
Jan - Dec 2015	56,212.66
Jan - Dec 2016	69,506.145
Jan - Dec 2017	152,737.452
Jan - Dec 2018	552,912.034
Jan - Dec 2019	323,167.065
Jan - Dec 2020	150,861,952
Jan - Dec 2021	159,622,972
Jan - Dec 2022	178,090,159
Jan - Dec 2023	201,714,762

Note: This includes scraps, cuttings, and unusable plastic items (in tons). (Thai Customs, 2024)

The largest exporters of plastic scraps which are sent to Thailand are Japan (58,785 tons), the United States (41,381 tons), China (14,650 tons), and others, amounting to more than 100,000 tons per year. Not only plastic scraps have been reported, but there also has been a significant increase in the amount of plastic waste, rising from 152,737 tons in 2017 to over 552,912 tons in 2018. (Ministry of Commerce's Public Data, 2023). Since 2018, the scenario has been continuously facing a severe impact on the environment, especially an aquatic ecosystem. Even if the plastic waste is meant for recycling, it still poses a significant threat to the environment (Chaondee, 2023). Furthermore, the illegal transportation of waste across borders typically involves additional fraudulent activities, such as falsifying waste analysis reports or bills of lading (Sarkulworawit, 2021).

Additionally, there have been reports of the arrest of several cases. In Samut Prakan province, a factory that illegally imported 20,000 tons of plastic scraps was searched. It was discovered that waste had been falsely declared, and there

 © Authors

was suspicion of tax evasion. Also, it was found that officials may have been involved in illegal activities (Thai PBS, 2018) which is an offense under the Customs Act 2017, Section 202 (CUSTOMS ACT B.E. 2560, 2017)

As a result of increased public awareness, there is a social movement to ban the importation of plastic scraps in addition to previously banned plastic waste. The Thai government has decided to implement this ban starting from 2025 stating that the import of plastic plates with the indexed number HS3915 will also be prohibited and considered illegal (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2024). Although regulations exist, there is currently no clear in terms of the effectiveness of law enforcement. In criminology prospects, this environmental crime may rationally continue to persist due to its high economic returns and the low probability of being caught.

Despite the existence of laws, the public still has doubts about the effectiveness of crime prevention. Furthermore, the fact that this criminal problem endures indicates an inadequate regulatory system as well as multiple organizations with complex duties. Insufficient research in Thailand has brought to light issues of crime prevention on environmental crime in terms of why illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste still exists, and how the agencies deal with those crimes; thus, it is critical to honorably highlight the existing issues in crime control and identify the obstacles which will be useful as guidelines for developing policies to prevent illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste.

Literature Review

Environmental crime in transitional contexts

Larry J. Siegel (2015) explained that the environmental crime perspective can be classified into legal perspectives, which involve violations of legal provisions that protect both human beings and the environment. On the other hand, it can also encompass a fairness perspective towards the environment. This means that any action that results in damage or loss to the environment, even if it is not defined as an action that violates the law, can be regarded as an environmental crime (Siegel, 2015). The study of environmental criminology involves examining behavior that is considered harmful to both humanity and the environment. This field emerged during the mid-1960s, around the time when the environmental movement gained momentum and discussions about animal rights began to take place in society. (Beirne & South, 2007).

UNICRI defined environmental crime as illegal acts that involve actions such as illegal trade that destroys the ozone layer and dumping of hazardous waste. These transnational threats of environmental crimes severely impact the quality of air, water, and soil, and they also affect the survival of living species (UNICRI, 2024). The "low risk, high profit" has been pointed out for this crime, and the motives of financial gain are confirmed by EU-level intelligence, revealing that key actors are perceived profits earned by the lack of traceability, and the lack of visibility of enforcement (Europol & EnviCrimeNet, 2015)

Considering on the impact, currently, the United Nations Environment Programme also describes transnational environmental crimes and specifies the meaning of "Transnational Environmental Crime" which refers to criminal activities carried out by groups of people. It is an action across international borders including illegal movement of controlled hazardous waste and hazardous chemicals (Nellemann, et al., 2016) Rob White (2018) has also suggested that transnational environmental crimes refer to illegal acts that harm humans, the environment, and animals. It involves the facilitation of the commission of wrongdoing by the state or wrongdoing by business organizations or influential actors who have the authority to direct government policy in ways

 © Authors

that cause harm to the environment (White, 2018) The high level of organizations of the transitional environmental crime group requires law enforcement agencies to dedicate their resources to combat it (UNEP, 2012).

Measures on illegal transboundary movements on Plastic Waste

Basel Convention

According to the Basel Convention, the main goals are (1) reducing the generation of hazardous waste and promoting environmentally friendly hazardous waste management, (2) restriction in cross-border movement of hazardous waste, except when the movement is by the principles of environmentally friendly hazardous waste management, and (3) the legal system applying to cases of cross-border movement when permission for cross-border movement is permitted (Secretariat of the Basel Convention, 1989).

One of the most important aspects that the Basel Convention has contributed to address is the provision of significant details to non-mandatory policy instruments within the framework of the Basel Convention's guidance. As a result, a group of experts from different governments has developed many technical guidelines on various types of waste management. The Convention also established regional or sub-regional centers for training and technology transfer in hazardous waste management, with the approval of the Conference of States Parties to the Basel Convention, to be used by the government at all levels as well as other relevant parties as a guideline and to facilitate the management of various types of waste involved (Secretariat of the Basel Convention, UN environment programme, 2011).

Policy guidelines on stopping importing plastic waste by the end of 2024

On February 21, 2023, the Cabinet approved the policy "Ban all imports of plastic scraps in 2025" to prevent Thailand from being a receptacle for waste from other countries. There is also a push for the Department of Foreign Trade to improve "the Ministry of Commerce regulations regarding allowing the import of plastic scrap into the Kingdom....." (draft) to control the importation and promoting the recycling of plastic waste in the country to reduce environmental impacts and improve the health of Thai people. In addition, a sub-committee has been appointed to integrate the management of electronic waste and plastic scraps imported from abroad by reducing imports initially (Department of Industrial Works, 2024). Plastic scraps require permission to be imported. "Plastic scraps" are any pieces, cut pieces and non-usable pieces either used or unused plastics according to Law on Customs Tariff, with Harmonized Code of 39.15 as proposed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2023). To reduce the impact on the environment and the price of plastic scraps in the country, and to prevent Thailand from being a receptacle for waste from other countries, the important thing is that after December 31, 2024, the following actions in Table 2 must be taken:

Table 2

Table summarizes the policy prohibiting the import of plastic scraps.

Years	Free zone area	General area
2023	Imported at 100% of actual production capacity, totaling no more than 372,994 tons per year	prohibited with exceptions
2024	Imported not exceeding 50% of actual production capacity, totaling no more than 186,497 tons per year	prohibited with exceptions
2025	prohibited	prohibited

(Greennews, 2023)

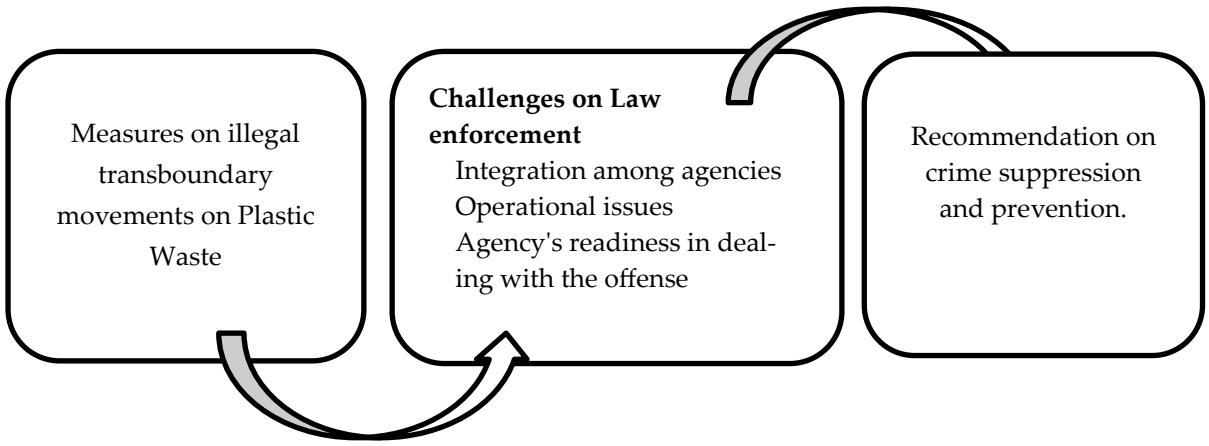
 © Authors

Importing plastic scraps will shortly be prohibited and declared illegal. However, there are currently no clear studies identifying the problem of crime combating and providing prevention and suppression. The subject of falsifying declarations for customs and law enforcement remains unclear due to the involvement of multiple government organizations in this matter.

Research Methods

Through a qualitative research design, this study aims to address problems of law enforcement in combating the illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste and to provide suggestions for effective enforcement. This research utilizes data from documentary sources including laws, regulations, academic documents, and media related to environmental crimes to identifies Thai background on the illegal transboundary movements of plastic waste, and basic issues on law enforcement. The researcher then analyzes the sources in order to design a semi-structured in-depth interview with open-ended questions for the interviewees. The question consists of the impact of smuggling plastic waste, the limits of legal measures, integration among agencies and enforcement concerns such as operational issues, patterns of offense, other information that participants are willing to provide and suggestions for combating plastic waste smuggling.

Figure 1
Research Conceptual framework



Key Informants

The stakeholders in law enforcement agencies gathered to collect data comprise customs officers, police, environmental agencies (Department of Industrial Works and Pollution Control Department), legal experts, and non-governmental organizations. An in-depth interview is ongoing with at least 10 years of experience experts involved in preventing and combating the smuggling of plastic waste in Thailand. These experts consist of government officials in positions of leadership, inquiry officials, and members of non-governmental organizations participating in environmental rights campaigns. According to the criteria, the data providers are 18 experts consisting of 3 police, 3 customs officers, 3 officers of the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), 3 officers of the Department of Industrial Works, 2 officers of the Pollution Control Department, 2 legal experts with doctorate diploma, and 2 representatives from non-governmental organizations.

 © Authors

Data Analysis

To achieve trustworthiness in qualitative research, the content analysis comes from a wide variety of sources (Virginia Wilson, 2011): research, academic articles, regulations, and laws. The information is accurate and reliable and has strong supporting evidence. In field research, data collection is carried out by at least 2 researchers as well as multiple analysts to interpret data meaning following the research question (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Schreier, 2012). The results will follow the research topic focusing on addressing the problems of law enforcement on the illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste and there are also recommendations for the development of crime prevention.

Results

1. Challenges of detecting illegal transboundary movements of plastic waste

Customs fraud involving false declaration procedures.

In general, the importation of products must pass customs clearance or must be declared to customs authorities. According to the information gathered from participants, illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste or the contaminated plastic scraps were mostly transportation by sea packed in containers. The pattern of misconduct detected involves falsifying customs declarations such as misrepresenting information on Bill of Lading, non-existing import companies and addresses, or declaring other indexes that are not the tariff index of 39.15. Even if they are plastic scraps, they may not comply with the license requirements according to the criteria of the Ministry of Industry in 2008. Plastic scraps that are crushed. Also, causes of pollution measuring greater than 2 cm that do not match the criterion. Since the Thai government plans to ban plastic scraps shortly in 2025, during the year of 2024, the participants pointed out there are offensive techniques that the plastic waste is hidden inside the container and covered by plastic scraps to avoid arrest. Furthermore, there is a gap in crime prevention at the beginning stage of customs control which is an opportunity that could avoid arrest due to the limitations of time in screening with X-ray equipment. It might not be possible to strictly screen and open containers that need to be continuously transferred to the industries either in free zone areas or outside the free zone.

Limitations in inspection technology and product examination

Indeed, Thailand is engaging in the Trade Facilitation Agreement and the ASEAN Economic Community bringing huge numbers of inbound and outbound to support international economic growth. Therefore, it is a time-consuming strategy to set up fast scan systems and reduce the rate of opening containers. However, this current situation on environmental crime shows that there is a limitation of inspection technology for customs to control suspicious containers. Some of the X-ray equipment has been overused and may have broken. Also, this point of border control cannot identify and check for every container.

Moreover, proving that the importation of suspicious cargo is illegal is also a big challenge. When customs officers detect that the commodity which might be categorized as hazardous waste under the Basel Convention against law enters the country, for product verification, there is a delayed bureaucratic procedure that the customs officers need to coordinate by sending an official letter to the Department of Industrial Works which authorizes the administrate of the industrial business regulation and hazardous substances. Then the scientific experts proceed with the scientific method to ensure and define suspect products as “plastic waste” or classified as hazardous waste residue from manufacturing industries.

 © Authors

If it is found that the goods are likely to break the law, we (customs) must follow the procedures in sending the letter to the Department of Industrial Works for proceeding with a physical examination by scientists. This process may take time. If it is plastic waste, it must be destroyed or sent back to its country of origin. This may cause the problem that waste must remain in containers which has a high destruction cost. Sometimes, it cannot be returned and containers are no longer used for further work. (Participant 2, custom)

If products are found as hazardous waste, the Customs Department will require the company to take responsibility for the expense of returning them to their country of origin and take legal action against all those involved. Unfortunately, some cargo containers remain at the port without showing the actors involved or non—existent importers. This may be examined for possible arrest, but more importantly, there are huge costs and harmful effects on the environment during the destruction process.

2. The monitoring of factories' importation and their manufacturing process

Monitoring industrial activity in the Free Zone area

Currently, several criminal cases have been publicized in the news where factory-operated businesses violated licensing requirements, and industrial waste was thrown into the environment. Although there are laws and regulations on factory licenses for factory establishment and operation, as well as controls on industrial pollution, managed by the Department of Industrial Works of the Ministry of Industry in Thailand, their manufacturing process poses a risk to public health, safety, and the environment. When transboundary movement of plastic waste can pass through customs clearance, it will be delivered to a factory both within and outside of the free zone. Therefore, to clarify the subject matter of factory monitoring. The subject might be split into free zone areas and general areas since different government actors are involved in the criminal control approach.

To begin with, industrial factories are located in free zones designated by the Director-General of Customs, and their economic activity must meet customs criteria and be subject to customs control. In reality, plenty of criminal cases have been under investigation in these free zone areas. Police officers pointed out that there are cases where factories break the rules in manufacturing remaining waste. There is also concern from non-organization surveillance that plastic scraps and plastic waste may flow outside the free zone area, leaving residue in the country. It has been mentioned that inspections in the free zone area are a reflection of customs law enforcement's efforts to verify whether the factory has followed the licensing or report procedures. Although the local police or the Central Investigation Bureau are now granted the jurisdiction to arrest, it came to light that this method always requires initial contact from customs so that the police can engage in action.

When customs officials have submitted notifications to the police. In practice, if customs issue an official letter, the police will investigate and take legal action. The main responsibility for control strategies in free zone areas relies on the customs authority. Police will be in charge once the custom discovers that it is the factory that violates any laws or conditions. (Participant 1, Police officer)

Surveillance public by non-organizations also concerns that there is still laxity in controlling business in the free zone area. It is not clear in tracking imports. The public may not know the real-time data on cargo transferred to the factory such as information on what is being imported, how much companies import, and where the products are processed. As a result, it is not surprising that citizens continue to question the competence of government agencies in enforcing the law and monitoring industrial factories. This could illustrate that industrial control

 © Authors

within the free zone area is still carried out by a single customs agency, creating doubts about transparency.

Monitoring industrial activity in the general area

Aside from that, in the general area, most industrial factories outside free zones are regulated under the Department of Industrial Works. When there is a suspicion of wrongdoing, the inquiry might be carried out in collaboration with local police or police of the central investigation bureau for an arrest and investigation. Nowadays, most cases are related to organizational crime. Similar to the free zone area, the real owner of the business is a Chinese investor using Thai nominees as one of the shareholders to meet the license application requirements. As a result, while preparing an investigation file for prosecution, significant evidence is required. The cooperation from the Department of Industrial Work is needed to identify hazardous waste and ensure that the business is illegal and harmful to society.

With regard to illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste to a factory, police usually have been informed of the sources so that they will always monitor and investigate the suspicious factory by gathering evidence such as photographs, information on suspect cargo containers arriving and exiting the factory, and citizen complaints. The inquiry officials will contact the Department of Industrial Work to search for illegal evidence together. However, the issue with this process is a time delay in coordination with the Department of Industrial Work. The police pointed out that sometimes it takes months before they can enter the factory together. News may have released the information and the subsector may know that they would be searched and thus destroyed evidence before the police arrive.

3. Inactive law enforcement in combatting illegal transboundary movements of plastic waste

The challenge of integrating multiple agencies

Various government agencies are involved in combating illegal plastic waste trafficking, customs as border control, police in charge of investigating, the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) in inquiry of special complex cases causing immense economic damage and public impact, the Department of Industrial Works as factory control, the Pollution Control Department in environmental policy development, the prosecutor and judge in bringing fair trials, and non-governmental organizations as public surveillance. Without a doubt, each agency reveals that they must be integrated and coordinated to function successfully.

According to the study's findings, there is one remaining concern: coordination between agencies. It is still being discussed whether customs failed to regulate the border or whether there was an error in the Department of Industrial Works' permission for setting up a factory and a failure to inspect industrial manufacturing procedures. While agencies often tackle problems based on their written description, this may not be the primary goal of crime prevention which requires a network. The network helps reduce the complicated bureaucratic procedures between agencies, sharing information, and establishing an integrated framework for transitional environmental crime combating and training. Additionally, there is no government's attempt to encourage public participation in crime prevention through facilitating public surveillance of illicit factories in the surrounding area.

An inconsistency in agency statutory during the inquiry

In regard to litigation in Thailand, when it comes to offenses related to illegal transboundary movement, the majority could be prosecuted regarding false declarations and related offenses

 © Authors

mainly under Customs Act B.E. 2560 (2017), Hazardous Substance Act, B.E. 2535 (A.D. 1992), Export and Import of Goods Act, BE 2522 (1979), Factory Act B.E. 2535 (A.D. 1992) and Anti-Participation in Transnational Organized Crime Act B.E. 2556 (A.D.2013). However, it appears that the implementation of the designation of police agencies to deal with the situation remains inconsistent. When the matter comes to the police, whether it was discovered during customs clearance, inside the free zone, or outside the free zone, besides the local police, cases could be referred to the central investigation bureau.

Presently, cases that fall under tax offenses are investigated by the Economic Crime Suppression Division once they reach the central investigative bureau. The police plan to restructure the agency by placing environmental offense cases under the supervision of the Suppression Division, as the damage caused to the environment is considered significant. (Participant 3, Police)

However, for the past decade, almost all of the significant cases have been handled by the Economic Crime Suppression Division instead of the Suppression Division Environmental Offenses, which typically deal with illegal wildlife hunting and forestry; thus, illicit transboundary movements of waste are currently not involved. This brings to the confusion that the cases were mainly considered as only on the perspective of economic loss. The damaging environmental effects of this type of offense are possibly overlooked. However, the police participants stated that their organization intends to broaden its scope of activity soon because, in simple terms, it ought to fall under the Division of Environmental Offenses to acquire physical evidence, identify environmental harm in the inquiry file, and coordinate with experts in confirming the substance of waste for the fair trial.

Implementation of the Transnational Organized Crime Act (B.E. 2556, A.D. 2013)

Additionally, legal experts pinpointed that to deal with cases, inquiry officers need to be knowledgeable about which the crime pattern could be identified as Transnational Organized Crime under the Anti-Participation in Transnational Organized Crime. Act B.E. 2556 (A.D.2013). As a concept of the crime control model, an organized criminal group means a structured group of three or more persons, this law imposes the legal basis for using special investigative techniques following the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), which attempts to set up a legal framework to combat criminal activity among State Parties.

It appears that the main challenge lies in the lack of understanding and integration between different agencies, as well as a lack of knowledge regarding the Anti-Participation in Transnational Organized Crime Act B.E. 2013 (A.D.2013). Officials must recognize whether the crime is related to a criminal organization or not. With legitimate authority to investigate crimes that happen rapidly, officials can take swift action against those who engage in such criminal activities. (Participant 1, Legal Expert)

Therefore, the act allows the responsible investigator or inquiry officer to investigate for the benefit of an investigation such as entering into any dwelling or place to search where the property may be hidden, searching a person or a conveyance who may be suspects, and seizure of the property. Despite existing law, an important concern on law enforcement issues is that all related government agents should be sufficiently educated and trained to understand the goals and content of this law in order to effectively carry out the investigation under the act and cooperate for the benefit of the investigation.

© Authors

The trail of an illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste

Considering the next step of prosecution, it appears that the majority of trial cases are related to forestry rather than the illicit transboundary movement of waste. It is partly because before the rise of plastic waste until the year 2019 according to CUSTOMS ACT B.E. 2560 (2017) Section 256 underlines that if the offender agrees to pay the fines, the Director-General may waive prosecutions, and the cases shall be deemed terminated. In the case where the Director-General deems fit to prosecute, he shall record a reason wherefore such person should be prosecuted. This term dealing with illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste was used until there is spreading news came to public that Thailand has become the world's trash, so punishment of fines to waive prosecutions has been discontinued (CUSTOMS ACT B.E. 2560 (2017).

Legal proceedings of the transboundary transportation of plastic waste are infrequently pursued in court. This is due, in part, to the Director-General's power to waive charges as outlined in the CUSTOMS ACT B.E. 2017. Despite customs having revised their policy to prosecute, cases involving such matters are still not commonly brought to trial. (Participant 2, Legal Expert)

Although few cases go to trial due to either limitation of arrest, investigation, or corruption in the pre-trial stage, there should be criminal justice institutions that have been designed to handle such matters. However, as shown in the Office of the Attorney General's organizational chart, a state attorney has not yet established an environmental litigation division. Subsequently, at the stage of a criminal trial, besides the Court of First Instance, there are only environmental divisions in the Court of Appeals and Supreme Court set up specifically to deal with this particular sort of environmental matter. Notably, the agency's readiness to deal with environmental offenses is not synchronized from pre-trial to trial. Likewise, the emphasis on crime prevention planning remains less solid than it should be.

4. Transparent among law enforcement actors

Thaweesin, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, visited the Customs Department on March 28, 2024, emphasizing the concern about the problem of corruption among government agents. He also mentioned the development of a database for importing and exporting that could monitor any importers' suspicious behavior and shall require cases that occurred in the past to be investigated.

What is important is the transparency in requesting permission for the factory, especially in the free zone. At this point, subject imports into free zone areas remain untraceable and unpublished in real-time. There is no database indicating which cargo is imported for what activities. How much should companies import? Where did the products depart? This is an issue of information transparency. (Participant 1, non-governmental organizations)

Pushing the 100% X-ray policy to increase efficiency in product release reduces the use of discretion by officials in claiming benefits. It cannot be argued that one of the significant challenges to effective crime prevention is environmental corruption among law enforcement agents. Nowadays, there are many illegal products smuggled into the country, undermining people's trust in government officials in terms of crime prevention.

With regard to combating illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste it is pointed out that when the officers access the site, it turns out that the suspects have destroyed or hidden evidence or cleaned the factory so that no illegal products will be detected. This raises the question that perhaps the officials involved were corrupt in notifying the offending factory to delete evidence before entering the site to search for evidence.

This form of transitional environmental crime surely results in significant benefits for the offenders. If officials are involved and share

 © Authors

interests, the chances of being detected would be reduced. Thus, they may continue their wrongdoing and pose a threat to our society. Since environmental crimes appear to create irreparable harm to our Earth and healthy environmental rights, law enforcement agents should work together to combat this type of crime through investigations, seizures, and other operations, as well as increased public observation to ensure that officials follow the law.

Discussion

Environmental crime refers to a wide range of actions that violate environmental laws and cause significant harm or risk to the environment, human health, or both (Europol, Environmental Crime, 2022). Garbage and hazardous waste trafficking are currently a major global problem involving a wide range of actors, including private enterprises, corrupt public officials, and organized crime groups (Liddick, 2010). Lieselot Bisschop also illustrates the complexity and global nature of the illegal transport of e-waste as a transnational environmental crime in which diverse actors can play a role (Lieselot, 2012). Consistent with what happened in Thailand, plenty of plastic waste overflowed from many countries. News was reported in June 2023 that 35 countries sent plastic waste to Thailand (Matichon Online, 2018). This demonstrates a wide range of actors; additionally, the waste that remains in the country is not only significant harm to the environment and human health but also an enormous loss in waste disposal.

From the view of the rational choice theory of crime, this sort of offense refers to greed that people rationally choose to take shortcuts to acquire wealth, believing that the potential profits far outweigh future punishment; not only greed but also the need that perform important roles (Siegel, 2015), as the blue-collar Thai nominees and migrant workers implicated in this offense needed money for living. Some of them have no idea who the real owner of the factory is. They are just employed to complete the work or hire as one of the Thai nominee's shareholders to meet the license application requirements.

Dealing with the illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste is consequently tough because it is a transitional environmental crime. The key actors are mostly organized crime living outside the country, specifically the Chinese capitalist group. Therefore, Tony and Farrington (1995) suggest reducing the opportunities for crime is an efficient method to prevent it, thus, in the long run, strengthening crime prevention for this kind of offense should be emphasized (Tonry & Farrington, 1995).

Detecting border control is a critical step for crime prevention. Risk management on the scanning system on the fast scan of customs remains a gap in sending illegal cargo into the country. This is aligned with Chaowat Sarkulworawit (2021) who suggested that there are issues in gathering information to use in establishing screening conditions for the custom's scan system, as well as a low rate of investigating imports (Sarkulworawit, 2021). Participants agreed that Thai law enforcement officers' performance in monitoring companies is critical to implementing the Basel Convention, which aims to limit hazardous waste and prevent transboundary waste movement. Networking operations with experienced and skilled officers dealing with this offense, developing technologies, training, as well as linking information, are critical to speeding up the arrest process, as Napassorn Piachan (2021) demonstrated that a lack of integration between agencies results in delayed criminal processes, including the problem of corruption, which causes crimes to be committed continuously (Piachan, 2023). Besides that, in crime prevention, public monitoring can play an important function in surveillance by enhancing awareness and protecting the well-being of the community.

 © Authors

Moreover, the knowledge of Transnational Organized Crime Act B.E. 2556 (A.D.2013) is very important since it grants numerous authorities to counteract such crimes. It is not appropriate that law enforcement agents are unaware of this regulation, in accordance with Sumonthip Chitsawang and et.al. They demonstrate that there is a lack of knowledge to implement the law in crime control and suggest that a guidebook should be created to instruct practitioners participating in enforcement (Chitsawang, Chitsawang, & Kor-Udom, 2022). Furthermore, because Thailand is a signatory to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and has enacted the Anti-Transnational Organized Crime Act of 2013 as implementing legislation under the Convention and its Protocol. This law provides law enforcement agencies with additional tools to assist in their investigation and prosecution of offenders (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). It is also consistent with the goal of fostering cooperation and information exchange. Therefore, it is essential for law enforcement officers to have an understanding and expertise when collaborating with Interpol on an international scale to combat this sort of crime.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the main issue of law enforcement on combating the illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste in four aspects consisting of the challenges of detecting products, issues on the monitoring of factories' importation and manufacturing, inactive law enforcement, and transparency among law enforcement actors. When products enter the country, the first step of crime prevention is to detect plastic waste. In this stage, the study found that there are limitations on the technology of customs to scan all cargo as well as risk management in gathering information from various intelligence sources for establishing a screening system. The most important problem is time-delayed when it needs scientific proof to be defined as waste. Non-existent importers' problems remain with the high cost of the destruction process. In some case, cargo can pass customs clearance and be transferred to the factory in both the free zone and general area. There is still a lack of integration between agencies in monitoring their manufacturing. Moreover, there is the problem of inactive law enforcement with a lack of national professional networking forces and an unsynchronized institutional framework from pre-trial to trial in terms of prosecution. Finally, the most important thing is transparency among law enforcement actors which possibly be reduced in case of establishing a networking team to check and balance and to deal professionally with the illegal transboundary movement of waste.

Recommendations

Without enforcement efforts to investigate and prosecute illegal transboundary movement of plastic waste, illegal dumping is expected to become a growing hazard to health and environmental security. The study includes guidelines for combating this sort of offense, which can be used as guidance for policymakers in the following recommendations.

1. Strengthen national law enforcement by setting up professional teams of national task forces involving police, customs officers, scientists, environmental agencies, prosecutors, and non-governmental groups to eliminate bureaucratic red tape and focus on crime prevention.

2. From pretrial to trial, establish an environmental litigation division in the attorney general's office and every level of the courts, and empower the Division of Environmental Offenses of the Central Investigation Bureau to investigate the significant matter.

 © Authors

3. Develop the intelligence and technology for data identification in the customs' risk management system for product scanning, as well as setting up the criminal record on the route, crime pattern, suspicious cargo, and possible involvement of organized crime.

4. Establish a real-time data and tracking system for cargo and plastic scraps entering the country and free zone area, as well as public monitoring systems such as CCTV, access control, and route control, to prevent corruption and enhance crime prevention activities.

5. Strengthen awareness and encourage non-governmental organizations, volunteers, and other stakeholders especially locals to monitor the factory industries, and to surveillance on transparency of governmental agents.

Acknowledgment

This study was granted by Research Institute of Rangsit University and earned a certificate of approval from RSU ethics Review Board coa no.rsuerb 2023-110 on July 27, 2023.

References

Anti-Participation in Transnational Organized Crime Act B.E. 2556. (2013). *Anti-Participation in Transnational Organized Crime Act B.E. 2556*. Thai Government Gazette.

Beirne, P., & South, N. (2007). *Issues in green criminology* (1st ed.). Willan. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781843926344

Chaondee, N. (2023). *Greennews*. https://greennews.agency/?p=33297

Chitsawang, S., Chitsawang, N., & Kor-Udom, S. (2022). A guideline for improving efficiency in enforcing the Anti-Participation in Transnational Organized Crimes Act B.E. 2556. *Journal of Social Sciences, 52*(2), 33–54. http://www.library.polsci.chula.ac.th/journal2

Chokcharatsakun, K. (2021). *Krungthep Turakij*. https://www.bangkokbiznews.com/social/954268

CUSTOMS ACT B.E. 2560. (2017). *CUSTOMS ACT B.E. 2560 (2017)*. Thai Government Gazette.

Department of Industrial Works. (2024). Meeting to consider guidelines for granting permission to import plastic scraps (outside the duty free zone) in 2024, ready to accept the import ban policy in 2025. https://www.diw.go.th/webdiw/pr67-113

Europol. (2022). *Environmental crime*. https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas/environmental-crime

Europol, & EnviCrimeNet. (2015). *Report on environmental crime in Europe*. Europol.

Greennews. (2023). Cabinet resolution prohibits the importation of waste. *Greennews*. https://greennews.agency/?p=33297

Interpol. (2020). *Interpol strategic analysis report: Emerging criminal trends in the global plastic waste market since January 2018*. INTERPOL General Secretariat.

Liddick, D. (2010). The traffic in garbage and hazardous wastes: An overview. *Trends in Organized Crime, 13*(2–3), 134–146. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117-009-9089-6

Lieselot, B. (2012). Is it all going to waste? Illegal transports of e-waste in a European trade hub. *Crime, Law and Social Change, 58*(3), 221–249. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-012-9383-0

Matichon Online. (2018). 35 countries send electronic waste to Thailand. *Matichon Online*. https://www.matichon.co.th/local/crime/news_980047

Ministry of Commerce's Public Data. (2023). *Summary of exports, imports, trade balance*. Information and Communication Technology Center, Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce.

 © Authors

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2013). Thailand ratifies UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children. https://www.mfa.go.th/en/content/5d5bcd2515e39c306000f543?cate=5d5bcb4e15e39c3060006834

Ministry of Industry. (2006). *Announcement of the Ministry of Industry regarding criteria for consideration and approval regarding permission to bring scraps, cuttings, and unusable items. which is plastic Whether used or not Entered the Kingdom in 2006*. Legislative Institutional Repository of Thailand.

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. (2023). *Action plan on plastic waste management phase II (2023–2027)*. Pollution Control Department and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. (2024). *Policy for regulating the import of plastic scraps*. Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

Nellemann, C., Henriksen, R., Kreilhuber, A., Stewart, D., Kotsovou, M., Raxter, P., … Barrat, S. (2016). *The rise of environmental crime: A growing threat to natural resources, peace, development and security*. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Piachan, N. (2023). The smuggling of electronic waste is an environment crime. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 491*(1), 13–32. https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/socku/article/view/257860

Rujivanarom, P. (2021). Thailand's plastic waste conundrum. *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*. https://th.boell.org/en/2021/10/26/thailands-plastic-waste-conundrum

Sarkulworawit, C. (2021). *A study on illegal trans-boundary movement of waste in Thailand* [Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University]. https://doi.org/10.58837/CHULA.THE.2021.1119

Sasaki, S. (2021). The effects on Thailand of China's import restrictions on waste: Measures and challenges related to the international recycling of waste plastic and e-waste. *Journal of Material Cycles and Waste Management, 23*, 77–83. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10163-020-01113-3

Secretariat of the Basel Convention. (2011). UN environment programme. Milestones since its adoption. https://www.basel.int/TheConvention/Overview/Milestones/tabid/2270/Default.aspx

Secretariat of the Basel Convention. (2011). *UN environmental programme*. https://www.basel.int/TheConvention/Overview/tabid/1271/Default.aspx

Siegel, L. (2015). *Criminology: Theories, patterns, and typologies* (12th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Thai Customs. (2024). *Statistics report*. Innovation and System Analysis Division, Information and Communication Technology Center, Customs Department.

Thai PBS. (2018). Smuggling factory imports 20,000 tonnes of plastic waste. *Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS)*. https://www.thaipbs.or.th/news/content/272551

Tonry, M., & Farrington, D. P. (1995). Strategic approaches to crime prevention. *Crime & Justice, 19*, 1. https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/faculty_articles/483

UNEP. (2012). *Transnational environmental crime – A common crime in need of better enforcement*. UNEP Global Environmental Alert Service (GEAS).

UNEP Environment Programme. (2024). *2024 UNEP*. https://www.unep.org/interactives/beat-plastic-pollution/

UNICRI. (2024). *United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)*. https://unicri.it/topics/environmental

White, R. (2018). *Transnational environmental crime: Toward an eco-global criminology*. Willan.

 © Authors

JOPAG
JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Journal of Politics and Governance
15(2), May – August 2025

Family Property Law: A Comparative Case Study between Lao PDR and Thailand

Khamphiou Vilayphone [1], **Chitaporn Pisolyabutratovisetkul** [2], **Daranee Saengnil** [3*]

[1] National University of Laos,Vientiane Lao PDR, k.vilayphon@nuol.edu.la
[2] Burapha University,Thailand, chitaporn@go.buu.ac.th
[3] NKhon Kean University (Nong Khai Campus), Thailand, daransa@kku.ac.th
[*] Corresponding Author, © Authors

Article history:

Received: April 4, 2024

Revised: November 28

Accepted: December 11, 2024

Keywords:

Original Property,
Marital Property,
Ownership Principle,
Property Sharing,
Equity Principle

Abstract

Societies continually experience conflict over property, specifically marriage property, which sometimes arises through apparent hypocrisy in property law. Disputing spouses and their legal representatives constantly seek to manipulate an interpretation or loophole of law to exploit others out of land or material gain through other financial/status advantages. Many property conflicts, specifically those among married couples of various countries, often present within courtroom auspices in family law. The purpose of this study was to compare the civil code of family law between The People's Democratic Republic of Lao and Thailand - specifically, property division between husband and wife after separation. Underpinned by the theory of natural rights the qualitative findings support recommendations to reduce conflicts before they reach a court. Specifically, the study examined the two nations' family law history, concepts, and theories related to property division between a husband and wife. The qualitative research approach utilized secondary source documents and literature to inform the comparative content analysis. The findings confirm the historical linkage between Thai and Laos traditions of property ownership, resulting in their many legal similarities. The origins of family law have been passed down from generation to generation, evolving into the contemporary practices of each nation-state. Although both countries broadly adhere to 'property ownership principles' for dividing property between a husband and wife, they differ in how each State deems property pre- and post-marriage. In both countries, property owned by an individual pre-marriage and that willed or bequeathed to such individual during the marriage is categorized as "original" property (initial property or Sing Suan Tua). In contrast, marital property (Sin Som Sang) is co-jointly amassed during the marriage. Here, however, the bilateral similarity stops. While Thai family law retains the founding principle of property ownership rights, Lao Family Law, Section 168, stipulates that the "original property" becomes "marital property" whenever such original property is renovated exceeding a value two-thirds of the original value, specifically using assets of the other spouse. This distinct deviation in Lao Family Law from the founding principle of property ownership appears soon after the explosion of the French Protectorate of Laos 1893-1975. This provision, however, seemingly promotes less equity among the disputing parties in Lao, acting as an injustice to the owner of the original property. The findings support a recommendation that Section 168 of the Lao Family Law Act be repealed (specifically, paragraph 3, which conflicts with ownership theory) to be replaced by Lao "customary principles of property ownership", aligning with neighboring Thailand's "equity property rights".

© Authors

Definitions:

Lao PDR is the globally common expression representing The Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Lao PDR Civil Code: This instrument, dated 6 December 2018 supports statutory authority over all aspects of the Lao communist society and describes, via Acts, Articles, Sections, and Sub-sections, the expected behaviors and conditions under which persons should live to maintain a civil society.

Lao Family Law Act 2008: This instrument supports statutory authority over all aspects of Lao Family Law, specifically through various Articles.

Thai Civil and Commercial Code: This instrument, dated 1 October1935supports statutory authority over all aspects of Thailand's democratic society and describes, via Articles, Sections, and Sub-sections, the behaviors and conditions under which persons should live to maintain a civil society.

Thai Family Law Act 1935: This instrument supports statutory authority over all aspects of Thai Family Law, specifically through various Articles.

Lao PDR Marriage (Thag Dong): Article 150of the Lao Civil Code charter 3 (marriage conditions and regulations of marriage) states for a man and woman to marry, they shall exhibit the following conditions:

1. be at least 18 years of age

2. commit to love, agreement, and willing-ness to live as a couple

3. be single, divorced or widowed with certifying documentation.

Property of Husband-and-Wife: Article 166 (Lao civil code charter 5 (estates of the spouse) refers to the estates of a spouse consisting of initial and inherited assets (Sin Suan Tua) or marriage assets (Sin Som Ros).

Original property (Sin Suan Tua): Article 167 states Initial assets are properties owned by the husband or wife before marriage or acquired through inheritance, bequeath or bestowed to specifically either the husband or the wife after marriage and existing in its original forms or transformed into other assets.

Repairs to original property (of either party): Lao civil code charter 5 (estates of the spouse) If one party uses their original assets to repair the other party's original asset, exceeding two-thirds of its value, such repaired property is now considered marital property.

Marital property (Sin Som Ros): Article 168 (Lao civil code charter 5 (estates of the spouse) states that marriage properties are those acquired by the spouse in common during their married life, except for low-value and personal assets. Further, Section 1470 declares Sin Som Ros is all property of spouses except those set aside as Sin Suan Tua.

Under Section 1471(Thai Civil and commercial code) chapter 5 Family Law Act), Sin Suan Tua consists of:

1. Property belonging to either spouse before marriage.

2. Property for personal use, dress or ornament suitable for station in life, or tools necessary for carrying on the profession of either spouse.

3. Property acquired by either spouse during marriage through a will or gift.

4. Property given to the woman as an engagement gift or betrothal pre-marriage (Khong-man).

Under Section 1472, if Sin Suan Tua has been exchanged for another property or new property bought, or money has been acquired from a sale, such other property or money acquired shall be Sin Suan Tua. Where Sin Suan Tua is totally or partly destroyed but replaced by other property or money, such other property shall be Sin Suan Tua under Section 1473, each spouse manages their Sin Suan Tua.

© Authors

Total income (Sin Som Sang): In comes either spouse receives while living together, married, or separated.

Equity property: Section 146 states that things temporarily fixed to land or buildings do not become part of the land or building. The same rule applies to a building or other structure fixed to the land by the person who has the right to exercise a right over another person's land.

Table 1

Comparative terms and definitions

Legal Instruments	Lao PDR	Thailand
Constitution Enactment	**[Insert Date]**	**[Insert Date]**
Statutory Code	Civil Code	Civil and Commercial Code
Governing Act	Lao Family Law	Thai Family Law
Marriage (local terms)	Sin Som Sang (Thag Dong)	Sin Som Ros
Property Definitions		
Original Property	Sin Suan Tua	Sin Suan Tua
Marital Property	Sin Som Sang	Sin Som Ros
Equity Property	Integrated assets	Component of property
Total Income	Sin Som Sang	Sin Som Ros
Engagement (pre-marriage contract)	Khong-man	Khong-man

Source: Author

Introduction

This research proffers that post-marital property sharing between husband and wife in Lao PDR does not uniformly follow the general principles of ownership that prevail in neighboring Thailand. Therefore, this study seeks to find the problem and present a solution regarding the equitable sharing of property following a divorce in Lao PDR.

In considering the dilemma, several specific ownership principles must be explored: John Locke's theory of natural rights(Cole & Whiting, 2024; Locke, 1689); customary principles of property rights. Thailand's capitalist perspectives on property rights on civil and commercial code (1908) (Khaowichit, 1976) and the Lao PDR's socialist perspectives on property rights on civil code of Lao (2012) (Ministry of justice, 2021).

Since the creation of the Lan Xang Kingdom[1], problems have arisen over the sharing of post-marital assets between the former husband and wife. According to localized customary law, property is divided between husband and wife by separating assets into original property (Sin Suan Tua) and marital property (Sin Som Ros). Any property owned before marriage is considered the original owner's property. As for any assets acquired or earned together as husband and wife, the new asset is marital income/wealth (Sin Som Sang).

[1] *A kingdom of the Lao people encompassed the entire area of Laos and some areas in the northeastern region of Thailand. The Lan Xang Kingdom was prosperous in politics, government, arts and culture, and Buddhism, which developed alongside other nearby kingdoms, including Lanna, Siam (Thailand), Burma, and Khmer, from 1353. However, in 1778, it finally lost its independence to the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand). Therefore, the traditional customs of Lao PDR are like those of Thailand, such as marriage. Herein, the patriarchal traditions have the man as the head of the family and property management, even after marriage. Males also commonly had many wives, with the first recognized as the royal wife and subsequent unions as small or minor wives.*

 © Authors

If there is a divorce, the assets in the Sin Som Sang portion should be shared equally (Apirat Petchsiri, 2016: 204). As a principle of dividing property between husband and wife, this customary practice has been a long-held tradition among many democratic world societies, including modern Thailand and the former French Protectorate of Laos (1893-1975).

However, in 1975 there was a change in the political regime of Lao whereby the French colonists were expelled, and the new rule established the Lao People's Democratic Republic under a socialist legal system. Accordingly, the first constitution of the Lao PDR was adopted in 1990 (Laos take the customary law and old traditional between 1975-1990) setting out new laws over many societal functions, not least principles of property ownership (Petchsiri, 2016). Specifically, but not exclusively, marriage-related land division would fall under the purview of the family law, which was formed in 1991. Notwithstanding, the meaning of property (assets)–original and marital - was not sufficiently defined. Subsequently, the Lao PDR Family Law Act was revised through the Lao PDR Civil Code in 2008, with a further revision in 2019.

Herein, family law definitions were gazette through Part 3 of the Lao PDR Civil Code, providing technical clarification of family relationships as divided into various categories, starting with engagement, proposal, marriage, and finally, registration. Part 3 describes explicitly the rights and duties of a husband and wife through marriage, the processes following the separation of a married couple, the relationships between the family (father, mother and children), and the wealth prior and accumulated wealth of the husband and wife. Although both Lao (and Thai) customary laws accommodated a man's marriage to many women, the minor (small) wives were treated differently than the royal (primary) wife.

The law specifies a clear division of assets between husband and wife, divided into the original property (property of either spouse that existed before the registration of marriage), marital property (assets that arise after the marriage registration), as well as assets or interests accrued from the original assets and those acquired during the life of husband and wife. Such a division of assets between the said husband and wife was proposed to eliminate the problem of wealth sharing between a former husband and wife. While the law brings technical clarity to ownership rights, it does not stop practice deviations, either overtly or covertly, that still present as legal problems (challenges) surrounding property separations upon the dissolution of marriages., Specifically, paragraph 3 of Article 168 in the Lao Civil Code states: In the case of repairs to the original property of either party in a value exceeding two-thirds of the original value of the repaired property by using the other party's assets. Herein, that property is then considered to be marital property. This specific provision is controversial and often regarded as unfair in post-marital property distribution. In addition, if the original property is fixed real estate, whose value primarily increased across the years of marriage, it is treated differently to movable property, which mostly depreciates. This differential promotes corruption. Specifically, when a husband or wife willingly repairs the house (buildings) or infills more than two-thirds of the land, the law expressly states such improvements will cause a property ownership shift from original to marital. Such actions allow each spouse, upon a marriage dissolving, to share in the material ownership (value gain) that marital property brings.

Hence, the problem of property sharing between a husband and wife after a Lao divorce is not following widely held principles of property ownership, prompting the following research objectives:

 © Authors

1) To examine the history and background of customary family law related to the division of property between husband and wife in the Lao PDR and Thailand.

2) To consider the various concepts and theories related to the division of property between husband and wife in the Lao PDR and Thailand.

3) To compare family law regarding the division of marital property between husband and wife in Lao PDR and Thailand.

The rest of the article is presented in the following order. First, the following methodology describes how the study proceeded. It commences with a literature review, which sets the theory and practice context for property ownership/ division across Laos and Thailand. The findings reveal the "problem" with discussion to explain how the laws can be amended. Finally, we present the recommendation to amend the Family Law in Lao PDR to bring fairness back to divorcing spouses engaged in property division.

Methodology

Underpinned by John Locke's theory of natural rights, we use qualitative methods to review the literature and supplemental secondary documents. Specifically, we conducted a comparative study of family law in the Lao PDR and Thailand, focusing on theories regarding the principles of property rights. The thematic analysis, coded, and synthesized to identify the inconsistency in setting the family laws and consider legal mechanisms to rebalance fairness between separating spouses, thereby reducing conflicts that often arise regarding property division and further developing a unifying law. The importance of this research is evident through the escalating court appearances around resolving property-sharing problems between husband and wife in the Lao PDR, compared to Thailand, For example Supreme Court Judgment No. 186/2022 (Juvenile and Family Court of Thailand) and Supreme Court Judgment No. 1221/1984) (https://deka.supremecourt.or.th/search)

Literature Review

John Locke's (1689) natural rights theory consists of three core principles - the rights to life, liberty, and property– and precedes the establishment of civil society. Locke contends that "every human being has these rights in a state of nature, and they have to be preserved when people enter into a commonwealth [Union or marriage]" (Cole & Whiting, 2024, p. 1). According to Ojha (2024), Locke (1632-1704) lived during one of the most consequential centuries in English political history - 17th-century England. This era saw escalating conflicts between the monarchy and parliament, resulting in bloody civil wars. Subsequently, Locke (1689). Contends that human beings ought to govern themselves following natural law, a premise he explained in his work, Two Treatises of Government. The first treatise rejects an absolutist monarch, thereby setting the stage for the second treatise (Locke, 1690), wherein he discusses how natural law and natural rights exist and are binding even in the state of nature, i.e. the pre-political society before the emergence of parliamentary government. Locke's account of private property, in particular, is perhaps the most influential one in Western legal-political thought (Varden, 2021), with his second treatise directly influencing many democratic, liberal constitutions of the world (Ojha, 2024).

Locke's ideas have been linked to faith in Christianity (Zuckert, 2005), with the perspective that God created the world and mankind as mutual things in nature and common property available for all humans to eat and use equally. From this Christian foundation, John Locke explains further - "every human being has one thing that they are born with; that is a natural right" (Locke, 1690).

 © Authors

Notwithstanding, while Locke acknowledges that in the state of nature, human beings are free, as there is no government or higher human authority, he also contends that this freedom does not mean that a state of nature is equivalent to a state with a license to do anything. This is so because Locke argues that human beings in the state of nature are subject to natural law where morals and reason prevail. Thus, natural rights proffers that every human can claim ownership of what God has given us of equal nature, a point some scholars argue doesn't and cannot work philosophically (see Arendt, 1998; Varden, 2021). Notwithstanding, Locke contends anything that is a product of physical labor and the land's fruit becomes personal property. Such property is owned by people with the right to use it as they wish. Other people have no right to the physical labor of others, and the work of one's hands is their property only. Other people cannot (should not) infringe on those natural rights (Cole & Whiting, 2024; Locke, 1689).

However, individual views regarding equality for one and those of a broader society are not always shared. While the laws of nature advocate for humans born in this world, with complete freedom, having a right to be happy without being restricted – i.e., everyone is equal - their natural rights, invoke an authority to protect and manage their assets and lives. Other people will not have the right to destroy their life, body, freedom, and property. Notwithstanding such noble principles, the existence of humans in natural conditions often generates conflict among humans and between humans and their natural rights. Under the theory of humans living in nature, (Cole & Whiting, 2024; Locke, 1689) interprets Locke's ideas through three rules describing the natural condition of a state:

1. there is mutually accepted law. People may enter different states of nature, sometimes making it impossible for individuals to agree.

2. there is accurate and mutually accepted judicial organization, with a judiciary responsible for adjudicating disputes that arise under the rules of nature. The judicial organization must be a mediator who has no interest in the parties.

3. there is executive power to enforce compliance with various decisions.

However, a juxtaposition appears in Locke's proposition on the natural state. On one hand, humans, by natural rights, should have equal rights because property is an inalienable right of humans. In exercising this right, however, there is no power to protect and preserve these rights sustainably. In response to this uncertainty and potential inconvenience of the natural state, humans, on the other hand, enter treaties (see Locke, 1689). Cole and Whiting (2024) interpret such treaties as facilitators for an established form of governance (civil government) to develop order guaranteeing freedom in the exercise of Locke's (1690) theory of rights.

Notwithstanding, some people still violate the laws of nature and reject the judiciary, causing various dangers. A civil society inherently requires an accepted form of governance to protect a person's natural rights. Such systems must present exact definitions in law, support an impartial judge, and have administrative powers to enforce decisions on various matters (Cole & Whiting, 2024; Locke, 1689). To be able to proceed correctly and justly allows humans to coexist and operate with reason (Cole & Whiting, 2024; Locke, 1689). Ownership of property, notably personal and productive land, is considered a fundamental right and foundation for survival. However, property ownership should not be an absolute right, in that the State can intervene during contestation. Such a caveat is necessary as property also remains a right related to the sustainability of the wider society, namely the life and death of the State (customary tribe). Foundational to civil governance is customary (tribal) law (Maffesoli, 1995).

 © Authors

Customs, often interchangeable with traditions, demonstrate patterns of continuation of ideas and beliefs in the principles of practice regarding life and living in society, as well as ethics and manners as natural behavioral traits. The tradition extends accumulated knowledge and the customary behavior of people in society from the ancestors' time. Many contemporary matters are rooted in customary society's values and attitudes. Customs, therefore, play a vital role in improving and maintaining society. It can be said that such traditions set a standard of acceptable human behavior in a group (Caldicott et al., 2022; Sanguansap, 1992). Notwithstanding, popular custom can be different from legal custom. Historically, customs were stringent and accepted to the point of being a discipline and a rule of society (McKerron, 2003). If an individual were to violate tradition, society may label them as infidels and punish them with expulsion from the group or, at worst, death. Today, traditions, customs, and religion have melded as foundations of modern law (Sitthiwanrak, 2001; Zuckert, 2005).

Law, thus, is an evolving function of civil societies and reform, therefore, must remain a legitimate power of each state, ensuring the fair treatment of its citizens and resources, not least in the allocation of land. As a concept, fairness is contestable. Every person cannot simply be put on a scale to judge fairness. This is because each person has unequal bargaining power and deserves the protection of the state. Within the liberal democratic system (mostly Western states): "Whoever has a little, the state should give a lot. Whoever has a lot, the state should give a little" While somewhat simplistic, the analogy can be broadly interpreted as demonstrating the principle of ownership rights (Cole & Whiting, 2024; Locke, 1689).

In contrast, in the socialist legal system (mostly Marxist states), it is believed that individual ownership of property, especially factors used in production, such as land, causes individuals to be selfish, jealously protecting their property to maintain beneficial rights. Subsequently, Marx considered ownership rights would bolster the capitalists (bourgeoisie) through the exploitation of the poor (proletariat) (Pollard, 2022; Veal, 2003). Marx believed that capital was amassed through the sweat of the proletariat, so he advocated for the abolition of capital or property rights and for the state, as the core of society, to become the owner of the rights.

Of note, the 1990 regime change in Lao PDR and their adoption of a socialist legal system suggests that production rights can be honorably shared among all people. David and Brierly (1978) quote the ideas of Lenin (1918), “We [socialist governments] do not accept private rights. Everything is subject to the benefit of the public and public law only” (David & Brierly, 1978). They continue, contending that the public laws of socialist countries are classified mainly by function, such as administrative law, labor law, social security law, and criminal law, except for private law. Karl Marx considered that ownership should be contained to the State so that any production that arises in the future should be shared according to the value of each person's labor. Such dividends would adjust as necessary for equitable distributions upon reaching the ‘complete era of communism’ (Lenin, 1918). Therefore, the Lao PDR’s inherited Property Characteristics Act, regarding property rights of the deposed French Protectorate of Laos (1893-1975) was abolished with ‘land, fields, and forests’ to now belong, in law, entirely to the Lao PDR estate.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis indicate that Lao family law and Thai family law originate from traditions passed down continuously and have been shaped first by customary local culture and second by religion. From the comparative study of legal

 © Authors

history across both states, it was found that they initially shared the law of property ownership and division by favoring the original owner before the marriage:

It is said that 'Na Moon, if you go to become a son-in-law, then change your Dimka to become Na Moon, but if you go to become a new casino owner, then profits become Sin Som Sang' (Paimanee Chaiwongsa, 2003, p. 178)

In practical explanation, if the husband develops a rice field on land that was his wife's original property, then the rice field also belongs to the wife (Sin Suan Tua). But if the husband and wife take up new land to farm rice, then that new land will be Sin Som Ros, and the income generated will be Sin Som Sang.

In Thai society during the reign of King U Thong and King Rama 1, circa 1804, several Acts concerned Section 1- the relationship between the husband and his wife (s) and their assets, describing the division of original and marital property when husband and wife divorce. If the man held the original property, the division favored the man in two parts to one part for the woman. If the woman held the original property, the division, thus, favored the woman, two parts to one. Further, the Act also considers the wife's status. If the royal wife (first or primary wife), she will receive a share. Minor wives would not receive any share.

Modern Thai family law, premised on Western liberal principles, was enacted through the Civil and Commercial Code 1935, Book 5 on Family Matters. There are two types of property between husband and wife. First, Section 1470 states that Property between husband and wife, other than what has been set aside as personal property, is considered marital. The said provision, thus, shows that the property classification between husband and wife in Thailand is divided into Sin Suan Tua and Sin Som Roo. The meaning of Sin Suan Tua and Sin Som Roo is provided by Section 1471: personal property consists of that which: 1) either party has before marriage; 2) that is for personal use clothing or body decorations appropriate to one's status or tools necessary for one's occupation of either spouse;3) either spouse acquired during marriage by inheritance or by giving out of affection; 4) which is a betrothal thing. Section 1474 further states that the marital property includes that which: 1) the spouses acquired during the marriage; 2) either party acquired during the marriage by will or by giving in writing when the will or letter specifies that it is marital property, and 3) is the interest of personal property.

The present-day Lao People's Democratic Republic paved the way for socialist principles of ownership law and subsequent family law provisions created in 1991 (Apirat Petchsiri, 2016, p. 19). These laws were revised in 2008 when Lao PDR opened to the West and changed its economic system. A further amendment in 2019 sought to rectify the anomaly within the Family Law Act of 1991, which did not separate assets between husband and wife. Spousal property was not defined until 2019, when family law was incorporated into the Lao PDR Civil Code, article 26.

The new Section clarified the definition of husband and wife's assets: property of a husband and wife is divided into two types: original property and personal assets in Section 5; and spousal property of husband and wife in Section 167. Herein, the original property is that of the husband or wife acquired before marriage or is wealth acquired through personal inheritance, especially after marriage. That property is held in inalienable perpetuity as belonging to the receiver. In addition, income and interest arising from the original property of the husband or wife shall be considered the original property of that person, except if the husband or wife has participated in its production. or co-creation, i.e., created together during time as husband and wife. In this case, Section 168 declares that total income and interest from the spousal property are considered Sin Som Sang.

 © Authors

An exception is held for property and personal items which do not have high value. Sin Som Sang also extends to the original property of either party that has undergone repairs by using the assets of the other party in value exceeding two-thirds of the original value of the repaired property, These 2019 amendments to the Lao PDR Family Law Act were premised on giving Sin Som Sang clear meaning with specific details regarding the distribution of the original property and Sin Som Sang, post-marital separation.

The comparative study shows that while family laws in Lao PDR and Thailand are similar, they do exercise consequential differences regarding dividing property after divorce. In commonality, family laws evolved from tradition, with the principle of ownership foundational in dividing property between husband and wife. Original property (personal property) belongs to whichever party brought such property to the union. Spousal property is created together and earned as husband and wife in joint ownership as Sin Som Sang.

As for the differences, it was found that the family laws of Lao PDR, specifically Section 168, paragraph 3 of the Civil Code, refer to cases involving repairing the original property of either party. Herein, if the assets or original property of one party are used to repair the property of the other party, in value exceeding two-thirds of the original value of the repaired property, it shall be considered that the property is now joint spousal (marital) property. Subsequently, such assets must be shared if the husband and wife end their marital union. Such provision causes injustice to the original owner of the repaired property, be they either husband or wife.

Within Thai family law, there is no such provision within their Civil and Commercial Code. Rather, Thais maintain the ownership principle and apply the additional principles of complementarily. Hereby, ownership of the property remains with the husband or wife who initially owned the property. For assets where marital assets were used for repairs, the division of Sin Som Ros between husband and wife must compensate for Sin Som Tua that has been used for repairs. According to Section 1534 of the Civil and Commercial Code, marital property disposed of by either spouse for benefit is fine. However, Section 1533 states it shall be treated as if the property still exists for the division of Sin Som Ros. This protects the other spouse if they did not receive the compensatory share of Sin Som Ros in the amount that should be made. The spouse who sells or intentionally destroys the Sin Som Ros must compensate with his or her own Sin Som Tua or personal assets.

For example, when the land or a building is the personal property of either husband or wife, and it is later repaired, or productive trees planted, or any buildings added on said land using original assets from the other spouse the land (buildings) remains the private property of the original owner. When the marriage ends, compensatory monies must be exchanged in lieu of any causal ownership shift. Although it may be evident that the original assets of party A are used to repair the original assets of party B, or matrimonial assets, the principle of components must be considered upon separation. Such considerations reaffirm 'equity property rights where the legitimate government (law) must be "grounded in respect for basic rights and universal human dignity" (Hunt, 2016, p. 555).

Thai Civil and Commercial Code, Section 144 (Accessory states) any property and its parts which, by nature or local custom, forms an essential part of the existence of that property and cannot be divided except by destroying it or causing the property to change its shape or condition, the original property owner retains ownership rights in all components of that property. That is, the person who has ownership of the leading property has ownership of all the accessories of that property. When the principal property is original, that property's ownership will remain as before. However, according to the Thai Code, Section

 © Authors

1534, compensation may be payable for the Sin Som Ros spent on such accessories when the marriage dissolves. This is a distribution of Sin Som Ros for the proportional benefit of both spouses.

Recommendations

The findings suggest alternate ways should be sought to resolve Lao family law conflicts regarding property sharing between husband and wife, specifically in cases of repairs to the original property of either party by using the original assets of the other party. Today, the Civil Code of the Lao PDR, Section 168, paragraph 3, deems the repaired property as Sin Som Sang. This Section (specifically paragraph 3) contradicts the theory of natural conditions, specifically property ownership. The original property owner should be afforded greater protections, not deprived of their natural rights and accepted customs, as with the present socialist system. Therefore, to be fair to the husband or wife who is the original owner of the property, the Civil Code of the Lao PDR, Section 168, paragraph 3, should be amended by [re]introducing the principle of ownership with the Thai influence of complementary principles applying to property components as they may develop over time.

References

Apirat Petchsiri. (2016). *The research of legal system and legal information related to social, culture, political and security of Lao People's Democratic Republic Office of the Council of State of Thailand and Khon Kean University*. Research Project. Office of the Council of State. https://www.lawforasean.krisdika.go.th/

Arendt, H. (1998). *The human condition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press. https://pensarelespaciopublico.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/arendt-hanna-the-human-condition.pdf

Caldicott, R. W., Scherrer, P., & Harris, A. (2022). The RV camping framework for understanding modern camping practices. *Tourism Management Perspectives, 43*, 100990. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2022.100990

Cole, D., & Whiting, B. (2024). Natural rights: Definition, theory & applications. *Study.com*. https://study.com/academy/lesson/natural-rights-definition-theory-examples.html

David, R., & Brierly, J. E. C. (1978). *Major legal systems in the world today: An introduction to the comparative study of law* (2nd ed.). The Free Press. https://openlibrary.org/books/OL4748432M/Major_legal_systems_in_the_world_today

Hunt, B. A. (2016). Locke on equality. *Political Research Quarterly, 69*(3), 546–556. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912916652239

Janyarak Suvapan. (n.d.). Gender recognition and marriage under the Civil and Commercial Code, Book 5. https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/lawnujournal/article/download/261182/181807/1076026

Khaowichit, N. (1976). *Sin Suan Tua - continuation level on personal property*. Chulalongkorn University. http://cuir.car.chula.ac.th/handle/123456789/39430

Locke, J. (1689). *Two treatises of government*. https://www.yorku.ca/comninel/courses/3025pdf/Locke.pdf

Locke, J. (1690). *Second treatise of government*. Project Gutenberg. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7370/7370-h/7370-h.htm

Maffesoli, M. (1995). *The time of the tribes: The decline of individualism in mass society*. Sage. https://www.adlibris.com/se/e-bok/time-of-the-tribes-9781848609532

Malee Pruekphongsawali. (2014). *Tracing women's human rights* (3rd ed.). Office of the National Human Rights Commission and the Women's and Youth Studies Project, Thammasat University. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Events/WHRD/WomenRightsAreHR.pdf

 © Authors

McKerron, M. A. (2003). *Neo-tribes and traditional tribes: Identity construction and interaction of tourists and highland people in a village in Northern Thailand*. Graduate School, Chiang Mai University. http://cmuir.cmu.ac.th/jspui/handle/6653943832/35477

Ministry of Justice, Lao PDR. (2021). JICA and JICA Rule of Law Project on February 2021. https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/english/our_work/thematic_issues/governance/portal/laos.html

Ojha, A. (2024). *Locke: Natural rights*. IGNOU the People's University. https://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/ 81671/1/Unit-11.pdf

Paimanee Chaiwongsa. (2003). Principle of Lao's family law. In *The articles of Lao's law*. Thammasat University.

Pollard, C. (2022, July 4). Karl Marx: His philosophy explained. *The Conversation Media Group*. https://theconversation.com/karl-marx-his-philosophy-explained-164068

Richard Thornburgh. (1990). The Soviet Union and the rule of law. *Foreign Affairs, 69*(2), 13–27. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20044301?origin=crossref

SidaSonsriet, L. (2016). *Southeast Asia: A decade before entering the ASEAN Community (2007–2015)*. Chulalongkorn University Printing House.

Sombat Damrongthanyawong. (2002). *Politics: Concepts and development*. Faculty of Public Administration, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA). https://doi.nrct.go.th/ListDoi/listDetail?Resolve

Thongthong Chantarangsu. (1999). *Socialist law society*. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-3-Documents-Series-2011-2015_CD.pdf

Varden, H. (2021). Locke on property. In J. Gordon-Roth & S. Weinberg (Eds.), *The Lockean Mind* (1st ed., pp. 428–437). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315099675-55

Veal, A. J. (2003). Marxism. In J. Jenkin & J. Pigram (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation* (pp. 300–301). Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Encyclopedia-of-Leisure-and-Outdoor-Recreation/Jenkins-Pigram/p/book/9780415868204

Zuckert, M. P. (2005). Locke - religion - equality. *The Review of Politics, 67*(3), 419–431. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500034641

 © Authors

JOPAG
JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Journal of Politics and Governance
15(2), May – August 2025

Puzzle of Media and Citizens Over Democracy in Nigeria

Godwin Ehiarekhian Oboh [1]

[1] Benson Idahosa University, Nigeria
Corresponding Author, ehiarekhian2007@yahoo.com, © Authors

Article history:

Received: October 11, 2024
Revised: November 13, 2024
Accepted: December 13, 2024

Keywords:

Nigerian Government,
Tinubu's Administration,
Nigerian Army,
Security and Media

Abstract

Successive Nigerian governments have frequently resorted to blame games to evade accountability. This paper examines public view of Tinubu's administration and advocates citizens' participation in governance. The study used the survey method and reviewed 429 questionnaires using descriptive statistics to evaluate public view of Tinubu's administration. It found that the Nigerian government and its citizens have separate views on ways in which the federal government could solve the problem of insecurity, economy and corruption in the country. The paper recommends that the federal government may need to listen more to the good advice of its citizens and media conversation and narratives on governance to improve on its commitment to serve the citizens more efficiently.

Introduction

The role of the media in society is to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to its citizens. A body of literature acknowledges that the desire of citizens to access public information agrees with the traditional objective of government to promote participatory democracy (Cavaliere, 2024). The purpose of the media is similar to the aim of a country's foreign policy which neither has permanent friends, nor permanent enemies. A country's foreign policy is intended to advance its national interests, which are those things that promote the peace and development of the country concerned (Orend, 2013). Similarly, the interest of the media is to protect the rights and liberties of the public. Across the world, citizens have found that the ideals and values being demonstrated in the media world are at variance with the reality and practice in authoritarian countries (Arendt, 2024). Researchers need to constantly review the interplay between media, citizens, and government to avoid either party working at cross purposes with each other.

A government that is committed to meeting the needs of its citizens soon learns that people seldom think alike, so governments must pay attention to how public opinion is distributed among the choices that people make on a given issue (Janda, Berry, and Goldman, 2017). The social importance of news hinges on the role media play in fostering connections between politics and citizens, thereby providing foundations for citizens engagement with government (Hallvard and Ytre-Arne 2022). A media organization may commend a government today for doing what is right for its critics and criticize the government the next day if it is found to have ignored the welfare of its citizens.

© Authors

Though the Nigerian media for example can boast of attempts and initiatives made by journalists to make the government accountable to the people by revealing the misuse of trust, public commentary seems overwhelmingly more on the abuse of public trust which goes unreported and uninvestigated by anti-corruption agencies (Muhammed Musa and Osman Antwi-Boateng, 2023). The media have the right to hold governments accountable for their actions and decisions in line with the UN's document on fundamental human rights. The Nigerian Constitution in Section 22, Sub-Section 1, affirmed that the press, radio, television, and other agencies of mass communication shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives of the constitution and affirm the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999), which implies that the media are more answerable to citizens than to the government. This perhaps is why journalists are unlikely to support any government whose actions and policies disregard public interests and welfare.

The media have the constitutional obligation to use every lawful means to investigate the unrevealed truth behind a piece of legislation made by the parliament, a decision by the government, and to attract public attention to a judicial process that violated the provisions of the constitution of the people concerned. "The processes that the media use to influence governments' policies include direct elections, opinion polls, and the representation of public concern through effective coverage of issues and events in society" (Smith, Hadfield, and Dunne, 2012). International media systems, like Aljazeera, Russia's Today, Chinese Global Television Network, and New Delhi Television, report on events from the perspective of the Global South (Tella, 2021).
It is typical of governments though to frown on media organizations that always insist on reporting the true accounts of events. Media organizations that have independent editorial policy like the BBC, CNN, Aljazeera, ARISE, the African Independent Television, Channel Television, and Times Magazine are relatively more objective in stating the actual narratives of events and issues. The public media organizations are established by governments to disseminate news and information on governments' programs of activities as well as to solicit public support for governments to implement its policy agenda for development. State journalists while agreeing that ownership has implication on the way they report on issues, argued that the guiding principle on what media report about is whether the event or issue is of national interest (Chari, 2022).

It is important to recall that the media played a major role in the decolonization process of the African region. They provided avenues for nationalists to discuss and express their views on the constitutional developments which culminated in the attainment of the political independence of the post-colonial countries in Africa. This perhaps is why some African leaders still expect the media to see themselves as part and parcel of governments, and to avoid criticizing governments for whatever reason. Democracy, unfortunately, does not grow without the media having to suggest better ways by which governments could act more efficiently in providing leadership for their citizens. The group of journalists that insist on telling the government the truth about the issues affecting its citizens is perceived as the enemy of the state, while the media organizations that are less critical of the government's policies are taken as patriots by the government. Meanwhile, the inability of media to provide insight and knowledge for informed citizenship is in itself a deficit of media trust (Jakobsson and Stiernstedt, 2023).

The Nigerian media and citizens have repeatedly expressed their concerns in the manner the federal government responds to the plight of the citizens. Public discontent for the economic

 © Authors

policy of Tinubu's government led to the August 2024 Nationwide Protest by the Nigerian youths who requested the federal government by the protest to End Bad Governance in the country. Part of the elements which triggered the public anger that led to the protest was the economic hardship faced by citizens. Among the demands made by the protesters include that government reduces the cost of governance, restores government's subsidy on petroleum and reverse floatation of foreign currencies which has made life difficult for many Nigerian citizens. The federal government in its response to the protest reassured the citizens of its commitment to revamp the nation's economy. It therefore urged the citizens to make sacrifices and have confidence in the federal government's economic policy which does feel what the citizens think about it. The organizers of the August 2024 Nationwide Protest have described as hollow the response by President Tinubu to the fundamentals of the protest (Akinfefon, et al 2024).

Recent studies have shown that poverty has the potential to hinder public involvement in politics. So, there is the need for governments to address the problem of poverty not to hinder civil and democratic forms of participation of their citizens in governance (Dacombe and Parvin 2021). In addition, there is the problem of inequality in participatory democracy as noted in a study which identifies some of the elements that could hinder effective public participation in governance ((Dacombe and Parvin 2021). Conversely, there are scholars who believe that society does not need participatory democracy if it already has democracy. They argued that citizens' participation in democracy is by default (Gouache, 2020) since democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people according to Abraham Lincoln. Therefore, the emphasis on participatory democracy is perhaps to remind society that democracy must be public-oriented in nature. This particular study acknowledges that Nigeria is a democratic country. Yet, it has become necessary to assess public view of the Federal Government of Nigeria on its commitment towards the interests and welfare of its citizens. The findings of the study will give an insight to the preference Tinubu's administration puts on the advice of its citizens and media narratives on governance toward improving on its commitment to serve the citizens more efficiently.

Study Objectives

1) To assess public view of the federal government's anti-corruption campaign.

2) To ascertain public view of the Nigerian government's security architecture.

3) To evaluate public views of the impact of the removal of petroleum subsidy in the Nigerian economy.

4) To assess public perception of the extent to which citizens have participated in Tinubu's administration.

Research Questions

1) What is the opinion of the Nigerian public on the federal government's anti-corruption campaign?

2) What does the public feel about the Nigerian security architecture?

3) What is the opinion of Nigerians on the removal of petroleum subsidy?

4) Does the Nigerian public feel that Tinubu's administration has encouraged public participation in government?

Literature

The participation paradigm has been found a more appropriate construct to discuss the importance of citizens' involvement in the Nigerian government. According to Cohen and Manion (1980), a paradigm is s configuration of beliefs, values, and techniques by which normal science

 © Authors

is pursued. Kuhn (1962) sees a paradigm as a pattern or framework which gives organization and direction to a given area of scientific investigation. A major weakness in the approach of any government to public management is the lack of meaningful opportunities for citizens to deliberate on issues of shared concern. Governments often see themselves as isolated individuals and do not provide opportunities for citizens to contribute to governance (Giles Moss and Lee Edwards, 2023). Social scientists had earlier used the Diffusion Paradigm to support the claim that innovative ideas, and practices, including technology, could be transferred from the more established democratic countries to the Global South. Diffusion in this context implies a process by which innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system (Rogers, 2003). Social scientists had placed much emphasis on discussing ways in which emerging democratic countries could use the economic models of the Global North to develop the countries located in the Global South until Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, among others, realized that economic models and theories are context sensitive, which implied some of the negative outcomes that have emerged from the recommendations made by global financial institutions for Africa.

> Public participation has been a compelling subject, resulting in a clamor of reflexive questions: Is there enough public participation in a government, should institutions be more participatory, are young people too distant from the government, who are listening to citizens' voices, whose voices are going unacknowledged, and what should the government do differently to ensure public participation in government (Livingstone 2013)?

The assumptions above are some of the questions a public-oriented government should ask itself to avoid eliciting public anger over the government's failure to recognize the role of its citizens in governance.

Some African leaders often look elsewhere for solutions to national economic problems instead of relying on themselves and their citizens to solve their problems. In many instances, African governments have ignored the conditionalities attached to the assistance they got from foreign interest groups. Sadly so, it is the effects of the conditionalities on the foreign loans and assistance received by the past and present governments in Africa that have partly impoverished the capacity of the governments in the region to provide basic social services for their citizens. It was therefore, surprising when the Nigerian government requested its citizens to make more sacrifices to sustain the economic policies which were designed deliberately to enable the federal government to meet its obligation and commitment to foreign interest groups and lenders. "The current global economic crisis has made some African countries to experience foreign payments difficulties, so critical that the countries concerned have been unable to pursue the development efforts initiated for their citizens" (Mawakani, 1986). "One would have wished that African governments looked inward for a solution to whatever problems existed instead of them having to give away their rights to foreign investors for economic purposes" (Oboh and Hudson, 2022, p.14). Self-reliance refers to the ability of a government to provide for its citizens, while public participation describes a planning process that requires citizens' involvement in government (Jacobson, 1985). Much of the assistance the Nigerian government received from foreign nations has not reflected significantly on the living conditions of its citizens. Majeed (2019) noted that the House of Representatives in Nigeria mandated its committee on public account to investigate the mismanagement of an intervention fund due to the manner the money was spent by the government.

Democracy refers to a government that is owned by the people and exists for the good of the people. "Under an open government, citizens

 © Authors

have to be motivated by government to contribute their knowledge, share their ideas, and state their preferences as determinant variables which should ideally constitute the elements of a government's policy framework for development" (Schmidthuber, et al (2019). There should be nothing about a government's action or decision that comes to its citizens as a surprise since the government and citizens must have agreed on whatever the government did in the interest of its citizens. It was commendable of Tinubu's presidency to have removed petroleum subsidies in line with global best practice. Still, the removal of petroleum subsidies was rather unplanned for and too hasty was the manner in which it was implemented by the federal government. Logically, it is the duty of the Nigerian government to put measures in place to mitigate the negative impact of the removal of petroleum subsidies. The participation model discussed in this paper stresses the need for a government to involve its citizens in governance. The media have a role to play in participatory democracy. A study of the perceptions of journalists on public trust in media reports indicates that journalists believed that the public has confidence in media reports (Oboh, 2024, p.18). Therefore, the Nigerian government, media and citizens should work together for the interest of the country notwithstanding that the new media have altered public knowledge of communication process. Audience as an element of communication now serves as both a source as well as recipient of social media communications (Oboh, 2022, p.36). Unarguably, citizens are always happy giving the opportunity by a government to contribute to national development. Nyerere (1979) once observed that one essential element of democracy is that "everyone must be allowed to speak."

Tinubu's Presidency in Nigeria

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on assumption of office in May 2023 promised to revamp the Nigerian economy and provide a solution to the problem of insecurity in the country. On his first day in office, he removed petroleum subsidies from the Nigerian economy. The government however inherited an economy that was on the verge of collapse, following the burden of foreign debts thrust on it by the previous administrations. Since the removal of petroleum subsidies from the Nigerian economy, the majority of the citizens now find it difficult to cope and to meet their basic needs. The government had asked its citizens to be patient and support its economic blueprint for development. For the record, former President Olusegun Obasanjo pioneered the Nigerian Fourth Republic from May 1999 to May 2007. The government attracted foreign investors and enjoyed waivers and debt cancellations on some of the foreign loans received by the previous administrations before then. Again, Nigeria is going through avoidable moments of trying circumstances as the two political parties that have provided leadership for Nigeria since 1999 to the present day-the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All-Progressive Congress (APC) - are busy trading blames and pointing accusing fingers on each other as being responsible for the ill-health of the nation's economy.

The media and citizens seem to have some puzzles over how Tinubu's government responds to public opinions on governance. Although President Tinubu did not serve in the Buhari's civilian administration, he played a major role in ensuring that Buhari became the President of Nigeria in 2015. The citizens therefore would have expected the Tinubu's government to ask the previous administrations, including the Buhari's civilian government, to explain what went wrong with the nation's economy after the Obasanjo´s civilian administration in 2007. "Those who are just only in cases where their profession requires it, who pretend to be equitable in others' affairs when they are incorruptible in what interests them directly, who have not put equity into the

 © Authors

smallest events of their lives; run the risk of soon losing that very justice which they dispense" (Carrithers and Steward, 2020). Consequently, if the public cannot see justice in the actions and decisions of the federal government, then it will be illogical for the government to ask its citizens to make sacrifices when some of those who impoverished the Nigeria's economy are yet serving in the government and parliaments. "Justice is the principle upon which a state is founded and the platform whereupon contributions are made toward the excellence of the state" (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2011). President Tinubu was among those who made personal sacrifices to ensure the emergence of the Nigerian Fourth Republic in May 1999. One then would have expected his government to hold public officials to account for the poor state of the nation's economy. "A lack of political trust by citizens signals discontent with democracy. Public trust in government is one of the most important objective and performance indicator of good governments at all levels" (Holum, 2022). Democracy assumes that elected representatives in governments and parliaments are voted into office by citizens who understand what those running for the office stand for (Goodin & Saward 2005 cited in Dan & Arendt, 2024). The request by the Nigerian government for the citizens to make more sacrifices to sustain its economic policies implied an indirect incentive for the government's refusal to recover the public funds that were misappropriated by a few individuals who served in the governments. Gagrcin and Moe (2024) opine that contemporary democratic theory focuses on remedies to safeguard democracy, so the Nigerian government should defend its democracy from the corrosive tendencies and influences of capitalist logic which has continually undermined the integrity of democracy across the world including the countries located in the Global North.

Moreover, Tinubu has promised to fight corruption by focusing more attention on preventive mechanisms and enhancing effective wealth redistribution techniques in Nigeria (Sanni, 2022), which implies that one's desire to commit a crime is partly predicated upon one's predicament to legitimately earn a living. This model is simple, but it does not have an answer to why some political elites who have enough money for themselves and their families still steal public money. Corruption is a case of gross misconduct, which the citizens expect government to prosecute without compromise. Authorities have confirmed that more than $3 billons dollars have been lost to crude oil theft in the country when Nigeria was unable to meet its production quota (Orjinmo, 2022). The living conditions of the majority of the Nigerian citizens are deteriorating consequent upon the steady increase in the cost of food items and other household materials following the floating exchange rate adopted by the federal government. For clarity, a floating exchange rate is an unmanaged process by which a government neither establishes an official rate for its currency, nor intervenes to affect the value of its currency, and instead allows market forces and private investors to influence the rate of exchange for currencies between countries (Kegley and Blanton, 2011-2012). Nigeria has a growing economy alongside its large-scale youth's unemployment, so the interest of the citizens should take precedence over any measure adopted by the government to revamp the nation's economy.

The Nigerian Army, Security and Media

Also, it is the primary responsibility of the Nigerian government to protect the lives and property of its citizens. It has become necessary for the federal government to have a reformed military-media partnership following the upsurge in the activities of criminal elements in the country. Police and civil authorities need to provide security

 © Authors

for the lives and property of citizens. Yet, there is a relationship between the attention that governments give to the education of their citizens and the ability of the citizens to contribute to the growth and development of the countries concerned. The irony regarding the need for a good education by governments is that the rich nations of the world that have good and functional educational systems are investing more money into education when compared to the investment in education by the less-developed nations of the world. Part of the consequences of the poor attention some African countries give to the education of their citizens is the restiveness being witnessed in the region.

The control of banditry in Nigeria for example has exceeded the capacity of normal policing. This perhaps was why the state had to deploy the armed forces to tackle the social conflicts in the country. "Although not all nomads are armed bandits, most of the people behind banditry are Fulani, an ethnic group spread across West Africa. The Fulani tribe is known for being nomadic pastoralists, while the communities being attacked are mostly Hausa farming communities" according to (Amaza, 2020 cited in Ejiofor, 2021). Nevertheless, for one to accept the notion of the "Islamization" of banditry would imply that bandits lacked the capacity and intelligence to make themselves obscure to the members of the Nigerian Law Enforcement Agencies by dressing in the attire of the Fulani Muslim. In framing the connectivity of banditry to the Fulani tribe, the media were used to create wider publicity against the Fulani community (Ojewole, 2023). Otherwise, it is unscientific for one to assume that the Fulani tribe alone is responsible for banditry in Nigeria, particularly when there is no sufficient evidence to show that the "Nigerian Fulani" is behind all the bandit attacks in the country. The occupation of communities by bandits in Nigeria signals the erosion of territoriality. The annexation of aspects of Nigeria's territory by violent non-state actors, among other things, means that the state in that context is either receding or failing in its responsibility to citizens (Okoli, Aina, and Onuoha, 2024). The solution to banditry is for the federal government to first, identify the stakeholders and beneficiaries of banditry. Part of the puzzles of the media and citizens is that the real cause of banditry in Nigeria is still shrouded in mystery. Elsewhere in the world, citizens and media are familiar with the causes of whatever attack was made on citizens. In Nigeria, there have been several hostage-taking, and yet those involved in them and the reasons for which they attacked citizens are unknown. Many innocent persons have been displaced, including herders from their land of nativity (Saminu, bin Yaacob & Shukri (2023). There is a need for the federal government to establish a good context under which military-media trust can strive. For record purposes, the Nigerian Armed Forces consist of an Army, a Navy, an Air Force, and other armed forces of the Federation as recognized and approved by the state. The armed forces are expected to perform the following roles as recognized by the 1999 Nigerian Constitution in Section 217:

- defend the Nigerian State from external aggression;
- maintain its territorial integrity;
- secure its border from violation on land, seas, and air;
- suppress insurrection and support civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria;
- perform such other functions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999).

A careful evaluation of the role of the armed forces with specific reference to the Nigerian Army revealed that they are expected to assist other civil authorities to restore order in situations that could lead to a general breakdown of law and order. From the perspective of the 1999 Nigerian

 © Authors

Constitution, the Nigerian Army has no role in the resolution of matters regarding social conflict in a civil society, except in the instances where such conflicts have grave consequences for the peace and order of society. "The armed bandits in the country have maintained a decentralized structure, with little or no coordination across multiple groups that exist in the country, and the motivation for banditry is multidimensional which makes it difficult for the government to adopt an effective approach to addressing the crises through dialogue" (Ojo, Oyewole and Aina (2023). For the federal government to have decided to involve the armed forces to restore peace in crisis-infested areas in the country gives an insight into the implications of banditry in the country.

Part of the motives behind the irregular attacks on citizens is to create division in the country alongside an impression that banditry is being sponsored by a particular ethnic group. The Nigerian military has deployed thousands of its personnel to join the police and other security agencies in conducting internal security operations, which has resulted in the protection of the lives and property of citizens and minimizing the operation of banditry in the country (Aina, Ojo & Oyewole, 2023). Nevertheless, the Police may need to reassure the public to keep the information provided by citizens on state security. There have been instances previously where some police officers were alleged to have divulged the information they received on state security, and thereby endangered the lives of sources of the information. In 2019, the Department of State Services (DSS) was alleged to have given a copy of intelligence report to the Ondo Police Command. Later, the report was on social media. A top and reliable security source in the DSS confirmed that the report online was accurate and that it was the one given to the police by the DSS (Sahara Reporters, 2019). Such practices may have affected the confidence that the public has in the Nigeria Police Force. Notwithstanding, the perception which the public has about the armed forces is predicated in the manner in which the media reported on the efforts by the military to stop banditry.

Some governments generally have aversion for the more obtrusive media organizations. Otherwise, the Nigerian army and media have similar attributes in terms of their shared commitment to public trust. In this regard, the army and the media should see themselves as friends and professional colleagues. Elsewhere in the world, it is rare to find members of the armed forces on the streets and in public places. Nigeria's peculiar situation has made it appear as though the armed forces must fight crime in civil society. The Nigerian Army Quarterly Military-Media Chat has opened a new frontier of opportunity for the army and the media to partner and explore new ways of developing more effective peace-resolution packages to solve the problem of insecurity in the country. As Greene (2012) has rightly observed: "If change is forced upon us, we must be careful to resist the temptation to overreact …Often such creative readjustments lead to a superior path that enables us to escape the ploy of complacency and force us to reassess where we are headed."

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for the collection of data in the study were structured questionnaires. Each questionnaire has five sections with 27 items on it: Section (1) contains items 1 to 6 which provided information on the Bio-Data of the respondents of the study, section (2) contains items 7 to 11 that assessed public view of the Nigerian government's anti-corruption campaign, section (3) contains items 12 to 16 that assessed public view of the Nigerian government's security architecture, section (4) contains items 17 and 21 that extracted public view on the removal of petroleum subsidy in the Nigerian economy and section (5) contains items 24 and 27 that assessed public view on the extent to which citizens have

 © Authors

participated in Tinubu's administration. The number of items on the substantive issues of the questionnaire is 21 (Items 7 to 27) whereupon the reliability test of the study was derived as presented below:

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	21	100.0
	Excluded [a]	0	.0
	Total	21	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
.759	21

Description of Variables

The different items used in measuring the research variables were described using mean and standard deviation. The mean scores were calculated by assigning 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 to strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree respectively and later divided by the total number of respondents. In interpreting the mean score, it is assumed that the values that are above 3 show that the majority of the respondents "agreed" with the statements, while the values that fall below 3 show that the majority of the respondents "disagreed" with the statements.

Study Sample

The study was conducted in Benin-City in Edo State, Nigeria. The unit of analysis of the study was the public view of the Nigerian government's anti-corruption campaign, security blueprint, the impact of the removal of petroleum subsidy and public view of the extent to which citizens have participated in Tinubu's administration. The paper used the convenient sampling technique and purposively selected academics and non-academics and students of Benson Idahosa University in Nigeria and the members of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, in Nigeria to form the elements which constituted the study sample. Benson Idahosa University is among the best private-funded universities in Africa with a population between 10, 000 and 11, 000 and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, has a population of 87 media practitioners. The study randomly distributed questionnaires to respondents using the services of research assistants. The study did not involve peculiar audiences such as children and vulnerable persons. No one was compelled to fill the study questionnaires as there was an informed consent by the respondents to support the study. The anonymity and confidentiality of respondents are preserved in the study.

Method

The study adopted the survey method. The researcher distributed 450 questionnaires to respondents, but 429 questionnaires were retrieved having an attrition rate 4.66 %. The paper used Yamene's Sample Size Formula: $\frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$ of 400 elements for survey as a guide for the number of the elements that formed the study sample. The paper used descriptive statistics to evaluate the data on the public view of the Nigerian government.

Limitation of the Study

The limitation of this study was the non-scientific sampling technique used in the study. So, there are likely to be variations between the findings of this paper and the subsequent replications of it by researchers in other contexts consequent

 © Authors

upon the convenient sampling technique used in the study. The findings of this study were predicated upon the opinions of a section of the Nigerian public. A similar study of this nature that used a more representative sample of the Nigerian public may vary slightly from the findings of this study.

Data Analysis and Findings

Table 1

Study Objective One: Assessment of public opinion of the Nigerian government's anti-corruption campaign.

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean x̄	Std. Dev
7	Corruption is the major problem of the Nigerian economy	321 74.8%	69 16.1%	15 3.5%	5 1.2%	18 4.2%	4.57	.94
8	Government is involved in corrupt practices	251 58.5%	110 25.6%	40 9.3%	12 2.8%	15 3.5%	4.33	2.00
9	The present Nigerian government is committed to fighting corruption	122 28.4%	135 31.5%	56 13.1%	66 15.4%	49 11.4 %	3.50	1.35
10	The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) under this administration is not doing enough to curb corruption	121 28.2%	169 39.4%	56 13.1%	56 13.1%	27 6.3%	3.70	1.19
11	The impact of the recovery effort by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission is not visible on the economy	146 34.0%	151 35.2%	47 11.0%	60 14.0%	25 5.8%	3.78	1.22
Grand Mean							**3.98**	**1.34**

***Source**: Fieldwork Study*

Results

Responses to the statements above revealed a mixed degree of agreement and disagreement. The statement on item 7 has a mean of 4.57 and std deviation 0.94, which denotes a very strong agreement, reflecting a feeling that corruption is the major problem of the Nigerian economy. The statement on item 9 on the other hand, has a mean of 3.50 and std deviation of 1.35, which implies a more neutral position where there is no proper commitment by the government to fighting corruption. The statement on item 10 has a mean of 3.70 and a standard deviation of 1.19, which suggests a slight agreement among the respondents that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is not doing enough to reduce corruption in Nigeria. The statement on item 8 seems to indicate that corruption is in the government having a mean of 4.33 and std deviation of 2.00. The statement on item 11 implies that the impact of the recovery effort by EFCC is not visible in the economy being evidence in a mean 3.78 and std deviation of 1.22. Generally, the overall mean of 3.98 and std deviation of 1.34 show a general moderate opinion that tended towards an agreement by the respondents that the EFCC needs to do more to recover the public funds which were wrongly appropriated by a few individuals in the past and present administration.

 © Authors

Table 2

Study Objective Two: Ascertaining public opinion on the Nigerian government's security architecture.

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean x̄	Std. Dev.
12	Bandits are being sponsored by politicians	203 47.3%	116 27.0%	57 13.3%	33 7.7%	20 4.7%	4.05	1.16
13	Bandits are being sponsored by religious groups	152 35.4%	108 25.2%	74 17.2%	59 13.8%	35 8.2%	3.66	1.31
14	Government knows the causes of banditry in Nigeria	181 42.2%	111 25.9%	61 14.2%	57 13.3%	19 4.4%	3.88	1.22
15	The Federal government can stop banditry in Nigeria	168 39.2%	112 26.1%	73 17.0%	46 10.7%	30 7.0%	3.80	1.26
16	Government does not know what to do to stop banditry	141 32.9%	88 20.5%	66 15.4%	61 14.2%	71 16.6%	3.39	1.46
Grand Mean							**3.76**	**1.28**

***Source**: Fieldwork Study*

Results

The responses to the statements on table 2 above had a range of agreement to disagreement. The statement on item 12 had a mean of 4.05 and std deviation of 1.16, which shows that politicians have knowledge of banditry. The statement on item 14 with a mean of 3.88 and std deviation of 1.22, implies that the government knows the causes of banditry in Nigeria. The statement on item 16 has a mean of 3.39 and a standard deviation of 1.46, which refuted the claim that the Nigerian government knows what to do to stop banditry in the country. The statement on item 13 has a mean of 3.66 and std deviation of 1.31 that indicated a neutral stance on whether bandits are being sponsored by religious groups. The statement on item 15 has a mean of 3.80 and std deviation of 1.26, showing a slight agreement that the federal government can stop banditry in Nigeria. Generally, the overall mean of 3.76 with a standard deviation of 1.28 shows a moderate opinion, which tended towards an agreement that the Nigerian government needs to find solution to the problem of insecurity in the country.

Table 3

Study Objective Three: Evaluation of public opinion on the impact of the removal of petroleum subsidies in the Nigerian economy

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean x̄	Std. Dev.
17	The removal of petroleum subsidy has not solved any problem	209 48.7%	97 22.6%	5 12.1%	44 10.3%	27 6.3%	3.97	1.26
18	The removal of petroleum subsidy is good for the economy	163 38.0%	96 22.4%	69 16.1%	57 13.3%	43 10.0%	3.65	1.36

 © Authors

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean x̄	Std. Dev.
19	Past governments created the problem of the Nigerian economy	166 38.7%	121 28.2%	68 15.9%	48 11.2%	26 6.1%	3.82	1.23
20	The present government has created more problems for the economy than the past governments through the removal of oil subsidy	165 38.5%	124 28.9%	66 15.4%	42 9.8%	32 7.5%	3.81	1.25
21	The approach to the removal of oil subsidy was unplanned and too hasty	167 38.9%	119 27.7%	59 13.8%	58 13.5%	25 5.8%	3.81	1.25
Grand Mean							**3.81**	**1.27**

***Source**: Fieldwork Study*

Results

The responses to the statements on table 3 above show some form of agreements and disagreement. The statement on item 17 has a mean of 3.97 and std deviation of 1.26 to indicate a strong agreement among the respondents that the removal of petroleum subsidy has not solved the problem of the Nigerian economy. The statements on 19 and 20 have means of 3.82 and a standard deviation of 1.23 and a mean of 3.81 and a standard deviation of 1.25, respectively. The findings suggest that there is an agreement among the respondents that the past governments are to be blamed for the problem of the Nigerian economy. The statement on item 21 has a mean of 3.81 and a standard deviation of 1.25 which show that there is a consensus among the respondents that the approach being employed by the federal government on the removal of petroleum subsidy was ill-planned. With a grand mean of 3.81 and a standard deviation of 1.27, it can be deduced that the action taken by the Nigerian government to remove petroleum subsidies has been deemed unsuccessful by the majority of the Nigerian citizens.

Table 4

Study Objective Four: Assessing public view on the extent of public participation in the Nigerian government.

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean x̄	Std. Dev.
24	The present government encourages public participation in government	143 33.3%	80 18.6%	59 13.8%	65 15.2%	82 19.1%	3.32	1.53
25	The past government encouraged more public participation in government	106 24.7%	94 21.9%	48 11.2%	77 17.9%	104 24.2%	3.04	1.54
26	The present Nigerian government takes the good advice of citizens on governance	72 16.8%	68 15.9%	54 12.6%	92 21.4%	143 33.3%	2.61	1.49

 © Authors

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean x̄	Std. Dev.
27	The present Nigerian government takes the advice of the media on governance	67 15.6%	55 12.8%	48 11.2%	92 21.4%	167 38.9%	2.45	1.49
Grand Mean							**2.86**	**1.51**

***Source**: Fieldwork Study*

Results

The responses to the statements on table 4 above give an overview of a lack of public participation in the Nigerian government. The statement on item 24 has a mean of 3.32 and std deviation of 1.53, which refuted the claim that the Tinubu's government encouraged public participation in governance. The statement on item 25 has a mean of 3.04 and std deviation of 1.54 that also refuted the claim that the past governments encouraged public participation in governance. The statements on items 26 and 27 slightly agreed that the federal government takes the advice of media and citizens in governance with a mean of 2.61 and std deviation of 1.49, and a mean of 2.45 and std of 1.49 respectively. Generally, the overall mean of 2.86 with a standard deviation of 1.51 suggests a low level of agreement on the part of the respondents that the Nigerian government listens to the advice of its citizens in governance.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

The study reviewed public view of the Nigerian government on its commitment towards the interests and welfare of its citizens. The citizens identified that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission needs to do more to recover the public funds wrongly appropriated by former and serving public officials. The National Assembly may need to review the immunity clause in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution that protects public officials against public prosecution while in office to create the room for anti-corruption agencies to be more effective in the prosecution of economic and financial crimes in Nigeria. The study therefore urged Tinubu's administration to defend Nigerian democracy from the corrosive tendencies and influences of capitalist logic as noted earlier (Gagrcin and Moe (2024).

The paper further observed that the federal government's security blueprint needs to be reviewed based public opinions to create the pathway for government to identify and prosecute the stakeholders and beneficiaries of banditry in Nigeria who are the primary sources of insecurity in the country. Many innocent Nigerians have been displaced, including herders (Saminu, bin Yaacob & Shukri (2023) whom society believes that are the bandits in Nigeria. The study noted with dismay that the removal of petroleum subsidy has not solved the economic problem of Nigeria based on public view. There is the need for the federal government to take steps to ameliorate the plights of its citizens due to the impact of subsidies removal by the government.

In addition, Tinubu's administration needs to create platforms to relate more closely with the members of the public. There appears to be a gap between the view of the federal government and those of its citizens on ways in which the problems of Nigeria can be solved. Otherwise, the essence of democracy will be defeated if the government consistently ignores the advice of its citizens in governance as noted earlier in the paper (Goodin & Saward 2005 cited in Dan & Arendt, 2024).

 © Authors

Recommendations

1) The study recommends that the Nigerian government needs to listen more to the good advice and suggestions of its citizens, and use media conversation and narratives on governance to improve on its commitment to serve its citizens more efficiently.

2) The Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation in Nigeria should explore ways and means of involving citizens in the discussions on government's proposed policy agenda for development to enable the citizens to contribute to the public debate on government's policies and decisions being the essence of democracy.

3) The paper recommends that the Federal Government of Nigeria should avoid intimidating or harassing media and citizens over the free speeches they made as fair comments to assist the government to align its policies and programs toward meeting public needs and expectations.

4) The study recommends that the Immunity Clause in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution that protects governments against public prosecution while in office should be reviewed by the National Assembly, to allow the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to prosecute both former and serving members of governments and parliaments who may have compromised their oaths of office and defrauded the public.

5) The study suggests that the Nigerian government need to identify and prosecute the beneficiaries and sponsors of banditry in the country being the most effective way to tackling the problem of state security.

6) The paper advises the Nigerian Army and media to work together to develop more effective peace-resolution packages from the Quarterly Military-Media Chats being an innovation on Military-Civil Partnership in Nigeria.

7) The paper recommends that the Nigerian government takes measures to mitigate the impact of the removal of petroleum subsidy and floatation of exchange rate as they have negative impact on the capacity of citizens to legitimately earn a living.

References

Aina, F., Ojo, J. S., & Oyewole, S. (2023). Shock and awe: Military response to armed banditry and the prospects of internal security operations in Northwest Nigeria. *African Security Review, 32*(4), 440–457. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10246029.2023.2246432

Akinfefon, D., Young, V. A., Oritse, B., Bello, B., Alechenu, J., Ewepu, G., & Ibrahim, O. (2024, August 5). Protest: Tinubu's broadcast fell short of expectations – Organizers, Atiku, Soyinka, PDP, NLC, Others. *Vanguard*. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/08/protests-tinubus-broadcast-fell-short-of-expectations-organisers-atiku-soyinka-pdp-nlc-others/

Arendt, F. (2024). The media and democratization: A long-term macro-level perspective on the role of the press during a democratic transition. *Political Communication, 41*(1), 26–44. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10584609.2023.2238652

Carrithers, D. W., & Steward, P. (2020). *Montesquieu*. Cambridge University Press.

Cavaliere, P. (2024). Freedom of expression after disinformation: Towards a new paradigm for the right to receive information. *Journal of Media Law*. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17577632.2024.2362482?src=exp-la

Chari, T. (2022). Decolonising conflict reporting, media and election violence in Zimbabwe. In B. Karam & B. Mutsvairo (Eds.), *Decolonising political communication in Africa: Framing ontologies* (pp. 12–25). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9781003111962-3/decolonising-conflict-reporting-tendai-chari

 © Authors

Cohen, L., & Manion, L. (1980). *Research methods in education*. Croom Helm Limited.

Dacombe, R., & Parvin, P. (Eds.). (2021). Doing democracy differently: How can participatory democracy take hold in deprived areas? *Journal of Representative Democracy, 57*(2). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00344893.2019.1682647

Dacombe, R., & Parvin, P. (Eds.). (2021). Democratic participation in an age of inequality. *Journal of Representative Democracy, 57*(2). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00344893.2021.1933151

Dan, V., & Arendt, F. (2024). Visuals as identity markers in political communication on social media: Evidence for effects of visual cues in liberals, but not in conservatives. *Mass Communication and Society*. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15205436.2024.2333404?src=exp-oa

Ejiofor, P. F. (2021). The mobility of terror: Motorcycle bandits, violence and anarchy in Nigeria. *The RUSI Journal, 166*(6–7), 84–95. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03071847.2022.2058994

Federal Government of Nigeria. (1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999*. Federal Government Press.

Gagrcin, E., & Moe, H. (2024). Defending democracy: Prioritizing the study of epistemic inequalities. *Political Communication*. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10584609.2024.2377990?src=exp-oa

Glazier, R. A., & Boydstun, A. E. (2012). The president, the press, and the war: A tale of two framing agendas. *Political Communication, 29*, 428–446. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10584609.2012.721870

Gouache, C. (2020). We do not need participatory democracy if we already have democracy. https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/202210/ActiveCitizens%20APN%20Baseline%20study.pdf

Greene, R. (2012). *Mastery*. Profile Books Limited.

Guterres, A. (2024, August 12). Security Council: Africa deserves permanent seat at the table. *Political and Peacebuilding Affairs*. https://dppa.un.org/en/security-council-africa-deserves-permanent-seat-table-says-guterres

Hallvard, M., & Ytre-Arne, B. (2022). The democratic significance of everyday news use: Using diaries to understand public connections over time and beyond journalism. *Digital Journalism, 14*. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21670811.2020.1850308

Holum, M. (2022). Citizens participation: Linking government efforts, actual participation and trust in local politicians. *International Journal of Public Administration, 46*(13), 915–925. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01900692.2022.2048667#abstract

Jacobson, T. (1985). An epistemological shift in development communication theory. In M. Voigt & E. Dervin (Eds.), *Progress in communication science*. Ablex.

Jakobsson, P., & Stiernstedt, F. (2023). Trust and the media: Arguments for the (irr)elevance of a concept. *Journalism Studies, 24*(4), 479–495. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2169191

Janda, K., Berry, J. M., & Goldman, J. (2017). *The challenges of democracy: American government in global politics* (11th ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Kegley, C. W., & Blanton, S. L. (2012). *World politics: Trends and transformation* (2011–2012 ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.

Livingstone, S. (2013). The participation paradigm in audience research. *Communication Review, 16*(1–2), 21–30. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10714421.2013.757174

 © Authors

Majeed, B. (2023, October 17). Reps to investigate alleged mismanagement of 189.9 billion COVID-19 intervention funds. *Premium Times*. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/north-central/634560-reps-to-investigate-alleged-mismanagement-of-n183-9-billion-covid-19-intervention-funds.html?tztc=1

Mawakani, S. (1986). Fund conditionality and the socioeconomic situations in Africa. *IMF eLibrary*. https://www.elibrary.imf.org/configurable/content/book

Moss, G., & Edwards, L. (2023). Public deliberation and the rustication of public service media. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10286632.2024.2342277

Mukherjee, S., & Ramaswamy, S. (2011). *A history of political thought: Plato to Marx*. PHI Learning Private Limited.

Musa, M., & Antwi-Boateng, O. (2023). Investigative journalism in the era of promotional politics: The case of Nigeria. *Cogent Social Sciences, 9*(2), Article 2244153. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2023.2244153

Nyerere, J. (1979). The spokesman and review of African political economy. In A. Coulson (Ed.), *African socialism in practice*. SAGE Publications.

Oboh, G. E. (2022). Historical and contemporary exploration of the Nigerian media landscape: Conventional to cyber critiques. In B. Mutsvairo & N. T. Ekeanyanwu (Eds.), *Media and communication in Nigeria: Conceptual, connections, crossroads and constraints* (pp. 32–43). Routledge.

Oboh, G. E. (2024). Media trust, regulation and ethics of journalism. In G. E. Oboh (Ed.), *Social science ethics for research and practice: An African perspective* (pp. 1–24). Ethics International Press.

Oboh, G. E., & Hudson, R. C. (2022). Perspectives of social change on racial inclusiveness and social justice. In G. E. Oboh (Ed.), *Social justice, exclusivity and citizenship in the twenty-first century* (pp. 1–36). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Ojewale, O. (2023). Theorising and illustrating plural policing models in countering armed banditry as hybrid terrorism in Northwest Nigeria. *Cogent Social Sciences, 9*(1). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2023.2174486

Okoli, A. C., Aina, F., & Onuoha, F. C. (2024). Banditry and "captive population syndrome" in Nigeria. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways towards terrorism and genocide*. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17467586.2024.2356509

Ojo, J. S., Oyewole, S., & Aina, F. (2023). Forces of terror: Armed banditry and insecurity in North-West Nigeria. *Democracy and Security, 19*(4), 319–346. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924

Orend, B. (2013). *Introduction to international studies*. Oxford University Press.

Orjinmo, N. (2022, October 22). Nigeria's stolen oil, the military and a man named Government. *BBC*. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63314545

Robinson, P. (2012). The role of media and public opinion. In S. Smith, A. Hadfield, & T. Dunne (Eds.), *Foreign policy: Theories, actors, classes* (2nd ed., pp. 168–187). Oxford University Press.

Rogers, E. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press.

Sahara Reporters. (2019, November 1). How police sabotaged DSS intelligence report on Boko Haram – DDS sources. *Sahara Reporters*. https://saharareporters.com/2019/11/01/how-policemen-sabotaged-dss-intelligence-report-boko-haram-dss-sources

Saminu, I., Aziz bin Yaacob, C. M., & Shukri, S. B. (2023). Bandits' struggle for survival and its humanitarian impacts in Zamfara State, Nigeria. *Cogent Social Sciences, 9*. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2023.2241714

 © Authors

Sanni, K. (2022, October 18). How I plan to fight corruption – Tinubu. *Premium Times*. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/560290-2023-how-i-plan-to-fight-corruption-tinubu.html?tztc=1

Schmidthuber, L., Piller, F., Bogers, M., & Hilgers, D. (2019). Citizens participation in public administration: Investigating open government for social innovation. *R&D Management*. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/radm.12365

Tella, O. (2021). De-Americanizing and Africanizing soft power. In O. Tella (Ed.), *Africa's soft power philosophies: Political values, foreign policies and cultural exports* (pp. 12–40). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/oa-mono/10.4324/9781003176022/africa-soft-power-oluwaseun-tella

 © Authors

JOPAG
JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Journal of Politics and Governance
15(2), May – August 2025

Thailand's Rural Doctor Movement and Democratization of Public Health

Gil Turingan [1]

[1] Faculty of History, University of Warsaw, Warsaw 00-927, Poland
Corresponding Author, g.turingan@uw.edu.pl, © Authors

Article history:

Received: November 21, 2024
Revised: December 4, 2024
Accepted: December 11, 2024

Keywords:

Rural Doctor Society,
Rural Doctor Foundation,
Public Health,
Democracy

Abstract

In November 2024, the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation honored the Rural Doctor Movement of Thailand, comprising the Rural Doctor Society (RDS) and the Rural Doctor Foundation (RDF), for their significant contributions to Thai public health over nearly 50 years. Originally formed as a self-help group addressing the working conditions of rural doctors in the 1970s, this movement has evolved into an influential, autonomous professional network within the country's healthcare system. This academic article argues that, while advocating for their goals, rural doctors also play a crucial role in promoting democratic ideals within Thailand's public health sphere. Guided by Gardiner's (1994) work on the seven policies to enhance democratization in healthcare, this paper asserts that rural doctors navigated a landscape of political challenges and shortcomings in the Thai democratic system through their steadfast commitment to the right to health, public participation, transparency, accountability, decentralization of power and resources, and equitable access to healthcare services. By examining news articles and narrative accounts from rural doctors, this article deepens our understanding of the movement's lasting significance. It reinforces the movement's role as a champion of the Thai healthcare system and a promoter of democracy in public health that could serve as a model for other Asian nations. Through the lenses of history and democracy, this work offers a different and updated view of the movement. Furthermore, the international recognition received by rural doctors underscores the importance of studying other professions and organizations that contribute to the development of democracy in Thailand.

Introduction

Thailand has been recognized as a leader in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, ranking first in the Global COVID-19 Recovery Index among 184 nations (PEMANDU Associates, 2022). Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO, praised the country's efforts, which stem from decades of investment in healthcare infrastructure and universal coverage (World Health Organization, 2020; Thailand Shares Best Practices and Lessons Learned from

the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020). This success can be attributed to the dedication of rural doctors, whose advocacy for healthcare improvements has been crucial during the pandemic

The Rural Doctor Movement, comprising the Rural Doctor Society (RDS) and the Rural Doctor Foundation (RDF), began in the 1970s and has significantly improved Thailand's public health system. Their advocacy was crucial in enacting the National Health Security Act of 2002, establishing universal health coverage. Over the years, rural doctors have influenced health policies and created various organizations to assist the Ministry of Public Health. They manage community hospitals, champion public health initiatives, and promote equitable access to quality services. Additionally, the movement monitors government practices and addresses corruption within the Ministry of Public Health (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, Integrated strategies to tackle the inequitable distribution of doctors in Thailand: four decades of experience, 2003, p. 13; Harris, Who Governs?: Autonomous Political Networks as a Challenge to Power in Thailand, 2014, pp. 13-14).

Various studies highlight the complex relationship between democracy and public health. This paper builds on Gardiner's (1994) work, proposing seven policies to enhance democratization in health care: empowering district health systems, improving coordination in service delivery, promoting community participation, addressing human and reproductive rights, ensuring cost-effective resource allocation, implementing equitable access, and focusing on the sustainability of these policies. Rooted in the 1978 Alma Ata Declaration, these policies aim to bolster democratic processes and improve health outcomes in developing countries. With the rise of technology and social media, this study also emphasizes patient and family engagement in health decisions, moving towards a person-centered approach that prioritizes wellness and social conditions over traditional hierarchies focused solely on sickness (Tang et al., 2016, pp. 1-2).

Thailand is classified as a flawed democracy, ranked 63rd out of 167 countries and 5th in Southeast Asia in the 2023 Democracy Index by the Economic Intelligence Unit. The index evaluates electoral processes, government functionality, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. Key factors contributing to its flawed democracy include a history of military rule, political dynasties, suppression of dissent, and unelected officials in government. During the COVID-19 pandemic, authoritarian measures were implemented to control the virus, including curfews and restrictions on information, which challenged democratization efforts in public health (Chachavalpongpun, 2020; Thailand falls 8 places in Democracy Index, 2024).

Given former Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's authoritarian policies and military leadership, it is worth exploring how Thailand succeeded during the pandemic. Was it due to the Prayut administration's management, or was it the result of the health infrastructure built by the Rural Doctor Movement over time?

The complexity of Thai public health within the framework of democracy and the democratization of public health is underscored by these inquiries. To further understand this, this article answers the following questions: (1) What role has the Rural Doctor Movement played in advancing the democratization of Thai public health? Additionally, (2) In what ways has the Rural Doctor Movement advocated for the democratization of public health despite the challenges posed by Thailand's democratic system?

This study argues that the Rural Doctor Movement is crucial in democratizing Thailand's public health despite the country's political challenges and flawed democracy. By analyzing news articles, narrative accounts and works of the rural doctors, and early academic research on the

 © Authors

movement, this article reveals that the movement continues to advocate for the right to health, public participation, transparency, accountability, decentralization of power and resources, and equity of access to medicine and healthcare services, despite the challenges they faced over time.

This work provides an updated perspective on the movement, presenting a fresh approach to examining the contributions of rural doctors to the Thai public health system. It delves into the history and essence of the movement, the rural doctors' role in Thailand's political and democratic landscape, and their impact on democratizing the public health sector. By examining the movement through the lenses of history and democracy, this article enriches our comprehension and acknowledgment of the movement's enduring significance over the past five decades. Additionally, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on public health, emphasizing the pivotal role of democracy in the health sector and society.

The Origins of the Rural Doctor Movement and the Rural Doctor Federation

The Rural Doctor Movement, which the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation awarded in 2024 for exemplifying the greatness of spirit in service of the people, began from the 1960s to 1970s to combat the brain drain of doctors leaving for the U.S. The formation of the movement was a result of the "bonded" public service programs introduced by the Thai government in 1967, requiring young health professionals to practice in rural areas for three years in exchange for educational subsidies (Pagaiya & Noree, 2008, pp. 10-11; Nam 2018, p. 223).

In addition, involvement in the student democracy movement of the 1970s, including protests against military rule, further shaped these doctors' perspectives on social justice (Bamber, 1997, p. 236; Nam, 2018, p. 224). After the violent crackdown on the 1976 protests, many medical students aligned with the Communist Party, providing care in remote areas. Inspired by global health initiatives like the Barefoot Doctors Model in China and the WHO's 1978 Declaration on Primary Healthcare, they sought to enhance public health and promote Health for All (Nam, 2018, p. 224; Puaksom, 2023, pp. 1-2).

Despite needing more managerial training, many rural doctors in Thailand became hospital directors and faced administrative challenges. Their inexperience sometimes led to regulatory violations, often due to misguidance from accountants and difficulties in personnel management. This management inexperience and political awakening brought my student activism, plus their deepened commitment to health equity resulted in the formation of the Rural Doctor Federation (Sahaphan phaet chonnabot) in 1976 to advance rural healthcare, tackle healthcare access issues, share insights from rural physicians, and support the medical professionals in underserved areas (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, p. 13; Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, p. 10).

The 1976 coup significantly influenced the Rural Doctor Federation's activities. Due to the Cold War, rural doctors' community involvement raised military suspicions, leading some progressive doctors to align with the communist insurgency. The Federation removed the term "Federation" from its name to avoid national security scrutiny, becoming the Rural Doctor Society (Chomrom phaet chonnabot) in February 1978. This change aimed to soften its political image following tragic events in Thailand, including the October 6, 1976 Thammasat massacre, where right-wing groups targeted student activists (Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, pp. 10-11; Harris, Achieving Access: Professional Movements and the Politics of Health Universalism, 2017, pp. 39-40).

 © Authors

The Formation of the Rural Doctor Society (RDS) and the Rural Doctor Foundation (RDF)

The Rural Doctor Society started as an informal group for top young physicians from Thailand's leading medical schools to share experiences relevant to rural healthcare. Dr. Uthain Jaranasri was the first president, with Dr. Manit Praphansin as secretary and Dr. Suwit Wibulpolprasert as deputy secretary from 1978 to 1979. The RDS supported rural doctors, hosted training programs for hospital management roles, and published the Journal of the Rural Doctor Society. It also initiated management training, recognized outstanding performance, facilitated visits by senior doctors to boost morale, and offered coaching in rural hospitals. Through social development initiatives, RDS's influence extended to rural communities (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, p. 13; Harris, ''Developmental Capture'' of the State: Explaining Thailand's Universal Coverage Policy 2014, p. 172).

In 1982, the Rural Doctor Society created the Rural Doctor Foundation (RDF) to support rural health projects and meet the needs of rural communities. Dr. Manit Praphansin, a past president of the RDS, was instrumental in establishing the RDF, also known as Mulniti phaet chonnabot. The foundation serves as the formal organization of the Rural Doctor Movement, allowing for better mobilization of resources and providing legal status to the informal network of rural doctors in Thailand. While the RDS operates as a flexible and informal network, the RDF focuses on funding, publishing, and adhering to Thai laws for organizations (Nam, 2018, p. 223; Sukhampha, 2024, pp. 4-5).

The movement has significantly influenced the Thai healthcare system by driving key reforms through its strong ties with the Ministry of Public Health. The Rural Doctor Society and Rural Doctor Federation form an influential network of professionals who advocate for health system reforms. These rural doctors, called policy entrepreneurs, collaborate with larger social entities to promote their agenda. Their flexible structure allows them to pursue reforms amidst political shifts, military juntas, and bureaucratic challenges. However, it also exposes them to political repercussions from the Ministry of Public Health (Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, pp. 8-9; Puaksom, 2023, p. 14; Sukhampha 2024, pp. 7-9).

The RDS established the Sampran Forum in 1986, which included around 20 progressive medical professionals and rural doctors focused on health policy discussions, including universal coverage. The Forum operated independently from the RDS, and membership was by invitation, comprising rural doctors, bureaucrats, senators, and public officials. Members of the Forum held vital positions in Thailand's healthcare system. They won elections to the Medical Council of Thailand from 1987 to 1993, which led to significant reforms in medical education and residency training (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, p. 13; Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, pp. 10-11, p. 21).

The Rural Doctor Movement evolved over decades from a self-help group to a political movement, shifting focus with leadership changes. Initially, the movement's leaders focused on enhancing rural health facilities. However, as figures such as Dr. Vichai Chokevivat, Dr. Choochai Supawongse, and the late Dr. Sanguan Nitta-yaramphong—who emerged from backgrounds in student activism—assumed leadership roles, the movement became increasingly politically engaged (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, p. 13).

Retiring rural doctors, including Dr. Kriangsak Watcharanukulkiat, Dr. Arak Wongworachart, and Dr. Pongthep Wongwatcharapaibool, comprise the movement. Under the leadership of Dr. Supat Hasuwannakit, the RDS promotes justice and good governance while combating corruption and supporting communities. Along with the RDF leadership of Dr. Choochai Supawongse,

 © Authors

they collaborate with the Ministry of Public Health and other agencies to improve the Thai healthcare system (RDS: The group of doctors fighting COVID – and corruption – in Thailand, 2021).

The Rural Doctor Movement and the Democratization of Public Health in Thailand

For the Rural Doctor Movement, democracy and public health are related. Guided by the teachings of the monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, the movement's commitment to Buddhist communitarianism, which emphasizes the importance of community as the building blocks of democracy, is reflected in the accomplishments and principles of the rural doctors. Other Buddhist teachings on the notion of self-sacrifice, humaneness, non-violence, a lack of concern for personal wealth, and forgiveness also became influential in the activism of rural doctors since the 1970s student movement and the development of the philosophical bases of their interest in social reform (Bamber, 1997, p. 247).

Aside from their medical work in rural areas, the movement is also active in Thai politics, particularly in its commitment to good governance and democracy. The active involvement of rural doctors in the democratic movements in Thailand started in the 1990s. The health professionals, including the members of the Rural Doctor Society, joined the protest campaign against the military coup in 1991. Many medical personnel were closely involved in the Black May demonstration of 1992. After the fall of the military leadership of the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC), the medical professionals continued participating in the democratic movement. They formed the Health Assembly for Democracy to campaign for democracy and promote the 1992 election. They also joined as watchdogs during the election and assisted the teachers in rural areas. Prominent members of this formation included known members of the RDS, such as Dr. Surapong Suebwonglee, Dr. Vichai Chokevivat, and Dr. Sanguan Nittayaramphong (Bamber, 1997, pp. 240-242).

The rural doctors also supported Dr. Prawese Wasi and the 1997 People's Constitution, replacing the military constitution of 1991. The new constitution prompted civil society organizations to become more engaged in Thai politics, including the network of rural doctors and their linkage with other NGOs. It paved the way for rural doctors to transform the health care system. It allowed them to launch their proposed legislation through the help of different NGOs, such as the Foundation for Consumers, led by Saree Aungsomwang, and the AIDS Access Foundation, founded by former Senator Jon Ungpakorn (Harris, Achieving Access, 2017, pp. 45-52).

In 2006, the rural doctors generally shied away from becoming active in the polarized political situation between the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) or "Yellow Shirts," an anti-former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra coalition, and the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) or "Red Shirts," a reaction movement against PAD. Mostly, the doctors tried to remain above the fray in the battles between the two factions for years (Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, pp. 15-16). Despite not directly associating with the two groups, the rural doctors still contributed to democratic campaigns, especially on public health matters.

From 2013-2014, the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), a coalition led by Suthep Thaugsuban, opposed the government of Yingluck Shinawatra by organizing protests in Thailand. In 2013, Suthep urged the Rural Doctor Society to set up provincial units of the PDRC to mobilize reform support from the rural people as they are well respected in their communities. However, the Rural Doctor Society emphasized that they only acted as a facilitator and not as the host of the PDRC's provincial network. The Society only participated in the anti-government demon-

 © Authors

demonstrations led by the PDRC because they also opposed corruption and the Ministry of Public Health's policies, such as the adjustment of the allowances of the medical workers, the medical-hub policy supporting the growth of private hospitals, and political intervention in the public health agencies (Rural Doctors Society's backing of PDRC raises questions, 2013; PM's resignation the solution, Suthep tells army, 2013; Tangprasert, 2013).

The Rural Doctor Society continues to advocate for democracy by urging the government to respect democratic principles, particularly the people's will. In 2022, they also asked the former Prime Minister and military leader Prayut Chan-o-cha to step down after he took power through a military coup in 2014 (Rural doctors again urge Prayut to step down after year rule, 2022). In the recent general election, the RDS, under the leadership of Dr. Supat Hasuwannakit, issued a statement endorsing the progressive Move Forward Party leader, Pita Limjaroenrat, as the next Prime Minister. The Society also urged the members of the House of Representatives and the Senate to respect people's votes and facilitate the forming of the government as soon as possible (Rural Doctor Society joins calls for respect of electorate's wishes, 2023).

The rural doctors' involvement in different political and democratic events only showed the movement's political pragmatism and perseverance in developing public health policies and protecting the right to health of the Thai people through democracy. Given the movement's history and involvement in democratic events in Thailand, what were its contributions to the democratization of the public health system, and how did the rural doctors push for the democratization of public health despite Thailand's democratic challenges?

Human Rights and Right to Healthcare

As the rural doctors participated in democratic events throughout history, the movement also played a crucial role in democratizing Thailand's public health despite being pragmatic in politics and having a flawed democracy in the political system. The rural doctors advocate human rights and the right to health, public participation, decentralization of power and resources, transparency and accountability, and equity of access to medicine and healthcare services.

The movement, particularly Dr. Sanguan and the other rural doctors who were part of the Sampran Forum, acted as the prime mover of the National Health Security Act of 2002, which paved the way for creating the universal health coverage program in Thailand. This law provided the Thai people access to affordable health services. Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's sponsorship of the UCS and his Thai Rak Thai Party's legislative majority were not the only crucial ingredients in the UCS's realization. The UCS also succeeded in the solidarity coalition of the Ministry of Public Health and non-governmental organizations, which the rural doctors facilitated. The network of rural doctors was responsible for initiating and designing the healthcare policy, introducing it to Thaksin and his party skillfully enacting it as law (Nam, 2018, pp. 237-238).

After the Thai Rak Thai Party won the 2001 election, critics argued that its policies were a form of populism. The "30 Baht Treats All Diseases" policy also fell into this category because it was seen as a radical reform in the public healthcare system, and its name sounded too market-oriented (Chardchawarn, 2018, p. 189).

Despite it being labeled as a populist policy of Thaksin's party, there is no doubt that universal health coverage contributed a lot to Thai society, especially the poor, vulnerable, and disadvantaged people. As a result of the universal coverage, a

 © Authors

people. As a result of the universal coverage, a gradual increase in the use of health services was recorded, and many outpatient visits, mainly from rural hospitals, emerged from 2003 to 2010. A decreasing trend in health-impoverished households was also recorded as the UCS contributes to improving poverty reduction. The UCS contributed significantly to the development of Thailand's health information system, and public expenditures on goods such as medicines and medical supplies also spilled over in various sectors (International Labour Organization, 2016).

Twenty-two years after the UCS was formally introduced in Thailand, over 99% of Thai citizens are now covered under one of the three tax-funded healthcare schemes, including the UCS (Thammatacharee, Enhancing convenience: 22nd year of UCS, 2024). The Universal Coverage Scheme started by Dr. Sanguan and the network of rural doctors continues to serve the Thai people. It underwent many improvements, such as removing the copayment of 30 baht per visit in 2008 and increasing the coverage regarding population and benefits packages. Recently, the government led by former Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin has been improving the scheme's accessibility by allowing healthcare beneficiaries to access coverage anywhere in Thailand, not only limited to their registered hospitals (Thammatacharee, From 'Treats All Diseases' to 'Treatment Anywhere': The Transformation of Thailand's Universal Coverage Scheme, 2024).

The movement also lobbied for improvements in the UCS, such as granting universal healthcare coverage to the stateless people living in the northern Thai provinces and at the Thailand and Myanmar borders. In 2020, it was reported that around 500,000 people were given healthcare coverage. The United Nations has praised this inclusion of the stateless people as a model for developing countries. Together with other NGOs, including the foundations that the rural doctors are associated with and the Ministry of Public Health, they signed a memorandum of understanding to speed up the national verification process and assist the stateless people (Healthcare rights of stateless people, 2020; Thailand extends health coverage to non-citizens, 2024).

The movement democratizes the public health sector in Thailand by giving people access to medical services through universal health care and primary health care programs. The right to healthcare is not confined to the walls and corridors of hospitals. For rural doctors, it also involves the quality of life and the community where the people live.

Public Participation

The rural doctors embody the ideals of democracy by advocating public participation in matters concerning the people's health. They were associated with civil society groups and rural communities. The movement generated a strong network among medical professionals. They connected with similar rural medical associations, such as the Rural Pharmacists' Society and the Rural Nurses' Society. The network of the RDS worked with a group of progressive medical professionals to form various NGOs dedicated to improving the rural public health system, such as the Primary Health Care Coordinating Committee for Thai NGOs, which was established by Dr. Prawese in 1983, the Thai Development Support Committee, and the Foundation for Consumers led by Saree Aungsomwang (Nam, 2018, pp. 223, 232-233).

When some rural doctors were promoted to government positions and became bureaucrats, the RDS supported the alliance between the bureaucrats and non-governmental organizations to push their public health agenda. It was easy for the rural doctors to facilitate the partnership because the bureaucrats from the Ministry of Public Health and the NGO leaders shared experiences in social movements, politics, and the health profession. Many were former activists

 © Authors

during the 1970s and shared a progressive orientation. A number of the NGO leaders were also members of the medical groups mentioned who changed their careers and pursued the NGO sector. The NGOs supported the rural doctors and the bureaucrats by conducting a grassroots campaign that contributed to the people's awareness (Nam, 2018, pp. 223, 232).

For example, during the developmental stage of the UCS, various NGOs contributed to the network of rural doctors, especially in establishing a primary-care-centered system in secondary and tertiary hospitals. NGOs participated by training villagers in preventive health practices. Examples of NGOs that joined the campaign of the bureaucrats in 2000 were the Slum Dwellers' Network, Consumers' Network, AIDS Network, Women's Network, AIDS Access Foundation, Thai Volunteers Service Foundation, and the Consumer Protection Foundation. Together, they launched nationwide campaigns, distributed pamphlets, held workshops, and dispatched volunteers to villages nationwide (Nam, 2018, pp. 229-234).

The movement and its network usually engage with the public by gaining support through protests and signature campaigns. In 2000, the network gathered 50,000 signatures to force the passage of the UCS in the parliament (Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, pp. 12-13).

In addition to the UCS, the movement deployed the signature campaign for enacting anti-tobacco bills and, later, the Health Promotion Foundation Act of 2001. This law aims to stimulate, support, and develop a systematic approach to health promotion in Thailand. With the passage of the law, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) was created to use taxes on tobacco and alcohol to fund health promotion programs.

The movement for the bill started in 1986 when Dr. Prawase and the Folk Doctor Foundation (Moh Chaoban), a group of Buddhist monks trained in primary health care to assist doctors and health personnel in rural areas (Wasi, 1986), launched the Thai Anti-Smoking Campaign Project. This campaign was supported by the RDS and the leadership of Dr. Choochai in October 1987 when 250 community doctors and nurses from all over the country participated in a 7-day run originating from all four regions of Thailand. The run started and ended at the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration City Hall and covered a distance of over 3,000 kilometers. This run was a turning point in Thailand's health campaign's history. It demanded the rights of non-smokers, and over 6 million people signed the petition supporting this cause, resulting in the passage of two tobacco acts in the Thai Parliament, the Tobacco Product Control Act of 1992 and the Non -Smoker's Health Protection Act of 1992 (Siwaraksa, 2002, pp. 13-15; Vateesatokit, 2003, pp. 155-156).

After the two tobacco acts were passed in 1992, the Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI), the first organizational offspring of the Sampran Forum, researched setting up a sin-tax-financed organization and became the center of knowledge that pushed the anti-smoking campaign forward (Siwaraksa, 2002, pp. 15-16). The Health Promotion Foundation Act, a product of various networks, including the rural doctors, played a crucial role in the passage of universal health coverage a year later because of its sustainability and because it reduced the government's financial burden on healthcare. In addition, health promotion and prevention programs are essential facets of a successful universal healthcare (Sopitarchasak et al., 2015, p. 63).

Recently, the members who are based in rural areas applied the concept of communitarianism when they went to the dense communities of Bangkok in 2021 and provided COVID-19 response assistance. Under the leadership of Dr. Supat, he led a series of teams to Bangkok from July to August 2021 to screen people for COVID-19 using rapid antigen test kits (ATKs). They also prescribed medication for those who

 © Authors

tested positive and vaccinated those who were negative for the virus. Almost 200,000 people in 369 communities in Bangkok received a response from the rural doctors and the government. The Rural Doctor Society worked with other non-governmental organizations like the Slum Dwellers' Network. The people appreciated the Society's efforts and were recognized by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (RDS: The group of doctors fighting COVID – and corruption – in Thailand, 2021; BMA grateful to rural doctors for helping with COVID-19 tests in Bangkok communities, 2021).

The movement also democratizes health care by engaging the public with the correct health information through its Facebook page. By providing comments and sharing them with other people, the Thai people become aware, and at the same time, they are provided an avenue to be part of the discourse on public health. The RDS actively assisted the Ministry of Public Health in providing advisories to the public about COVID-19 during the peak of the pandemic (Thai Rural Doctors Society claims COVID-19 infections are rising, not falling, 2021; Doctors warn of new Covid wave in Thailand, hospitals told to be ready, 2022). With the legalization of marijuana in the country, the RDS is also active in providing information to the people about the effects of the legalization on Thai society, such as pointing out snack products with cannabis that are available in the market that can be purchased easily by the children (Rural Doctor Society wants public debate over sale of ganja-mixed snacks, 2022).

Decentralization of Power and Resources

The movement contributes to the democratization of public health by supporting the decentralization of power and resources. Decentralization in the public health system refers to the transfer of responsibility for health services from the central government to the local government, which improves the health system's efficiency and responsiveness (Jongudomsuk & Srisasalux, 2012, pp. 347-350).

The conventional structure of the Ministry of Public Health limited the rural doctors' ability to instill changes in the health system, and it provided them with constrained autonomy. To be efficient in delivering health services to the people, the rural doctors did not just collaborate with the NGOs, but they also scaled down the responsibilities of the Ministry of Public Health. The rural doctors also created new semi-autonomous health organizations that operated outside of the hierarchy of the ministry (i.e., the Health Systems Research Institute, Thai Health Promotion Foundation, the National Health Foundation, the Society and Health Institute, the International Health Policy Program, the National Health Security Office (NHSO), the National Health Assembly, and Health Accreditation Institute) (Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, pp. 13-14).

The movement's advocacy for decentralization manifested in the UCS that the rural doctors pushed for, particularly the financial strategies and distribution of healthcare resources. Under the program, adequately managed and decentralized financial management can result in equitable resource distribution and benefit the rural population and primary healthcare services (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, pp. 12-13).

The active involvement of civil society groups, such as NGOs, in the advocacies of the movement also showed the decentralization of power in decision-making and policymaking. It was evident since the rural doctors pushed for implementing the primary healthcare approach, the legislation of prominent public health bills, and the COVID-19 pandemic response of the rural doctors.

Transparency and Accountability

The movement also used its influence not just in policymaking but also as the watchdog and voice of the people. Being a watchdog, the

 © Authors

rural doctors democratize the public health by promoting transparency and accountability. In August 1998, the RDS revealed to the public a scheme by the Minister of Public Health to embezzle funds by overcharging hospitals for drugs. Dr. Yongyut Thammayuth, the president of the Rural Doctor Foundation at that time, and Dr. Vichai Chokevivat confirmed the corruption in the medicine and medical supply procurement process. Many former presidents of the foundation came out and confirmed the issue. They submitted a formal request to former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai to set up an investigation committee. The RDF and other organizations and sectors of civil society, such as the Rural Pharmacist Foundation, mobilized their fight through radio and television. The drug purchasing scandal resulted in the resignation of the health minister and one deputy health minister. One of the minister's advisers was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. The success of the RDS boosted the morale of the rural doctors. It was the first time in Thai history that corruption was exposed and supported by continuous pressure and systematically organized by the public through the initiative of rural doctors against high-level politicians and high-ranking bureaucrats (Potisophon, 2003; Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, p. 14).

In 2008, due to the fear of sanctions from foreign governments and retaliation from the pharmaceutical companies, the newly appointed Public Health Minister Chaiya Sasomsab threatened to withdraw the support for the Thai government's compulsory licensing for cancer drugs that was signed by the previous minister, Dr. Mongkol Na Songkhla, a known member of the Sampran Forum. These compulsory licenses allow the overriding of patents on expensive cancer drugs so Thai patients can get cheap generic versions. The Rural Doctor Society and the network of rural doctors, including the NGOs, pressured the Ministry of Public Health to continue the compulsory licensing and filed a petition to impeach the minister. Due to various accusations, such as his failure to declare the assets of his wife after he was sworn in as a minister and including his impeachment complaint due to his stance on generic cancer drugs, the Constitutional Court ordered Health Minister Chaiya Sasomsap to quit, and it prompted him to resign from his post (Thai court orders health minister to quit, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Wibulpolprasert et al., 2011, pp. 1-2, 5-8).

Aside from being the voice of the people, rural doctors also serve as the voice of the healthcare professionals. The Ministry of Public Health implemented a new allowance rate for medical workers in 2013. From basing it on how remote the area the healthcare workers were, it was changed to a new rate based on how many patients they served. The former presidents of the Rural Doctor Society, such as Dr. Kriangsak Watcharanukulkiat and Dr. Arak Wongworachart, opposed the new allowance rate and emphasized that the new plan was unfair to doctors who worked in rural areas. More doctors were prompted to quit provincial hospitals to work in private hospitals (Ministry to set new rate for state doctors, 2013; Rural doctors urge Pradit to go, 2013; Rural doctors pull out after govt slashes hardship allowance, 2013).

During the pandemic, the Rural Doctor Society raised many issues regarding the Prayut administration's COVID-19 response, such as the government's procurement of COVID-19 vaccines and the purchase of 8.5 million allegedly low-quality ATKs from a Chinese company at double the price quoted online (RDS: The group of doctors fighting COVID – and corruption – in Thailand, 2021).

Equity of Access to Medicine and Healthcare Services

The movement consistently reiterated its advocacy for making healthcare services accessible to everyone through its primary healthcare initiatives and the UCS. In addition to raising awareness among rural populations about the importance of

 © Authors

healthcare, the movement democratized Thai public health by making medicines accessible to the people. The efforts made by the Rural Doctor Society in 1998 to expose the drug purchasing scandal and in 2008 to impeach the health minister due to compulsory licensing did not only show their commitment as a watchdog but also their support of national drug policies, especially making the medicines more accessible to the Thai people and in the rural areas.

In addition, Dr. Vichai, who was the Chair of the Committee to Support the Implementation of the Government Use of Patents, pushed for the overriding of patents on Kaletra, an antiretroviral therapy (ART) medicine for HIV-1 and other medications (Thailand seeks deeper drug price cuts than Brazil deal, 2007; Wibulpolprasert et al., 2011, p. 5).

Aside from the prominent members of the movement, the network of rural doctors also played a vital role in implementing government use licenses for generic versions of patented medicines in Thailand. The movement emphasized the need for access to affordable alternatives amidst the high prices of patented drugs. The NGOs and advocacy groups supported the rural doctors by raising public awareness. The network used the evidence and research generated by scholars and experts to support their public pressure and media campaigns. They also underwent capacity building on intellectual property rights, pharmaceutical patents, and the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement. The civil movement collaborated with international NGOs like Médecins Sans Frontières, Third World Network, and Oxfam to gather support and expertise. They also worked with international bodies such as the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization (Wibulpolprasert et al., 2011). With the help of the movement, rural doctors empowered the people and democratized the public health sector by actively engaging them in their campaigns to make medicines accessible to everyone. By ensuring that medicine and healthcare services are available to everyone, they not only enhance the public health system but also help reduce social inequality in Thailand.

Conclusion

The five decades of existence and relevance of the movement only show that rural doctors serve as an essential piece in the democratic social movements of Thailand. From becoming a self-help group to a political movement group, the rural doctor proved that democracy and public health are inseparable concepts. The democracy of Thailand might not be perfect or too complicated to comprehend. However, the Rural Doctor Movement continuously does its part to ensure democracy in the country and its public health system. As the rural doctors heal their patients in the communities, they also heal the country's social ills, particularly the challenges of democracy. The movement plays a valuable role in Thailand's public health democratization. By being pragmatic and having a loose network, they pushed for various reforms in the Thai healthcare system that enabled them to democratize it through human rights and the right to health, public participation, decentralization of power and resources, transparency and accountability, and equity of access to medicine and healthcare services. Despite the series of military juntas, political instability brought by polarization, issues on bureaucracy, silencing dissent, and political interests, the rural doctors still managed to thrive and achieve their contributions to the Thai public health sector. However, democracy is still an ongoing battle, and the democratization of public health is still a process in Thailand. The challenges and the work of the rural doctors remain, and it is now in the hands of the next generation of rural doctors how they will continue the fight for the Thai people. As this article

 © Authors

offers a different and updated perspective on the movement, it highlights the democratic approach and contributions of rural doctors to the Thai public health system. With the new government following Prayut's military leadership, this topic is worth exploring, particularly how the movement adapts to the current administration while continuing its legacies after five decades. Furthermore, given the international recognition received by rural doctors from the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, it is important to continue studying other professions and organizations that also contribute to the development of Thai democracy.

Funding Acknowledgment:

This research is supported by the Faculty of History of the University of Warsaw through a postdoctoral research fellowship. NCN OPUS-24 Research Project: The Foothold: China, Southeast Asia, and the Global Revolution at the Margins, 1920s–1954 (Project No: 2022/47/B/HS3/02745).

Correction Note: This article was updated on [20 October 2026] to include an acknowledgment section that was inadvertently omitted from the originally published version.

References

BMA grateful to rural doctors for helping with Covid-19 tests in Bangkok communities. (2021, August 11). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/40004520

Bamber, S. (1997). The Thai medical profession and political activism. In K. Hewison (Ed.), *Political change in Thailand: Democracy and participation*. London: Routledge.

Chachavalpongpun, P. (2020). COVID-19 attacks the regime: The case of Thailand. *The Asia-Pacific Journal.*

Chardchawarn, S. (2018). Case study 7: Dr. Sanguan Nitayarumphong and public healthcare reform in Thailand. In A. H. Nishihara, M. Matsunaga, I. Nonaka, & K. Yokomichi (Eds.), *Knowledge creation in public administrations: Innovative government in Southeast Asia and Japan*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Doctors warn of new Covid wave in Thailand, hospitals told to be ready. (2022, July 5). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/40017376

Gardiner, C. (1994). Democracy and health: Implications for MOH policies. In M. Reich (Ed.), *Democracy and health: An overview of issues presented in four papers*. Boston, MA: Data for Decision Making Project, Harvard School of Public Health.

Harris, J. (2014). "Developmental capture" of the state: Explaining Thailand's universal coverage policy. *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law.*

Harris, J. (2014). Who governs?: Autonomous political networks as a challenge to power in Thailand. *Journal of Contemporary Asia,* 1–23.

Harris, J. (2017). *Achieving access: Professional movements and the politics of health universalism*. London: Cornell University Press.

Healthcare rights of stateless people. (2020, July 13). *National Health Security Office.* https://eng.nhso.go.th/view/1/DescriptionNews/Healthcare-rights-of-stateless-people-/158/EN-US

International Labour Organization. (2016). *Universal healthcare coverage scheme*. Switzerland: International Labour Organization.

Jongudomsuk, P., & Srisasalux, J. (2012). A decade of health-care decentralization in Thailand: What lessons can be drawn? *WHO South-East Asia Journal of Public Health.*

Ministry to set new rate for state doctors. (2013, March 22). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/30202580

Nam, I. (2018). Partnering for universal health coverage in Thailand: Bureaucrats and NGOs. *Asian Survey, 58*(2), 213–239.

 © Authors

Pagaiya, N., & Noree, T. (2008). *Thailand's health workforce: A review of challenges and experiences*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

PEMANDU Associates. (2022, December 23). *Full GCI ranking: Ranking of countries by recovery index.* https://covid19.pemandu.org/gci-ranking/

PM's resignation the solution, Suthep tells army. (2013, December 14). *Bangkok Post.* https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/384843/military-refuses-to-pick-a-side

Pongutta, S., Suphanchaimat, R., Patcharanarumol, W., & Tangcharoensathien, V. (2019). Lessons from the Thai Health Promotion Foundation. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization,* 213–220.

Potisophon, S. (2003). Citizen mobilization in the fight against corruption: The case of health care funding in Thailand. *Open Government Forum.* Seoul: OECD.

Puaksom, D. (2023). Thailand's Rural Doctor Society in the 1970s–80s and its struggles to improve health in the countryside. In V. Neelakantan (Ed.), *The geopolitics of health in South and Southeast Asia*. London: Routledge.

RDS: The group of doctors fighting COVID – and corruption – in Thailand. (2021, August 18). *Thai PBS World.*

Rural Doctor Society joins calls for respect of electorate's wishes. (2023, May 17). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/thailand/politics/40027710

Rural Doctor Society wants public debate over sale of ganja-mixed snacks. (2022, July 14). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/40017723

Rural Doctors Society's backing of PDRC raises questions. (2013, December 17). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/30222276

Rural doctors again urge Prayut to step down after year rule. (2022, August 19). *Thai News Room.* https://thainewsroom.com/2022/08/19/rural-doctors-again-urge-prayut-to-step-down-after-8-year-rule/

Rural doctors pull out after govt slashes hardship allowance. (2013, April 3). *HFocus.* https://www.hfocus.org/content/2013/04/2720

Rural doctors urge Pradit to go. (2013, March 21). *HFocus.* https://www.hfocus.org/content/2013/03/2609

Siwaraksa, P. (2002). *The birth of the ThaiHealth Fund.* Bangkok: Thai Health Promotion Foundation.

Sopitarchasak, S., Adulyanon, S., & Lorthong, T. (2015). Thai Health Promotion Foundation: Innovative enabler for health promotion. *World Health and Population.*

Sukhampha, R. (2024). Diffusion of global health norms through a national medical professional movement in the universal healthcare of Thailand. *Frontiers in Public Health.*

Tang, P. C., Smith, M. D., Adler-Milstein, J., Delbanco, T., Downs, S. J., Mallya, G. G., … Sands, D. Z. (2016). The democratization of health care: A vital direction for health and health care. *National Academy of Medicine Perspectives.*

Tangprasert, P. (2013, December 16). PDRC's rural supporters get to work on offshoots. *Bangkok Post.*

Taylor, L. (2008, April 1). Thai public health minister faces impeachment campaign. *PharmaTimes Online.* https://pharmatimes.com/news/thai_public_health_minister_faces_impeachment_campaign_987378/

Thammatacharee, J. (2024, January 11). Enhancing convenience: 22nd year of UCS. *National Health Security Office.* https://eng.nhso.go.th/view/1/DescriptionNews/Enhancing-convenience-22nd-year-of-UCS/587/EN-US

Thammatacharee, J. (2024, April 22). From 'treats all diseases' to 'treatment anywhere': The transformation of Thailand's universal coverage scheme. *National Health Security*

 © Authors

Office. https://eng.nhso.go.th/view/1/Secretary-General/From-Treats-All-Diseases-to-Treatment-Anywhere-The-Transformation-of-Thailands-Universal-Coverage-Scheme/610/EN-US

Thai Rural Doctors Society claims COVID-19 infections are rising, not falling. (2021, October 10). *Thai PBS World.* https://www.thaipbsworld.com/thai-rural-doctors-society-claims-covid-19-infections-are-rising-not-falling/

Thai court orders health minister to quit. (2008, July 9). *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBKK62912/

Thai court orders health minister to quit. (2008, July 9). *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBKK62912/

Thailand extends health coverage to non-citizens. (2024, January 12). *Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C.* https://washingtondc.thaiembassy.org/en/content/thailand-extends-health-coverage-to-non-citizens

Thailand falls 8 places in democracy index. (2024, February 17). *Bangkok Post.* https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2743780/thailand-falls-8-places-in-democracy-index

Thailand seeks deeper drug price cuts than Brazil deal. (2007, August 10). *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBKK29335/

Thailand shares best practices and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. (2020, September 2). *Greater Mekong Subregion.* https://www.greatermekong.org/thailand-shares-best-practices-and-lessons-learned-covid-19-pandemic

Vateesatokit, P. (2003). Tailoring tobacco control efforts to the country: The example of Thailand. In J. d. Beyer & L. Waverley Brigden (Eds.), *Tobacco control policy: Strategies, successes, and setbacks.* Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Wasi, P. (1986, July). Bareheaded doctors. *World Health.*

Wibulpolprasert, S., & Pengpaibon, P. (2003). Integrated strategies to tackle the inequitable distribution of doctors in Thailand: Four decades of experience. *Human Resources for Health,* 1–17.

Wibulpolprasert, S., Chokevivat, V., Oh, C., & Yamabhai, I. (2011). Government use licenses in Thailand: The power of evidence, civil movement and political leadership. *Globalization and Health,* 1–8.

World Health Organization. (2020, September 19). Thailand: How a strong health system fights a pandemic. https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/how-a-strong-health-system-fights-a-pandemic-in-thailand

 © Authors

JOPAG
JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Journal of Politics and Governance
15(2), May – August 2025

Thailand's Rural Doctor Movement and Democratization of Public Health

Gil Turingan [1]

[1] Faculty of History, University of Warsaw, Warsaw 00-927, Poland
Corresponding Author, g.turingan@uw.edu.pl, © Authors

Article history:

Received: November 21, 2024
Revised: December 4, 2024
Accepted: December 11, 2024

Keywords:

Rural Doctor Society,
Rural Doctor Foundation,
Public Health,
Democracy

Abstract

In November 2024, the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation honored the Rural Doctor Movement of Thailand, comprising the Rural Doctor Society (RDS) and the Rural Doctor Foundation (RDF), for their significant contributions to Thai public health over nearly 50 years. Originally formed as a self-help group addressing the working conditions of rural doctors in the 1970s, this movement has evolved into an influential, autonomous professional network within the country's healthcare system. This academic article argues that, while advocating for their goals, rural doctors also play a crucial role in promoting democratic ideals within Thailand's public health sphere. Guided by Gardiner's (1994) work on the seven policies to enhance democratization in healthcare, this paper asserts that rural doctors navigated a landscape of political challenges and shortcomings in the Thai democratic system through their steadfast commitment to the right to health, public participation, transparency, accountability, decentralization of power and resources, and equitable access to healthcare services. By examining news articles and narrative accounts from rural doctors, this article deepens our understanding of the movement's lasting significance. It reinforces the movement's role as a champion of the Thai healthcare system and a promoter of democracy in public health that could serve as a model for other Asian nations. Through the lenses of history and democracy, this work offers a different and updated view of the movement. Furthermore, the international recognition received by rural doctors underscores the importance of studying other professions and organizations that contribute to the development of democracy in Thailand.

Introduction

Thailand has been recognized as a leader in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, ranking first in the Global COVID-19 Recovery Index among 184 nations (PEMANDU Associates, 2022). Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO, praised the country's efforts, which stem from decades of investment in healthcare infrastructure and universal coverage (World Health Organization, 2020; Thailand Shares Best Practices and Lessons Learned from

the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020). This success can be attributed to the dedication of rural doctors, whose advocacy for healthcare improvements has been crucial during the pandemic

The Rural Doctor Movement, comprising the Rural Doctor Society (RDS) and the Rural Doctor Foundation (RDF), began in the 1970s and has significantly improved Thailand's public health system. Their advocacy was crucial in enacting the National Health Security Act of 2002, establishing universal health coverage. Over the years, rural doctors have influenced health policies and created various organizations to assist the Ministry of Public Health. They manage community hospitals, champion public health initiatives, and promote equitable access to quality services. Additionally, the movement monitors government practices and addresses corruption within the Ministry of Public Health (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, Integrated strategies to tackle the inequitable distribution of doctors in Thailand: four decades of experience, 2003, p. 13; Harris, Who Governs?: Autonomous Political Networks as a Challenge to Power in Thailand, 2014, pp. 13-14).

Various studies highlight the complex relationship between democracy and public health. This paper builds on Gardiner's (1994) work, proposing seven policies to enhance democratization in health care: empowering district health systems, improving coordination in service delivery, promoting community participation, addressing human and reproductive rights, ensuring cost-effective resource allocation, implementing equitable access, and focusing on the sustainability of these policies. Rooted in the 1978 Alma Ata Declaration, these policies aim to bolster democratic processes and improve health outcomes in developing countries. With the rise of technology and social media, this study also emphasizes patient and family engagement in health decisions, moving towards a person-centered approach that prioritizes wellness and social conditions over traditional hierarchies focused solely on sickness (Tang et al., 2016, pp. 1-2).

Thailand is classified as a flawed democracy, ranked 63rd out of 167 countries and 5th in Southeast Asia in the 2023 Democracy Index by the Economic Intelligence Unit. The index evaluates electoral processes, government functionality, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. Key factors contributing to its flawed democracy include a history of military rule, political dynasties, suppression of dissent, and unelected officials in government. During the COVID-19 pandemic, authoritarian measures were implemented to control the virus, including curfews and restrictions on information, which challenged democratization efforts in public health (Chachavalpongpun, 2020; Thailand falls 8 places in Democracy Index, 2024).

Given former Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's authoritarian policies and military leadership, it is worth exploring how Thailand succeeded during the pandemic. Was it due to the Prayut administration's management, or was it the result of the health infrastructure built by the Rural Doctor Movement over time?

The complexity of Thai public health within the framework of democracy and the democratization of public health is underscored by these inquiries. To further understand this, this article answers the following questions: (1) What role has the Rural Doctor Movement played in advancing the democratization of Thai public health? Additionally, (2) In what ways has the Rural Doctor Movement advocated for the democratization of public health despite the challenges posed by Thailand's democratic system?

This study argues that the Rural Doctor Movement is crucial in democratizing Thailand's public health despite the country's political challenges and flawed democracy. By analyzing news articles, narrative accounts and works of the rural doctors, and early academic research on the

 © Authors

movement, this article reveals that the movement continues to advocate for the right to health, public participation, transparency, accountability, decentralization of power and resources, and equity of access to medicine and healthcare services, despite the challenges they faced over time.

This work provides an updated perspective on the movement, presenting a fresh approach to examining the contributions of rural doctors to the Thai public health system. It delves into the history and essence of the movement, the rural doctors' role in Thailand's political and democratic landscape, and their impact on democratizing the public health sector. By examining the movement through the lenses of history and democracy, this article enriches our comprehension and acknowledgment of the movement's enduring significance over the past five decades. Additionally, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on public health, emphasizing the pivotal role of democracy in the health sector and society.

The Origins of the Rural Doctor Movement and the Rural Doctor Federation

The Rural Doctor Movement, which the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation awarded in 2024 for exemplifying the greatness of spirit in service of the people, began from the 1960s to 1970s to combat the brain drain of doctors leaving for the U.S. The formation of the movement was a result of the "bonded" public service programs introduced by the Thai government in 1967, requiring young health professionals to practice in rural areas for three years in exchange for educational subsidies (Pagaiya & Noree, 2008, pp. 10-11; Nam 2018, p. 223).

In addition, involvement in the student democracy movement of the 1970s, including protests against military rule, further shaped these doctors' perspectives on social justice (Bamber, 1997, p. 236; Nam, 2018, p. 224). After the violent crackdown on the 1976 protests, many medical students aligned with the Communist Party, providing care in remote areas. Inspired by global health initiatives like the Barefoot Doctors Model in China and the WHO's 1978 Declaration on Primary Healthcare, they sought to enhance public health and promote Health for All (Nam, 2018, p. 224; Puaksom, 2023, pp. 1-2).

Despite needing more managerial training, many rural doctors in Thailand became hospital directors and faced administrative challenges. Their inexperience sometimes led to regulatory violations, often due to misguidance from accountants and difficulties in personnel management. This management inexperience and political awakening brought my student activism, plus their deepened commitment to health equity resulted in the formation of the Rural Doctor Federation (Sahaphan phaet chonnabot) in 1976 to advance rural healthcare, tackle healthcare access issues, share insights from rural physicians, and support the medical professionals in underserved areas (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, p. 13; Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, p. 10).

The 1976 coup significantly influenced the Rural Doctor Federation's activities. Due to the Cold War, rural doctors' community involvement raised military suspicions, leading some progressive doctors to align with the communist insurgency. The Federation removed the term "Federation" from its name to avoid national security scrutiny, becoming the Rural Doctor Society (Chomrom phaet chonnabot) in February 1978. This change aimed to soften its political image following tragic events in Thailand, including the October 6, 1976 Thammasat massacre, where right-wing groups targeted student activists (Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, pp. 10-11; Harris, Achieving Access: Professional Movements and the Politics of Health Universalism, 2017, pp. 39-40).

 © Authors

The Formation of the Rural Doctor Society (RDS) and the Rural Doctor Foundation (RDF)

The Rural Doctor Society started as an informal group for top young physicians from Thailand's leading medical schools to share experiences relevant to rural healthcare. Dr. Uthain Jaranasri was the first president, with Dr. Manit Praphansin as secretary and Dr. Suwit Wibulpolprasert as deputy secretary from 1978 to 1979. The RDS supported rural doctors, hosted training programs for hospital management roles, and published the Journal of the Rural Doctor Society. It also initiated management training, recognized outstanding performance, facilitated visits by senior doctors to boost morale, and offered coaching in rural hospitals. Through social development initiatives, RDS's influence extended to rural communities (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, p. 13; Harris, ''Developmental Capture'' of the State: Explaining Thailand's Universal Coverage Policy 2014, p. 172).

In 1982, the Rural Doctor Society created the Rural Doctor Foundation (RDF) to support rural health projects and meet the needs of rural communities. Dr. Manit Praphansin, a past president of the RDS, was instrumental in establishing the RDF, also known as Mulniti phaet chonnabot. The foundation serves as the formal organization of the Rural Doctor Movement, allowing for better mobilization of resources and providing legal status to the informal network of rural doctors in Thailand. While the RDS operates as a flexible and informal network, the RDF focuses on funding, publishing, and adhering to Thai laws for organizations (Nam, 2018, p. 223; Sukhampha, 2024, pp. 4-5).

The movement has significantly influenced the Thai healthcare system by driving key reforms through its strong ties with the Ministry of Public Health. The Rural Doctor Society and Rural Doctor Federation form an influential network of professionals who advocate for health system reforms. These rural doctors, called policy entrepreneurs, collaborate with larger social entities to promote their agenda. Their flexible structure allows them to pursue reforms amidst political shifts, military juntas, and bureaucratic challenges. However, it also exposes them to political repercussions from the Ministry of Public Health (Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, pp. 8-9; Puaksom, 2023, p. 14; Sukhampha 2024, pp. 7-9).

The RDS established the Sampran Forum in 1986, which included around 20 progressive medical professionals and rural doctors focused on health policy discussions, including universal coverage. The Forum operated independently from the RDS, and membership was by invitation, comprising rural doctors, bureaucrats, senators, and public officials. Members of the Forum held vital positions in Thailand's healthcare system. They won elections to the Medical Council of Thailand from 1987 to 1993, which led to significant reforms in medical education and residency training (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, p. 13; Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, pp. 10-11, p. 21).

The Rural Doctor Movement evolved over decades from a self-help group to a political movement, shifting focus with leadership changes. Initially, the movement's leaders focused on enhancing rural health facilities. However, as figures such as Dr. Vichai Chokevivat, Dr. Choochai Supawongse, and the late Dr. Sanguan Nitta-yaramphong—who emerged from backgrounds in student activism—assumed leadership roles, the movement became increasingly politically engaged (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, p. 13).

Retiring rural doctors, including Dr. Kriangsak Watcharanukulkiat, Dr. Arak Wongworachart, and Dr. Pongthep Wongwatcharapaibool, comprise the movement. Under the leadership of Dr. Supat Hasuwannakit, the RDS promotes justice and good governance while combating corruption and supporting communities. Along with the RDF leadership of Dr. Choochai Supawongse,

 © Authors

they collaborate with the Ministry of Public Health and other agencies to improve the Thai healthcare system (RDS: The group of doctors fighting COVID – and corruption – in Thailand, 2021).

The Rural Doctor Movement and the Democratization of Public Health in Thailand

For the Rural Doctor Movement, democracy and public health are related. Guided by the teachings of the monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, the movement's commitment to Buddhist communitarianism, which emphasizes the importance of community as the building blocks of democracy, is reflected in the accomplishments and principles of the rural doctors. Other Buddhist teachings on the notion of self-sacrifice, humaneness, non-violence, a lack of concern for personal wealth, and forgiveness also became influential in the activism of rural doctors since the 1970s student movement and the development of the philosophical bases of their interest in social reform (Bamber, 1997, p. 247).

Aside from their medical work in rural areas, the movement is also active in Thai politics, particularly in its commitment to good governance and democracy. The active involvement of rural doctors in the democratic movements in Thailand started in the 1990s. The health professionals, including the members of the Rural Doctor Society, joined the protest campaign against the military coup in 1991. Many medical personnel were closely involved in the Black May demonstration of 1992. After the fall of the military leadership of the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC), the medical professionals continued participating in the democratic movement. They formed the Health Assembly for Democracy to campaign for democracy and promote the 1992 election. They also joined as watchdogs during the election and assisted the teachers in rural areas. Prominent members of this formation included known members of the RDS, such as Dr. Surapong Suebwonglee, Dr. Vichai Chokevivat, and Dr. Sanguan Nittayaramphong (Bamber, 1997, pp. 240-242).

The rural doctors also supported Dr. Prawese Wasi and the 1997 People's Constitution, replacing the military constitution of 1991. The new constitution prompted civil society organizations to become more engaged in Thai politics, including the network of rural doctors and their linkage with other NGOs. It paved the way for rural doctors to transform the health care system. It allowed them to launch their proposed legislation through the help of different NGOs, such as the Foundation for Consumers, led by Saree Aungsomwang, and the AIDS Access Foundation, founded by former Senator Jon Ungpakorn (Harris, Achieving Access, 2017, pp. 45-52).

In 2006, the rural doctors generally shied away from becoming active in the polarized political situation between the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) or "Yellow Shirts," an anti-former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra coalition, and the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) or "Red Shirts," a reaction movement against PAD. Mostly, the doctors tried to remain above the fray in the battles between the two factions for years (Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, pp. 15-16). Despite not directly associating with the two groups, the rural doctors still contributed to democratic campaigns, especially on public health matters.

From 2013-2014, the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), a coalition led by Suthep Thaugsuban, opposed the government of Yingluck Shinawatra by organizing protests in Thailand. In 2013, Suthep urged the Rural Doctor Society to set up provincial units of the PDRC to mobilize reform support from the rural people as they are well respected in their communities. However, the Rural Doctor Society emphasized that they only acted as a facilitator and not as the host of the PDRC's provincial network. The Society only participated in the anti-government demon-

 © Authors

demonstrations led by the PDRC because they also opposed corruption and the Ministry of Public Health's policies, such as the adjustment of the allowances of the medical workers, the medical-hub policy supporting the growth of private hospitals, and political intervention in the public health agencies (Rural Doctors Society's backing of PDRC raises questions, 2013; PM's resignation the solution, Suthep tells army, 2013; Tangprasert, 2013).

The Rural Doctor Society continues to advocate for democracy by urging the government to respect democratic principles, particularly the people's will. In 2022, they also asked the former Prime Minister and military leader Prayut Chan-o-cha to step down after he took power through a military coup in 2014 (Rural doctors again urge Prayut to step down after year rule, 2022). In the recent general election, the RDS, under the leadership of Dr. Supat Hasuwannakit, issued a statement endorsing the progressive Move Forward Party leader, Pita Limjaroenrat, as the next Prime Minister. The Society also urged the members of the House of Representatives and the Senate to respect people's votes and facilitate the forming of the government as soon as possible (Rural Doctor Society joins calls for respect of electorate's wishes, 2023).

The rural doctors' involvement in different political and democratic events only showed the movement's political pragmatism and perseverance in developing public health policies and protecting the right to health of the Thai people through democracy. Given the movement's history and involvement in democratic events in Thailand, what were its contributions to the democratization of the public health system, and how did the rural doctors push for the democratization of public health despite Thailand's democratic challenges?

Human Rights and Right to Healthcare

As the rural doctors participated in democratic events throughout history, the movement also played a crucial role in democratizing Thailand's public health despite being pragmatic in politics and having a flawed democracy in the political system. The rural doctors advocate human rights and the right to health, public participation, decentralization of power and resources, transparency and accountability, and equity of access to medicine and healthcare services.

The movement, particularly Dr. Sanguan and the other rural doctors who were part of the Sampran Forum, acted as the prime mover of the National Health Security Act of 2002, which paved the way for creating the universal health coverage program in Thailand. This law provided the Thai people access to affordable health services. Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's sponsorship of the UCS and his Thai Rak Thai Party's legislative majority were not the only crucial ingredients in the UCS's realization. The UCS also succeeded in the solidarity coalition of the Ministry of Public Health and non-governmental organizations, which the rural doctors facilitated. The network of rural doctors was responsible for initiating and designing the healthcare policy, introducing it to Thaksin and his party skillfully enacting it as law (Nam, 2018, pp. 237-238).

After the Thai Rak Thai Party won the 2001 election, critics argued that its policies were a form of populism. The "30 Baht Treats All Diseases" policy also fell into this category because it was seen as a radical reform in the public healthcare system, and its name sounded too market-oriented (Chardchawarn, 2018, p. 189).

Despite it being labeled as a populist policy of Thaksin's party, there is no doubt that universal health coverage contributed a lot to Thai society, especially the poor, vulnerable, and disadvantaged people. As a result of the universal coverage, a

 © Authors

people. As a result of the universal coverage, a gradual increase in the use of health services was recorded, and many outpatient visits, mainly from rural hospitals, emerged from 2003 to 2010. A decreasing trend in health-impoverished households was also recorded as the UCS contributes to improving poverty reduction. The UCS contributed significantly to the development of Thailand's health information system, and public expenditures on goods such as medicines and medical supplies also spilled over in various sectors (International Labour Organization, 2016).

Twenty-two years after the UCS was formally introduced in Thailand, over 99% of Thai citizens are now covered under one of the three tax-funded healthcare schemes, including the UCS (Thammatacharee, Enhancing convenience: 22nd year of UCS, 2024). The Universal Coverage Scheme started by Dr. Sanguan and the network of rural doctors continues to serve the Thai people. It underwent many improvements, such as removing the copayment of 30 baht per visit in 2008 and increasing the coverage regarding population and benefits packages. Recently, the government led by former Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin has been improving the scheme's accessibility by allowing healthcare beneficiaries to access coverage anywhere in Thailand, not only limited to their registered hospitals (Thammatacharee, From 'Treats All Diseases' to 'Treatment Anywhere': The Transformation of Thailand's Universal Coverage Scheme, 2024).

The movement also lobbied for improvements in the UCS, such as granting universal healthcare coverage to the stateless people living in the northern Thai provinces and at the Thailand and Myanmar borders. In 2020, it was reported that around 500,000 people were given healthcare coverage. The United Nations has praised this inclusion of the stateless people as a model for developing countries. Together with other NGOs, including the foundations that the rural doctors are associated with and the Ministry of Public Health, they signed a memorandum of understanding to speed up the national verification process and assist the stateless people (Healthcare rights of stateless people, 2020; Thailand extends health coverage to non-citizens, 2024).

The movement democratizes the public health sector in Thailand by giving people access to medical services through universal health care and primary health care programs. The right to healthcare is not confined to the walls and corridors of hospitals. For rural doctors, it also involves the quality of life and the community where the people live.

Public Participation

The rural doctors embody the ideals of democracy by advocating public participation in matters concerning the people's health. They were associated with civil society groups and rural communities. The movement generated a strong network among medical professionals. They connected with similar rural medical associations, such as the Rural Pharmacists' Society and the Rural Nurses' Society. The network of the RDS worked with a group of progressive medical professionals to form various NGOs dedicated to improving the rural public health system, such as the Primary Health Care Coordinating Committee for Thai NGOs, which was established by Dr. Prawese in 1983, the Thai Development Support Committee, and the Foundation for Consumers led by Saree Aungsomwang (Nam, 2018, pp. 223, 232-233).

When some rural doctors were promoted to government positions and became bureaucrats, the RDS supported the alliance between the bureaucrats and non-governmental organizations to push their public health agenda. It was easy for the rural doctors to facilitate the partnership because the bureaucrats from the Ministry of Public Health and the NGO leaders shared experiences in social movements, politics, and the health profession. Many were former activists

 © Authors

during the 1970s and shared a progressive orientation. A number of the NGO leaders were also members of the medical groups mentioned who changed their careers and pursued the NGO sector. The NGOs supported the rural doctors and the bureaucrats by conducting a grassroots campaign that contributed to the people's awareness (Nam, 2018, pp. 223, 232).

For example, during the developmental stage of the UCS, various NGOs contributed to the network of rural doctors, especially in establishing a primary-care-centered system in secondary and tertiary hospitals. NGOs participated by training villagers in preventive health practices. Examples of NGOs that joined the campaign of the bureaucrats in 2000 were the Slum Dwellers' Network, Consumers' Network, AIDS Network, Women's Network, AIDS Access Foundation, Thai Volunteers Service Foundation, and the Consumer Protection Foundation. Together, they launched nationwide campaigns, distributed pamphlets, held workshops, and dispatched volunteers to villages nationwide (Nam, 2018, pp. 229-234).

The movement and its network usually engage with the public by gaining support through protests and signature campaigns. In 2000, the network gathered 50,000 signatures to force the passage of the UCS in the parliament (Harris, Who Governs?, 2014, pp. 12-13).

In addition to the UCS, the movement deployed the signature campaign for enacting anti-tobacco bills and, later, the Health Promotion Foundation Act of 2001. This law aims to stimulate, support, and develop a systematic approach to health promotion in Thailand. With the passage of the law, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) was created to use taxes on tobacco and alcohol to fund health promotion programs.

The movement for the bill started in 1986 when Dr. Prawase and the Folk Doctor Foundation (Moh Chaoban), a group of Buddhist monks trained in primary health care to assist doctors and health personnel in rural areas (Wasi, 1986), launched the Thai Anti-Smoking Campaign Project. This campaign was supported by the RDS and the leadership of Dr. Choochai in October 1987 when 250 community doctors and nurses from all over the country participated in a 7-day run originating from all four regions of Thailand. The run started and ended at the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration City Hall and covered a distance of over 3,000 kilometers. This run was a turning point in Thailand's health campaign's history. It demanded the rights of non-smokers, and over 6 million people signed the petition supporting this cause, resulting in the passage of two tobacco acts in the Thai Parliament, the Tobacco Product Control Act of 1992 and the Non -Smoker's Health Protection Act of 1992 (Siwaraksa, 2002, pp. 13-15; Vateesatokit, 2003, pp. 155-156).

After the two tobacco acts were passed in 1992, the Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI), the first organizational offspring of the Sampran Forum, researched setting up a sin-tax-financed organization and became the center of knowledge that pushed the anti-smoking campaign forward (Siwaraksa, 2002, pp. 15-16). The Health Promotion Foundation Act, a product of various networks, including the rural doctors, played a crucial role in the passage of universal health coverage a year later because of its sustainability and because it reduced the government's financial burden on healthcare. In addition, health promotion and prevention programs are essential facets of a successful universal healthcare (Sopitarchasak et al., 2015, p. 63).

Recently, the members who are based in rural areas applied the concept of communitarianism when they went to the dense communities of Bangkok in 2021 and provided COVID-19 response assistance. Under the leadership of Dr. Supat, he led a series of teams to Bangkok from July to August 2021 to screen people for COVID-19 using rapid antigen test kits (ATKs). They also prescribed medication for those who

 © Authors

tested positive and vaccinated those who were negative for the virus. Almost 200,000 people in 369 communities in Bangkok received a response from the rural doctors and the government. The Rural Doctor Society worked with other non-governmental organizations like the Slum Dwellers' Network. The people appreciated the Society's efforts and were recognized by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (RDS: The group of doctors fighting COVID – and corruption – in Thailand, 2021; BMA grateful to rural doctors for helping with COVID-19 tests in Bangkok communities, 2021).

The movement also democratizes health care by engaging the public with the correct health information through its Facebook page. By providing comments and sharing them with other people, the Thai people become aware, and at the same time, they are provided an avenue to be part of the discourse on public health. The RDS actively assisted the Ministry of Public Health in providing advisories to the public about COVID-19 during the peak of the pandemic (Thai Rural Doctors Society claims COVID-19 infections are rising, not falling, 2021; Doctors warn of new Covid wave in Thailand, hospitals told to be ready, 2022). With the legalization of marijuana in the country, the RDS is also active in providing information to the people about the effects of the legalization on Thai society, such as pointing out snack products with cannabis that are available in the market that can be purchased easily by the children (Rural Doctor Society wants public debate over sale of ganja-mixed snacks, 2022).

Decentralization of Power and Resources

The movement contributes to the democratization of public health by supporting the decentralization of power and resources. Decentralization in the public health system refers to the transfer of responsibility for health services from the central government to the local government, which improves the health system's efficiency and responsiveness (Jongudomsuk & Srisasalux, 2012, pp. 347-350).

The conventional structure of the Ministry of Public Health limited the rural doctors' ability to instill changes in the health system, and it provided them with constrained autonomy. To be efficient in delivering health services to the people, the rural doctors did not just collaborate with the NGOs, but they also scaled down the responsibilities of the Ministry of Public Health. The rural doctors also created new semi-autonomous health organizations that operated outside of the hierarchy of the ministry (i.e., the Health Systems Research Institute, Thai Health Promotion Foundation, the National Health Foundation, the Society and Health Institute, the International Health Policy Program, the National Health Security Office (NHSO), the National Health Assembly, and Health Accreditation Institute) (Harris, , 2014, pp. 13-14).

The movement's advocacy for decentralization manifested in the UCS that the rural doctors pushed for, particularly the financial strategies and distribution of healthcare resources. Under the program, adequately managed and decentralized financial management can result in equitable resource distribution and benefit the rural population and primary healthcare services (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, pp. 12-13).

The active involvement of civil society groups, such as NGOs, in the advocacies of the movement also showed the decentralization of power in decision-making and policymaking. It was evident since the rural doctors pushed for implementing the primary healthcare approach, the legislation of prominent public health bills, and the COVID-19 pandemic response of the rural doctors.

Transparency and Accountability

The movement also used its influence not just in policymaking but also as the watchdog and voice of the people. Being a watchdog, the

 © Authors

rural doctors democratize the public health by promoting transparency and accountability. In August 1998, the RDS revealed to the public a scheme by the Minister of Public Health to embezzle funds by overcharging hospitals for drugs. Dr. Yongyut Thammayuth, the president of the Rural Doctor Foundation at that time, and Dr. Vichai Chokevivat confirmed the corruption in the medicine and medical supply procurement process. Many former presidents of the foundation came out and confirmed the issue. They submitted a formal request to former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai to set up an investigation committee. The RDF and other organizations and sectors of civil society, such as the Rural Pharmacist Foundation, mobilized their fight through radio and television. The drug purchasing scandal resulted in the resignation of the health minister and one deputy health minister. One of the minister's advisers was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. The success of the RDS boosted the morale of the rural doctors. It was the first time in Thai history that corruption was exposed and supported by continuous pressure and systematically organized by the public through the initiative of rural doctors against high-level politicians and high-ranking bureaucrats (Potisophon, 2003; Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003, p. 14).

In 2008, due to the fear of sanctions from foreign governments and retaliation from the pharmaceutical companies, the newly appointed Public Health Minister Chaiya Sasomsab threatened to withdraw the support for the Thai government's compulsory licensing for cancer drugs that was signed by the previous minister, Dr. Mongkol Na Songkhla, a known member of the Sampran Forum. These compulsory licenses allow the overriding of patents on expensive cancer drugs so Thai patients can get cheap generic versions. The Rural Doctor Society and the network of rural doctors, including the NGOs, pressured the Ministry of Public Health to continue the compulsory licensing and filed a petition to impeach the minister. Due to various accusations, such as his failure to declare the assets of his wife after he was sworn in as a minister and including his impeachment complaint due to his stance on generic cancer drugs, the Constitutional Court ordered Health Minister Chaiya Sasomsap to quit, and it prompted him to resign from his post (Thai court orders health minister to quit, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Wibulpolprasert et al., 2011, pp. 1-2, 5-8).

Aside from being the voice of the people, rural doctors also serve as the voice of the healthcare professionals. The Ministry of Public Health implemented a new allowance rate for medical workers in 2013. From basing it on how remote the area the healthcare workers were, it was changed to a new rate based on how many patients they served. The former presidents of the Rural Doctor Society, such as Dr. Kriangsak Watcharanukulkiat and Dr. Arak Wongworachart, opposed the new allowance rate and emphasized that the new plan was unfair to doctors who worked in rural areas. More doctors were prompted to quit provincial hospitals to work in private hospitals (Ministry to set new rate for state doctors, 2013; Rural doctors urge Pradit to go, 2013; Rural doctors pull out after govt slashes hardship allowance, 2013).

During the pandemic, the Rural Doctor Society raised many issues regarding the Prayut administration's COVID-19 response, such as the government's procurement of COVID-19 vaccines and the purchase of 8.5 million allegedly low-quality ATKs from a Chinese company at double the price quoted online (RDS: The group of doctors fighting COVID – and corruption – in Thailand, 2021).

Equity of Access to Medicine and Healthcare Services

The movement consistently reiterated its advocacy for making healthcare services accessible to everyone through its primary healthcare initiatives and the UCS. In addition to raising awareness among rural populations about the importance of

 © Authors

healthcare, the movement democratized Thai public health by making medicines accessible to the people. The efforts made by the Rural Doctor Society in 1998 to expose the drug purchasing scandal and in 2008 to impeach the health minister due to compulsory licensing did not only show their commitment as a watchdog but also their support of national drug policies, especially making the medicines more accessible to the Thai people and in the rural areas.

In addition, Dr. Vichai, who was the Chair of the Committee to Support the Implementation of the Government Use of Patents, pushed for the overriding of patents on Kaletra, an antiretroviral therapy (ART) medicine for HIV-1 and other medications (Thailand seeks deeper drug price cuts than Brazil deal, 2007; Wibulpolprasert et al., 2011, p. 5).

Aside from the prominent members of the movement, the network of rural doctors also played a vital role in implementing government use licenses for generic versions of patented medicines in Thailand. The movement emphasized the need for access to affordable alternatives amidst the high prices of patented drugs. The NGOs and advocacy groups supported the rural doctors by raising public awareness. The network used the evidence and research generated by scholars and experts to support their public pressure and media campaigns. They also underwent capacity building on intellectual property rights, pharmaceutical patents, and the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement. The civil movement collaborated with international NGOs like Médecins Sans Frontières, Third World Network, and Oxfam to gather support and expertise. They also worked with international bodies such as the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization (Wibulpolprasert et al., 2011). With the help of the movement, rural doctors empowered the people and democratized the public health sector by actively engaging them in their campaigns to make medicines accessible to everyone. By ensuring that medicine and healthcare services are available to everyone, they not only enhance the public health system but also help reduce social inequality in Thailand.

Conclusion

The five decades of existence and relevance of the movement only show that rural doctors serve as an essential piece in the democratic social movements of Thailand. From becoming a self-help group to a political movement group, the rural doctor proved that democracy and public health are inseparable concepts. The democracy of Thailand might not be perfect or too complicated to comprehend. However, the Rural Doctor Movement continuously does its part to ensure democracy in the country and its public health system. As the rural doctors heal their patients in the communities, they also heal the country's social ills, particularly the challenges of democracy. The movement plays a valuable role in Thailand's public health democratization. By being pragmatic and having a loose network, they pushed for various reforms in the Thai healthcare system that enabled them to democratize it through human rights and the right to health, public participation, decentralization of power and resources, transparency and accountability, and equity of access to medicine and healthcare services. Despite the series of military juntas, political instability brought by polarization, issues on bureaucracy, silencing dissent, and political interests, the rural doctors still managed to thrive and achieve their contributions to the Thai public health sector. However, democracy is still an ongoing battle, and the democratization of public health is still a process in Thailand. The challenges and the work of the rural doctors remain, and it is now in the hands of the next generation of rural doctors how they will continue the fight for the Thai people. As this article

 © Authors

offers a different and updated perspective on the movement, it highlights the democratic approach and contributions of rural doctors to the Thai public health system. With the new government following Prayut's military leadership, this topic is worth exploring, particularly how the movement adapts to the current administration while continuing its legacies after five decades. Furthermore, given the international recognition received by rural doctors from the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, it is important to continue studying other professions and organizations that also contribute to the development of Thai democracy.

Funding Acknowledgment: This research is supported by the Faculty of History of the University of Warsaw through a postdoctoral research fellowship. NCN OPUS-24 Research Project: The Foothold: China, Southeast Asia, and the Global Revolution at the Margins, 1920s–1954 (Project No: 2022/47/B/HS3/02745).

Correction Note: This article was updated on 20 October 2026 to include an acknowledgment section that was inadvertently omitted from the originally published version.

References

BMA grateful to rural doctors for helping with Covid-19 tests in Bangkok communities. (2021, August 11). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/40004520

Bamber, S. (1997). The Thai medical profession and political activism. In K. Hewison (Ed.), *Political change in Thailand: Democracy and participation*. London: Routledge.

Chachavalpongpun, P. (2020). COVID-19 attacks the regime: The case of Thailand. *The Asia-Pacific Journal.*

Chardchawarn, S. (2018). Case study 7: Dr. Sanguan Nitayarumphong and public healthcare reform in Thailand. In A. H. Nishihara, M. Matsunaga, I. Nonaka, & K. Yokomichi (Eds.), *Knowledge creation in public administrations: Innovative government in Southeast Asia and Japan*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Doctors warn of new Covid wave in Thailand, hospitals told to be ready. (2022, July 5). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/40017376

Gardiner, C. (1994). Democracy and health: Implications for MOH policies. In M. Reich (Ed.), *Democracy and health: An overview of issues presented in four papers*. Boston, MA: Data for Decision Making Project, Harvard School of Public Health.

Harris, J. (2014). "Developmental capture" of the state: Explaining Thailand's universal coverage policy. *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law.*

Harris, J. (2014). Who governs?: Autonomous political networks as a challenge to power in Thailand. *Journal of Contemporary Asia,* 1–23.

Harris, J. (2017). *Achieving access: Professional movements and the politics of health universalism*. London: Cornell University Press.

Healthcare rights of stateless people. (2020, July 13). *National Health Security Office.* https://eng.nhso.go.th/view/1/DescriptionNews/Healthcare-rights-of-stateless-people-/158/EN-US

International Labour Organization. (2016). *Universal healthcare coverage scheme*. Switzerland: International Labour Organization.

Jongudomsuk, P., & Srisasalux, J. (2012). A decade of health-care decentralization in Thailand: What lessons can be drawn? *WHO South-East Asia Journal of Public Health.*

Ministry to set new rate for state doctors. (2013, March 22). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/30202580

Nam, I. (2018). Partnering for universal health coverage in Thailand: Bureaucrats and NGOs. *Asian Survey, 58*(2), 213–239.

 © Authors

Pagaiya, N., & Noree, T. (2008). *Thailand's health workforce: A review of challenges and experiences*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

PEMANDU Associates. (2022, December 23). *Full GCI ranking: Ranking of countries by recovery index.* https://covid19.pemandu.org/gci-ranking/

PM's resignation the solution, Suthep tells army. (2013, December 14). *Bangkok Post.* https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/384843/military-refuses-to-pick-a-side

Pongutta, S., Suphanchaimat, R., Patcharanarumol, W., & Tangcharoensathien, V. (2019). Lessons from the Thai Health Promotion Foundation. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization,* 213–220.

Potisophon, S. (2003). Citizen mobilization in the fight against corruption: The case of health care funding in Thailand. *Open Government Forum.* Seoul: OECD.

Puaksom, D. (2023). Thailand's Rural Doctor Society in the 1970s–80s and its struggles to improve health in the countryside. In V. Neelakantan (Ed.), *The geopolitics of health in South and Southeast Asia*. London: Routledge.

RDS: The group of doctors fighting COVID – and corruption – in Thailand. (2021, August 18). *Thai PBS World.*

Rural Doctor Society joins calls for respect of electorate's wishes. (2023, May 17). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/thailand/politics/40027710

Rural Doctor Society wants public debate over sale of ganja-mixed snacks. (2022, July 14). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/40017723

Rural Doctors Society's backing of PDRC raises questions. (2013, December 17). *The Nation.* https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/30222276

Rural doctors again urge Prayut to step down after year rule. (2022, August 19). *Thai News Room.* https://thainewsroom.com/2022/08/19/rural-doctors-again-urge-prayut-to-step-down-after-8-year-rule/

Rural doctors pull out after govt slashes hardship allowance. (2013, April 3). *HFocus.* https://www.hfocus.org/content/2013/04/2720

Rural doctors urge Pradit to go. (2013, March 21). *HFocus.* https://www.hfocus.org/content/2013/03/2609

Siwaraksa, P. (2002). *The birth of the ThaiHealth Fund.* Bangkok: Thai Health Promotion Foundation.

Sopitarchasak, S., Adulyanon, S., & Lorthong, T. (2015). Thai Health Promotion Foundation: Innovative enabler for health promotion. *World Health and Population.*

Sukhampha, R. (2024). Diffusion of global health norms through a national medical professional movement in the universal healthcare of Thailand. *Frontiers in Public Health.*

Tang, P. C., Smith, M. D., Adler-Milstein, J., Delbanco, T., Downs, S. J., Mallya, G. G., … Sands, D. Z. (2016). The democratization of health care: A vital direction for health and health care. *National Academy of Medicine Perspectives.*

Tangprasert, P. (2013, December 16). PDRC's rural supporters get to work on offshoots. *Bangkok Post.*

Taylor, L. (2008, April 1). Thai public health minister faces impeachment campaign. *PharmaTimes Online.* https://pharmatimes.com/news/thai_public_health_minister_faces_impeachment_campaign_987378/

Thammatacharee, J. (2024, January 11). Enhancing convenience: 22nd year of UCS. *National Health Security Office.* https://eng.nhso.go.th/view/1/DescriptionNews/Enhancing-convenience-22nd-year-of-UCS/587/EN-US

Thammatacharee, J. (2024, April 22). From 'treats all diseases' to 'treatment anywhere': The transformation of Thailand's universal coverage scheme. *National Health Security*

 © Authors

Office. https://eng.nhso.go.th/view/1/Secretary-General/From-Treats-All-Diseases-to-Treatment-Anywhere-The-Transformation-of-Thailands-Universal-Coverage-Scheme/610/EN-US

Thai Rural Doctors Society claims COVID-19 infections are rising, not falling. (2021, October 10). *Thai PBS World.* https://www.thaipbsworld.com/thai-rural-doctors-society-claims-covid-19-infections-are-rising-not-falling/

Thai court orders health minister to quit. (2008, July 9). *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBKK62912/

Thai court orders health minister to quit. (2008, July 9). *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBKK62912/

Thailand extends health coverage to non-citizens. (2024, January 12). *Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C.* https://washingtondc.thaiembassy.org/en/content/thailand-extends-health-coverage-to-non-citizens

Thailand falls 8 places in democracy index. (2024, February 17). *Bangkok Post.* https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2743780/thailand-falls-8-places-in-democracy-index

Thailand seeks deeper drug price cuts than Brazil deal. (2007, August 10). *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBKK29335/

Thailand shares best practices and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. (2020, September 2). *Greater Mekong Subregion.* https://www.greatermekong.org/thailand-shares-best-practices-and-lessons-learned-covid-19-pandemic

Vateesatokit, P. (2003). Tailoring tobacco control efforts to the country: The example of Thailand. In J. d. Beyer & L. Waverley Brigden (Eds.), *Tobacco control policy: Strategies, successes, and setbacks.* Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Wasi, P. (1986, July). Bareheaded doctors. *World Health.*

Wibulpolprasert, S., & Pengpaibon, P. (2003). Integrated strategies to tackle the inequitable distribution of doctors in Thailand: Four decades of experience. *Human Resources for Health,* 1–17.

Wibulpolprasert, S., Chokevivat, V., Oh, C., & Yamabhai, I. (2011). Government use licenses in Thailand: The power of evidence, civil movement and political leadership. *Globalization and Health,* 1–8.

World Health Organization. (2020, September 19). Thailand: How a strong health system fights a pandemic. https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/how-a-strong-health-system-fights-a-pandemic-in-thailand

 © Authors

JOPAG
JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Journal of Politics and Governance
15(2), May – August 2025

Temporal Development Patterns of Inner Solar System Colonization in Comparativist Perspective

Marian Ehret [1], Phanrajit Havarangsi [2*]

[1] Bangkok University International, Thailand
[2] Stamford International University, Thailand
[*] Corresponding Author, dearsomie@gmail.com, © Authors

Article history:

Received: October 10, 2024
Revised: December 5, 2024
Accepted: December 12, 2024

Keywords:

Henry Jenkins,
Mars Colonization,
Moon Colonization,
Oswald Spengler,
Roman Conquest

Abstract

This qualitative study asked research questions on Moon and Mars colonization, as these celestial bodies in the inner solar system attract human presence. In which timeframes will the colonization of Moon and Mars begin and result in creating habitats as political entities with human populations? Which media content provides educational examples for Moon and Mars colonization, depicting nature and timeframes of the colonization processes realistically? The objectives were to determine timeframes for Moon and Mars colonization and to identify educational media examples for both processes. Literature on political and media-reflected space colonization highlighted the need to identify precise temporal colonization patterns and media content, which informed these timeframes. Within the Historical Cycles theory, philosopher Oswald Spengler's analogy approach was employed as a research method, using political-historical comparisons between the Roman conquests of Gaul and Britain and the Western colonization timeframes of Moon and Mars, projecting past Roman events onto future Western occurences. Outcomes revealed that limited exploratory base creation on the Moon would begin after the human return in 2025. These bases would evolve into specialized exploratory bases around 2045, with human settlements forming as political entities in the 2090s, reaching growth saturation in the 2120s. Exploratory Martian bases would emerge from the 2090s onward, with human settlements forming political systems from the 2160s or 2190s onward, reaching development consolidation in the 2230s. Media content that communicated timeframes of lunar and Martian colonization realistically included the movies Moon (2009), Ad Astra (2019), and the TV show The Expanse (2015–2022).

© Authors

Introduction

The study background of inner solar system colonization will begin with the anticipated human return to the Moon by 2025 under NASA's Artemis program. However, scholars had divergent views on when creating human population habitats on the Moon and Mars, the most significant celestial bodies, will exactly occur. For instance, SpaceX entrepreneur Elon Musk believed establishing a Mars habitat with a million settlers might be doable by 2050 (Yap & Kim, 2023). In contrast, Doboš (2023) projected such events further into the future, while the UAE government planned for an inhabited Mars settlement by 2117. These distinctions highlighted a research gap, as space colonization will become practical from 2025 onwards, necessitating a precise definition of the temporal development patterns of Moon and Mars colonization, including political-cultural impact factors. Since settling other celestial bodies will result in the creation of extraterrestrial political entities (Doboš, 2022, 2023), this qualitative study employed a political studies approach. Additionally, Oswald Spengler's (1998) theory of Historical Cycles was applied for a political-historical comparison between the ancient Roman colonization of Gaul and Britain during the Classical high culture and comparative processes in the West, to arrive at the most precise projections for the anticipated timeframes of Moon and Mars colonization.

Furthermore, there was a need to identify media-cultural means to support the space colonization process by raising societal awareness about its realistic temporal patterns. Notably, Robert Zubrin (2021), the founder of the Mars Society, called for spreading cultural awareness of this process, especially Mars colonization, to positively influence future political decisions. In the 21st century, the most effective cultural tools for reaching mass audiences were movies and TV shows due to their audiovisual impact. Thus, this study identified audiovisual content that realistically communicated about Moon and Mars colonization and their expected timeframes. As existing literature (Klimchynskaya, 2022; Moss-Wellington, 2020) had not yet identified media content for this exact, above, educational purpose, this study analyzed media works in this context by applying Henry Jenkins' (2009) theory of participatory culture.

Defining the timeframes for Moon and Mars colonization, with precise political-cultural impact factors, by applying political-historical and media-educational perspectives, was necessary for two reasons. Firstly, papers such as Doboš' (2022, 2023) contributions, which applied a political perspective in the study context, were scarce, despite the explained, increased need for such an approach. Secondly, media scholarly papers identifying audiovisual content for educational purposes, due to realistic depictions of temporal space colonization patterns, did not exist. The significance of advancing knowledge in these study contexts arose because solar system colonization formed the most impactful human project of the third millennium. Lastly, the study was significant as it could contribute to a more realistic understanding of how the timeframes of this entire process would unfold and be affected by political-cultural factors, thereby carrying practical planning implications.

This study was based on two research questions and their related objectives.

RQ1: In which timeframes will the colonization of Moon and Mars likely begin and result in the creation of habitats as political entities with human populations?

RO1: To determine likely timeframes for the beginning of Moon and Mars colonization, covering the early development from specialized or temporary to exploratory bases, and the subsequent creation of habitats as political entities with human population, growing until reaching their late saturation points. Emphasis was also placed on specific political and cultural factors impacting the evolution of human habitats.

 © Authors

RQ2: Which media content provides educational examples for Moon and Mars colonization, depicting the nature and timeframes of the colonization processes realistically?

RO2: To determine which media content, limited to fictional or fictionalized movies and TV shows, primarily science fiction, provides educational examples for Moon and Mars colonization, depicting both nature and timeframes of the colonization processes realistically. The focus was on 21st-century content, which was temporally closer to the examined timeframes.

This research paper was organized as follows. The Introduction was succeeded by the chapters Literature Review, Research Methodology, Results, and Discussion. Finally, the paper ended with Conclusion, Implications of the Study, Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research.

Literature Review

Scholars widely agreed that human return to the Moon was imminent. Estimates for establishing a permanent lunar presence ranged from 2028 (Dallas et al., 2021), the 2020s in general (Swan, 2023), the late 2020s and early 2030s (Doboš, 2023), to the 2030s in general (Chavy-Macdonald et al., 2021). Initially, habitat creation would focus on very limited areas of the lunar south polar region, likely the Aitken basin, with permanently illuminated areas for solar energy generation located near permanently shaded areas, probably containing water ice as a resource (Brown et al., 2022; Song et al., 2021). Additionally, geopolitical competition pitted the Artemis project, led by the United States in collaboration with Europeans and Japanese, against the planned Chinese-Russian lunar research station (Song et al., 2021). Over time, lunar settlements were projected to evolve from limited to more specialized exploratory bases, somewhat akin to scientific bases in Antarctica; evolving into colonies with long-term residents, and finally larger entities with citizens. However, these Moon colonies were unlikely to achieve self-sufficiency from Earth (Doboš, 2023). The most comprehensive contribution on lunar settlement was provided by Bohumil Doboš, using a geopolitical perspective, necessitated by the need to understand the above near-future processes.

By comparison, the assessment of human Mars colonization specifics was similarly detailed. Projections ranged from 2029 for establishing a temporary base (Zubrin, 2021), sometime shortly after the 2020s (Swan, 2023), to the creation of a massively populated habitat with a million people by 2050 (Yap & Kim, 2023), or establishing a large-scale civilian settlement by 2117 (Grove, 2022). However, temporary bases were prerequisites for the first human landings on the Red Planet, requiring at least one-year mission stays (Zubrin, 2021). Mars colonization was expected to follow a similar evolution as lunar settlements, progressing from simple bases to cities with larger civilian populations and political systems. A significant distinction was the presence of numerous regions with likely reserves of subsurface water ice and favorable climates, such as in the lowlands of the northern hemisphere near the equator, which could likely prevent geopolitical competition for scarce areas as anticipated for the Moon (Doboš, 2023). Furthermore, due to its distance and the six- to nine-month journeys from Earth compared to three-day trips to the Moon, Mars was likely to become more independent and self-sustainable (Zubrin, 2021). Robert Zubrin's work on Martian colonization was outstanding in terms of depth and quantitative scope, focusing primarily on engineering solutions, while also addressing political-social aspects of human Martian life in the far future.

 © Authors

The literature review of academic studies on Moon and Mars colonization depiction in cinema and TV revealed a diversity of perspectives. Firstly, Holland (2024) analyzed manned TV spaceflight documentations as informing human perception and politics on spaceflight, emphasizing the first manned Moon landing in 1969 as a significant TV event. According to Klimchynskaya (2022), movies like The Martian (2015) and TV shows such as Away (2020) have familiarized humans with future travels to Mars. Moss-Wellington (2020) viewed the Moon mission drama Apollo 13 (1995) and The Martian (2015) as reasonably accurate but criticized their portrayal of scientific innovation as overly individualistic and heroic, thereby reducing complexity and social reality by promoting American values. Wu and Wang (2023) perceived Western science fiction narratives, including those set on the Moon and Mars, as potentially thought-stimulating while reflecting Earthly issues and impacting East Asian TV content, yet potentially avoiding reality and educational aspects of space colonization. Lastly, Mann (2022) critiqued the transformation of the Jordanian desert, used as a shooting location, into an abstract Martian landscape as a form of cultural colonialism, possibly unconscious.

Existing literature on political and media-reflected space colonization aspects necessitated this further research to identify precise timeframes and political-cultural impact factors on colonization, and educational media content informing on these temporal patterns. Literature on lunar colonization highlighted the initial, permanent exploratory base creation but neglected their evolution into civilian and political entities, saturation points, and political-cultural factors (Dallas et al., 2021; Doboš, 2023). Similarly, academic works on Mars colonization mentioned expected timeframes for creating temporary exploratory bases but overlooked permanent establishment timeframes, provided contradictory temporal development patterns for civilian colonies as political study subjects, ignored saturation points, or lacked precision on political-cultural factors (Doboš, 2023; Yap & Kim, 2023; Zubrin, 2021). Media-analytical studies identifying educational content in the study context stressed scientific accuracy (Moss—Wellington, 2020) and familiarization with future events (Klimchynskaya, 2022), but primarily focused on cultural criticism or omitted communication of temporal space exploration patterns. While Holland's (2024) study on manned spaceflight documentation had an educational focus, highlighting TV depictions of real events, fictional content, due to its dramatization potential, would be more beneficial in the study context, except for broadcasting the first manned Mars landing.

Research Methodology

This study used a comparativist, political-historical method to draw analogies addressing the first research question. This method utilized Oswald Spengler's Theory of Historical Cycles, formulated in early 20th-century Germany by the cultural-historical philosopher. Spengler's theory notably enhanced the understanding of Classical and Western high cultures.

Historical Cycles dismissed the notion of a unified global history with ongoing progress, proposing that eight historical high cultures developed independently through 1,000-year cycles, each having four phases. This repeated occurrence enabled projecting an older culture's development onto a younger high culture. Notably, Spengler suggested comparing the extinct Classical high culture of the Greeks and Romans (1100 BC–200 AD) with the living Western high culture (since 900 AD) due to their shared heritage. Although approximations were inherent in Spengler's comparisons, his method's precision offered unmatched predictive verisimilitude for future developments in Western politics. However, analogies had to be necessary and logically coherent. For example, comparing the transition from the

 © Authors

Roman Republic to the Roman Empire (134–27 BC) in the Classical culture to similar Western processes established corresponding and relevant analogies (Spengler, 1998).

The prime symbol distinguished each high culture. The Classical high culture, once surrounding the Mediterranean, centered on the physical body as its prime symbol, foundational to all its cultural expressions. For example, physically realistic statues symbolized its highest art form, while the physical body of the city-state served as the essential political unit. Comparatively, the Western prime symbol was the infinite space, representing a quest to comprehend nature's mysteries and a distinct will-to-power aiming into the infinite distance. Thus, the pinnacle of Western culture was Classical music, resonating acoustically through space. The Western pursuit of infinity was expressed through its sophisticated, distinct technology, serving as a means of ultimate power. Both above prime symbols were essential in this study, explaining why Roman conquest in the Classical world extended over limited geographical territories, while Western expansion aimed at other celestial bodies within the solar system (Spengler, 1998).

In particular, the Roman conquests of Gaul (125–27 BC) and Britain (55 BC–84 AD) in the Classical world were compared to the Western colonization processes of the Moon (from 2025 onwards) and Mars. The conquest of Gaul represented an external Roman power expansion during the internal transition from Republic to Empire (Broughton, 1951, 1952; Drinkwater, 2014), while the conquest of Britain was part of the broader Roman Empire expansion (Alcock, 2011; Matyszak, 2003). Identifying larger political processes that both Roman conquests coincided with, or were constitutive of, mattered methodologically, following Spengler's (1998) theory to predict the timing of corresponding Western colonization processes on the Moon and Mars.

This study applied Henry Jenkins' media-cultural concept of participatory culture to identify cinema and TV content depicting Moon and Mars colonization scientifically accurate and approximately within the timeframes determined in this study to answer the second research question. Jenkins emphasized the potential of popular media, including films and television, to educate audiences through storytelling. Furthermore, this approach could foster a more participatory culture by encouraging engagement with content, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. Movies and TV shows would be effective due to their visual and auditory stimuli, making content more relatable, engaging, and comprehensible, thereby sparking discussion, forming fan community, and inspiring new content creation (Jenkins, 2009). Jenkins' concept of participatory culture aligned with Zubrin's advocacy for spreading cultural-artistic awareness on Mars colonization to positively influence future political decision-making in this context (Zubrin, 2021). Lastly, this above concept also resonated with Spengler's call to educate especially the youth in addressing major, multi-generational societal tasks (Spengler, 2018). Undoubtedly, inner solar system colonization of the Moon and Mars represented such a task.

Results

The results, along with the subsequent discussion, addressed both research questions in two sections, employing Spengler's political -historical analogy approach through secondary data analysis and Jenkins' media-cultural concept. The results confirmed the two research objectives, which were to determine timeframes for Moon and Mars colonization and to propose suitable media content for educating on these processes.

© Authors

Results on Temporal Development Patterns of Moon and Mars Colonization

The respective, distinct Classical and Western prime symbols of the physical body and infinite space were critical in the study context. The Classical conquest of Gaul by the Romans, requiring the crossing of the Alps as a close geographical-physical body, would correspond in the Western context to the colonization of the Moon, necessitating a short journey of a few days through the close infinite distance of outer space.

The Roman conquest of Gaul occurred in several stages from 125 to 27 BC. This conquest coincided with the transition from the Roman Republic to the Empire, which began with the election of Tiberius Gracchus as Roman plebeian tribune in 134 BC and ended with Emperor Augustus' coronation in 27 BC (Ehret & Sani, 2022). From 125 to 109 BC, the Romans expanded into southern Gaul, defeating Gallic, Celtic, and Germanic tribes, and establishing the province of Gallia Transalpina, bordering the Italian peninsula. Importantly, Cesar's bloody military campaigns from 58 to 50 BC decisively established control over almost all of Gaul, forming the central event of Rome's Gallic conquest. Subsequently, this conquest was successfully consolidated despite local unrest und revolts until 27 BC (Broughton, 1951, 1952; Drinkwater, 2014; Matyszak, 2003).

The corresponding lunar colonization would begin in 2025 with a human return to the Moon within the US-led Artemis program, 56 years after the first manned Moon landing in 1969. Similar to the above Roman processes, the lunar colonization would coincide with the century -long transition from American Republic to Empire, which the United States entered from 2016 onwards, marked by the election of Donald Trump as US president, the American analogy of Tiberius Gracchus (Ehret & Sani, 2022). This Artemis project, including Europeans and Japanese, was projected to achieve a permanent human presence near or on the Moon by 2028 (Dallas et al., 2021), provoking a non-Western response aimed at establishing a Sino-Russian lunar research station in the 2030s. Notably, these first limited exploratory bases by geopolitical rivals would be located in the south polar region, competing for scarce areas allowing permanent access to solar energy and proximity to water ice. Subsequently, similar limited exploratory bases would likely be established in the north polar region, as the second-best choice in terms of energy and resource accessibility (Brown et al., 2022; Doboš, 2023, Song et al., 2021). Importantly, the lunar polar regions, especially the south pole, would in the Western process of Moon colonization (2025–2045) function as initial footholds, comparable to South Gaul in Rome's Gallic conquest (125–109 BC).

The subsequent stages of lunar colonization would likely witness the evolution of human settlements, driven by increasing economic viability. The year 2045 could signify a pivotal moment as Beijing aimed to establish a lunar economic-industrial zone, likely coinciding with Western initiatives. Moreover, this economic zone may lead to the development of specialized exploratory bases in non-polar regions, catering to economic interests such as helium-3 mining in Mare Tranquilitatis to secure energy supplies for nuclear fusion reactors on Earth (Bedard, 2019; Doboš, 2023). In the Western context of lunar colonization, the 2090s could mirror the significance of the 50s BC in Roman Gaul's conquest, expanding human presence and influence across most of the lunar surface. This period should witness the formation of colonies as political entities, accommodating long-term residents. If Moon colonization would be consolidated at a saturation point about a century after its inception, akin to the Roman conquest of Gaul, larger political entities with robust living standards and economic foundations, including tourism opportunities, should exist by the 2120s (Drinkwater, 2014; Ryan & Kutschera, 2007). However, due to its proximity to Earth and reliance

 © Authors

on Terran supply chains, the Moon would unlikely achieve independence but would more likely function as an extension of Earth, akin to an eight continent (Alvarez, 2020).

Extending this above analogy between Gaul and the Moon, the Classical conquest of Britain, requiring the Romans to cross the far maritime-physical body of the English Channel, would serve as most fitting analogy to the Western colonization of Mars. Colonizing Mars would necessitate a journey lasting several months through the far infinite distance of outer space.

The Roman conquest of Britain occurred in distinct stages spanning from 55 BC to 84 AD. This conquest was part of the broader Roman Empire expansion, which began with the Empire formation in 27 BC and reached its zenith during the reign of Emperor Trajan in 117 AD (Jackson, 2022). In 55 and 54 BC, Cesar attempted two military invasions of Britain, which, while not entirely unsuccessful, ultimately led to his withdrawal to the European continent due to political challenges in Gaul and Rome. A lasting Roman conquest of Britain was achieved about a century later, from 43 to 84 AD. Emperor Claudius and Aulus Plautius led the initial conquest from 43 to 47 AD, encompassing the establishment of the Roman province of Britannia in 43. Subsequently, the conquest stage culminated into significant northward territorial advances under the command of Agricola from 77 to 84 AD, consolidating this conquest. Comparatively, the Roman conquest of Britain lasted about four decades longer than the earlier conquest of Gaul (Broughton, 1952; Drinkwater, 2014; Matyszak, 2003).

Applying the temporal development patterns of Roman Empire expansion in Britain to Western space colonization equated Cesar's failed invasion attempts in 55 and 54 BC with establishing a permanent Martian exploratory base in the mid-2090s. However, this analogy would suggest that this Roman withdrawal process corresponded to the Western process of creating a permanent Martian presence. But internal coherence supported this interpretation. If we projected the temporal gap between the first moon landing in 1969 and the anticipated human return to Earth's natural satellite in 2025 onto the establishment of a permanent human presence on Mars as suggested above, this event would occur between five and six decades after the first manned Mars landing, likely dating the latter in the late 2030s. This expectation would roughly align, within a margin of up to a decade, with Zubrin's (2021) estimate of a crewed Mars mission's timeframe. Additionally, the existence of exploratory bases only by the 21st century's end would confirm Doboš' (2023) belief that Martian settlements will not be subject to near future geopolitical considerations.

The successful Roman conquest of Britain from 43 to 84 AD could predetermine the transformation timeframe of Martian colonies as political entities, transitioning from initially sheltering long-term civilian residents to accommodating colonial citizens. Accordingly, this Martian evolution might occur between the early 2190s and the mid-2230s as its temporal saturation point. However, this analogy would suggest a long gap between permanent exploratory base creation and establishing a political, civilian habitat. It was important to note that Spengler's (1998) analogies, although measured in the unalterable units of human generations, provided only approximations. While a deviation of a few decades within broader processes when comparing the above Classical and Western timeframes was possible, deviations would not span centuries. Projecting the anticipated time gap between establishing a permanent lunar exploratory base and civilian settlement creation onto comparative Martian projects could indicate the early 2160s as the approximate time for the arrival of Martian settlers who would develop communities with over a hundred people and eventually evolve into societies with over a thousand people, based on a political system (Schmidt & Boháček, 2021). Consequently,

 © Authors

Musk's dream of reaching 1 million Martian inhabitants by 2050, along with the UAE government's projection of establishing a political entity by 2117, appeared overly optimistic (Grove, 2022; Yap & Kim, 2023).

Differently from the Moon, Mars' greater abundance of resources, settlement areas, and distance from Earth would not only foster self-sufficiency but also likely lead to political independence. Doboš' (2023) proposed that an astro-political competition might arise between the Earth-lunar system and the Martian system, including two moons, alongside the geopolitical competition among Terran powers. Doboš' projected Martian sovereignty as a political prerequisite in the distant future, prompting speculation on when this might be achieved.

Taking a speculative, non-Spenglerian approach, the timeframes between the first permanent human presence on Mars and eventual planetary independence from Earth could be estimated by comparing the temporal development patterns of English or British settlements in North America and Australia and their respective paths to independence from the United Kingdom. For instance, it took 113 years from the first British colony creation in Australia in 1788 to achieving a considerable degree of independence in 1901 (Gare & Ritter, 2008). In contrast, the time gap between establishing England's first permanent North American colony in 1607 and the full independence of the United States in 1776 spanned 169 years (Taylor, 2013).

If these trajectories were indicative of Martian sovereignty, accounting for the potential emergence of political unit-forming Martian settlements starting from either the 2160s or 2190s, then Martian independence could feasibly occur between the early 2270s and early 2360s.

Martian independence could be aided by partial terraforming, improving living conditions on the Red Planet. Zubrin (2021) proposed releasing frozen carbon dioxide (CO_2) gas into the Martian atmosphere using methods like orbiting mirrors reflecting sunlight onto the Mars regolith surface and greenhouse gas emissions. His calculations suggested releasing enough CO_2 within about seven decades to raise Mars' current atmospheric pressure (6–10 millibars) to 170 millibars, enhancing radiation protection. This revolutionary approach would increase Martian temperatures by 30 to 35 degrees Celsius, reaching a new average of -25 to -20°C. Depending on seasons and regions, these above temperature and pressure levels would allow liquid water on the surface and likely support the introduction of primitive plants such as ryegrass and lichen. Importantly, humans could walk outside wearing only warm clothes, a breathing mask, and an oxygen tank for humid air, eliminating the need for pressure suits. If partial terraforming began alongside civilian settlement in the 2160s or 2190s, achieving this outcome by the 2230s or 2260s would not only increase the accessibility and value of Martian land but also fuel aspirations for independence.

Spengler dated the end of Roman Emperor Aurelian's reign in 275 AD as the demise of the Classical high culture, thus predicting the end of the West's historical cycle to occur in the first decades of the 25th century. While some high cultures survived the end of their cycles in a millennia-lasting petrified state, the West, due to its transformatory will-to-power, was too volatile and unstable, too scientifically and technically extreme in its achievements, to share a similar fate. This end of the West would cause the unique Western technology, which enabled Moon and Mars colonization, to disappear (Spengler, 1998). Consequently, human space colonization could forever come to an end shortly after 2400.

Results on Media Content Educating on the Temporal Development Patterns of Moon and Mars Colonization

This section employed Henry Jenkins' media-cultural concept of participatory culture to identify rather realistic fictional movies and TV shows on

 © Authors

Moon and Mars colonization that aligned with the aforementioned temporal development patterns. These media could serve the educational purpose of raising cultural awareness about this above process. First, media content on Moon colonization was analyzed, followed by similar content on Mars colonization. Lastly, media addressing the colonization of both celestial bodies was analyzed against the defined requirements.

Two fictional movies were analyzed, which realistically depicted human activities on the Moon within realistic timeframes. The first work, First Man (2018), portrayed Neil Armstrong, the first human to step on the Moon in 1969. Apart from the accurate timeframe, as it depicted a historical event, the film's detailed attention to space travel mechanics and astronaut experiences provided a realistic context for understanding future lunar missions. Although this biographical drama was set in the past and thus did not communicate future temporal development patterns, it entirely met Spengler's recommendation to educate the youth about challenging tasks by learning from the biographies of successful achievers (Spengler, 2018). Additionally, the second work that could, in Jenkins' (2009) sense, support a participatory culture advocating Moon colonization was Moon (2009), set in 2035. While the story addressed ethical malpractices of Moon exploration, the film also depicted lunar mining and the psychological isolation effects of long-term space habitation in a scientifically grounded way, which could support the desired educational effect. The existence of a specialized exploratory lunar base, in Doboš' sense (2023), in the film predated the above timeframe expectations by only roughly a decade, what was still acceptable.

Two media content formats were selected to align with Jenkin's media-cultural concept of engaging audiences in the context of Mars colonization. Both the movie The Martian (2015) and the docudrama Mars (2016–2018) qualified in this analytical context due to including fictional storylines, providing scientifically rather accurate speculations about human missions to Mars and potential solutions for Martian environmental challenges. The Martian depicted the creation of Mark Watney's temporary exploratory base "The Hab" by 2035, and the TV show portrayed the first manned Mars landing by 2033, both timeframes close enough to meet the above suggested projections. However, the docudrama set the beginning of Mars colonization through permanent exploratory base creation about six decades earlier than anticipated. Comparatively, The Martian emerged as the more commendable work in this study context, despite not featuring a permanent human settlement on Mars and exaggerating the impact of Martian sandstorms for narrative purposes.

Additionally, a potential future adaptation of Kim Stanley Robinson's acclaimed book trilogy on Martian colonization could have the most desirable impact in terms of Jenkin's participatory culture. If Robinson's science fiction works, Red Mars, Green Mars, and Blue Mars, were adapted for TV, they could deeply root a mainstream audience in understanding the Martian settlement and terraforming process (Robinson, 2015). However, the content and timeframes of this fiction trilogy would not align with the outcomes of this study. Firstly, no permanent Mars base with a hundred colonists would be established by 2026; but permanent bases would likely only emerge from the 2090s onward. Secondly, complete terraforming of Mars to create a breathable atmosphere, unlike the partial terraforming process described earlier, would probably never happen.

Three media works depicting Moon and Mars colonization were analyzed to assess their effectiveness in engaging a 21st-century audience in participatory ways, aligning with Jenkins' intentions.

 © Authors

For All Mankind (2019–present), an alternate history series, depicted the creation of lunar and Martian exploratory bases with a realistic approach to technological advancements and space travel logistics. However, the purposefully advanced timeframes established the first permanent Moon base ("Jamestown") in 1973 and the first permanent Mars base ("Happy Valley") in 1994. These dates would significantly predate projections based on the above temporal development patterns, by roughly half a century for the Moon base and a full century for the Mars base.

Comparatively, Ad Astra (2019) portrayed missions to the Moon and Mars based on current scientific understanding. The film depicted a heavily commercialized lunar settlement in the early 22nd century, designed to accommodate civilians and tourists. However, certain lunar zones experienced military and geopolitical conflicts. In contrast, the Martian base seemed predominantly focused on scientific research and exploration. Notably, both celestial body settlements aligned roughly with the earlier proposed temporal development patterns, suggesting a long-term, civilian lunar colony as a political entity with long-term residents and a permanent Martian exploratory base existing from the 2090s onward.

Lastly, the TV show The Expanse (2015–2022) was most useful in this study context for communicating realistic expectations about the nature and timeframes of advanced lunar and Martian colonization. Set approximately in the 2350s, both the Moon and Mars featured highly advanced civilian settlements, aligning with the study's suggestions that such settlements would emerge on the Moon from the 2090s onward and on Mars from the 2160s or 2190s onward. While the Moon remained politically under Earth's control, Mars had evolved into an independent planet, rivaling Earth in an astro-political competition for solar system dominance. As depicted in the TV show, Martian sovereignty by the mid-24th century seemed likely. Additionally, the show portrayed Martian settlements underground in the Valles Marineris to achieve radiation protection, based on scientific designs for Martian habitat creation. Surprisingly, the effects of the partial terraforming process depicted in the show at this advanced point in time were even more pessimistic than projected by this study and Zubrin (2021).

Summary of Results

Both research objectives-identifying timeframes for Moon and Mars colonization and determining useful media content for informing about these processes—were accomplished and supported by the results as follows. The outcomes indicated that the establishment of limited exploratory bases on the Moon would likely commence following the human return in 2025. These bases would gradually transform into specialized exploration hubs by around 2045, with human settlements developing into political entities in the 2090s and reaching their growth limits by the 2120s. Martian exploratory bases would begin to take shape from the 2090s onward, with human settlements forming political structures after the 2160s or 2190s, and reaching a phase of development consolidation in the 2230s. Media that accurately portrayed the timelines for lunar and Martian colonization included the films Moon (2009), Ad Astra (2019), and the television series The Expanse (2015–2022).

Discussion

This chapter investigated legal-social and political-cultural factors affecting the temporal development patterns of Moon and Mars colonization in the form of a discussion. Eventually, the discussion verified that both research objectives had been sufficiently fulfilled and that the timeframes for inner solar system colonization were accurate enough.

© Authors

Discussion of Legal and Social Factors Impacting the Temporal Development Patterns of Moon and Mars Colonization

This discussion assessed the accuracy of the proposed Moon and Mars colonization timeframes and explored whether additional legal-social factors might pose obstacles to or delay colonization, thus requiring a revision of these timeframes. Legal factors included the Moon Treaty, an international agreement adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1979. Additionally, the national policies of the three key state actors in Moon and Mars colonization were reviewed, including the Artemis Accords established by the United States in 2020 and the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) Regarding Cooperation for the Construction of the International Lunar Reseach Station, signed by China and Russia in 2021. Finally, social factors, including global environmentalist movements that may oppose inner solar system colonization, were also analyzed.

The Moon Treaty, officially the Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, will likely not impede Moon or Mars colonization. While the treaty prohibited states from claiming lunar or Martian territory and advocated international collaboration, the UN, as the supra-national organization that adopted it, had de facto no enforcement power. Moreover, the U.S., Russia, and China never ratified this treaty, and are therefore not obliged to follow its regulations. In fact, only 17 nations had signed the Moon Treaty (Koch, 2018; O'Brien, 2020).

In contrast, the American-led Artemis Accords, Principles for Cooperation in the Civil Exploration and Use of the Moon, Mars, Comets, and Asteroids for Peaceful Purposes, and the Chinese-Russian MoU were significant. Firstly, their signatory states had enforcement power. Secondly, their legal provisions strongly supported the suggested timeframes for Moon and Mars colonization. Moreover, both legal documents aimed at creating economic activities on the Moon. The MoU from March 2021 aimed at establishing a space economic zone by 2045, while the Artemis Accords, signed by 48 countries in 2020, allowed claiming extracted resources and creating safety zones surrounding operation centers, such as lunar bases, to protect from harmful interference. While sovereignty was not de jure claimed, it would de facto be established in the settlement areas and the zones of economic activity (Doboš, 2023; Nelson, 2020; "Signatories of the U.S.-Led Artemis Accords," 2023). Such a development would follow the logic of U.S. historical experience in how the West of the North American continent was won. Also, it would likely create a precedent for later Mars colonization. If a Martian settlement were to hypothetically declare independence from Earth, it could consider all Terran contracts void and claim Martian sovereignty, perhaps even over the entire Red Planet.

Even the suggested media examples for education on inner solar system colonization depicted these developments seemingly realistically. The film Moon (2009) and the TV series Mars (2016–2018) depicted economic activities on both title-giving celestial bodies. Additionally, the movie Ad Astra (2019) and the TV show For All Mankind (2019–present) even depicted military or armed lunar conflicts between different political actors due to conflicting sovereignty claims, such as between U.S. and Russian bases in the south polar region.

Global environmentalist movements would be unlikely to impede plans for Moon colonization and human landings on Mars in the late 2020s. The second Trump administration (2025-2029) will likely dismiss concerns over environmental and ethical issues related to human space colonization. Moreover, in November 2024, Trump appointed billionaire space enthusiast Elon Musk to co-lead the U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), with the goal of removing bureaucratic hurdles for human Moon and Mars missions, including environmental restrictions

 © Authors

(Martichoux, 2024). This was unsurprising, as Musk's company, SpaceX, would be part of these efforts. SpaceX's Spaceship HLS will serve as lunar lander for the uncrewed Moon mission in 2025 and the crewed landings in 2026 and 2028 (Foust, 2023; Smith, 2024). Musk's vision was to send humans to Mars by 2028, though this timeline was unrealistic. His lifelong obsession included establishing a long-term Mars colony using his companies SpaceX to send human colonists with reusable interplanetary transporters, Starlink for satellite communication, and his Boring Company for drilling underground settlements (Ehret, 2022). Also, both the Chinese and Russian governments will prioritize long-term technological, economic, and geopolitical, national goals over environmental concerns, and, while they may involve military aspects, they will neglect private sector efforts (Doboš, 2023).

Discussion of Political and Cultural Factors Impacting the Temporal Development Patterns of Moon and Mars Colonization

The discussion also aimed to gain an enhanced understanding of political-cultural impact factors influencing Moon and Mars colonization. Determining these factors was crucial as Western-dominated lunar and Martian territories could be politically and culturally incorporated into the Western, particularly American, culture resembling the Roman assimilation of conquered Gaul and Britain into the Classical culture (Alcock, 2011; Drinkwater, 2014). Woodard (2011) identified eleven distinct American nations, or regional cultures, formed over centuries almost entirely by European immigration into North America. He perceived Yankeedom, in the greater New England region, and the Deep South, marked by its historical racial hierarchy, as dominant rivals. This discussion explored which of these eleven political-regional cultures could impact the emergence of Western political entities on the Moon and Mars.

The political-cultural characteristics of Western lunar settlements could be strongly impacted by the Appalachian and Far Western regional cultures of the United States. Appalachians, descended from Scots-Irish settlers in states like Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Arkansas, and Oklahoma, emphasized individuality and military values. In contrast, conservative Far Westerners in states such as Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Nebraska, and Colorado, perceived themselves as foreign-controlled by East coast corporations due to their mining resources (Woodard, 2011). Mining operations likely to begin on the Moon around 2045, enabled by specialized exploratory base creation (Doboš, 2023), would probably require recruiting military-trained personnel with individualist values, particularly Appalachians. Additionally, the power relations between the United States and the Western lunar settlements, which are likely to be politically and supply-dependent but resource-rich, could mirror the historical dependency of the Far West on the US East coast. Consequently, the political-cultural identity of Western lunar colonies may draw heavily from the Appalachian and Far Western regional cultures. Woodard (2011) noted that a cultural nucleus of a newly emerging political colonial entity could be formed by few hundred initial settlers, with subsequent generations adapting its identity for centuries and in the millions.

Western Martian settlements, likely self-sufficient and destined for political independence, could be strongly affected by political-cultural elements of Yankeedom and the US Left Coast. Yankees, located in states such as Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Michigan, were known for their social engineering initiatives aimed at transforming the world according to their image. Similarly, the Left Coast, stretched along the coasts of California, Oregon and Washington, shared Yankee messianism and Appalachian individuality, having evolved as an offshoot of both cultures (Woodard, 2011). The ideological

 © Authors

inclination of Yankees and Left Coasters towards societal engineering would resonate well with the Martian terraforming concept, envisioned as the most ambitious engineering project in history aimed at redesigning the material basis of all future planetary political entities. Zubrin's (2021) advocacy for transplanting general American cultural values to Mars as a new frontier supported the above speculation about the political-cultural characteristics of Western Martian settlements. However, he left the specific American regional cultures poised to exert the greatest political-cultural impact unspecified.

No fictional movies or TV shows were identified that explore the political-cultural impact of these above American regional-political cultures on Moon and Mars colonization.

Conclusion

This paper achieved both its research objectives by identifying the temporal development patterns of Moon and Mars colonization and the media content that communicates them. Firstly, limited exploratory base creation on the Moon will likely begin after the 2025 human return, followed by specialized exploratory bases around 2045. By the 2090s, human settlements would likely emerge as political entities, reaching growth saturation by the 2120s. In comparison, Mars would see exploratory bases established from the 2090s onward, with human settlements as political systems forming from the 2160s or 2190s onward and achieving development consolidation by the 2230s. Partial terraforming could substantially improve access to the Martian surface by the 2230s or 2260s, supporting Martian independence between the early 2270s and early 2360s. Media content communicating these timeframes of lunar and Martian colonization realistically encompassed the movies Moon (2009), Ad Astra (2019) and the TV show The Expanse (2015-2022). Moon portrayed a specialized exploratory base around 2035, while Ad Astra showcased a Martian exploratory base alongside a lunar settlement functioning as a political entity in the early 22nd century. The Expanse presented an astro-political solar system -wide conflict between the Earth-controlled Terra -Luna system and a politically independent Mars around 2350.

Implications of the Study

For theoretical implications, this paper utilized Spengler's theory of Historical Cycles and its historical-comparativist method for the first time to address political questions regarding the temporal development patterns of Moon and Mars colonization, confirming this theory's applicability in the study context. This paper posited that creating analogies was the most useful approach in this context to attain verisimilitude, as it offered an improved long-term observational position encompassing centuries, thereby contributing new knowledge to the study subjects (Spengler, 1998).

This was the first paper applying Jenkins' theory of participatory culture to identify media content, such as movies and TV shows, that communicate realistic timeframes for Moon and Mars colonization. Based on the study's results, human Moon colonization was projected to occur between the 2020s and 2120s, and Mars colonization from the 2090s to the 2230s, carrying practical implications for national agencies and businesses involved in space exploration. While Moon colonization would likely raise geopolitical and economic questions before 2050, Mars colonization would not have practical implications until then, except for the first human landings necessitating temporary exploratory base creation.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The focus on Moon and Mars colonization timeframes intentionally neglected two other celestial bodies in the inner solar system, Mercury

 © Authors

and Venus. Due to its proximity to the sun and distance from Earth, Mercury was not expected to become a near or mid-future target for human settlements forming political entities. Venus, the planet closest to Earth, possessed extremely hostile climatic conditions, preventing any meaningful human access to its surface. Although its upper atmosphere offered the most hospitable conditions in the solar system outside of Earth, foreseeable future colonization of Venus' atmosphere through cloud habitats was unlikely (Doboš, 2023). Instead, humans would more likely settle in radiation-protecting lunar and Martian underground caves, following evolutionary patterns of a prehistoric past. The prospects of human presence on the Moon and Mars would require further studies, particularly regarding the impact of policies to be implemented by the U.S. Department of Government Efficiency starting in 2025.

Additionally, celestial bodies outside the inner solar system were also ignored in the study. While mining objects in the asteroid belt, forming the boundary between the inner and outer solar system, might become an important future industrial activity (Goswamy & Garretson, 2020), the low gravity of its asteroids would prevent establishing settlements as political systems comparable to those anticipated during Moon and Mars colonization. Furthermore, projecting the Roman-led expansion of the Classical world onto the Western settlement of the asteroid belt would be morphologically problematic, as no Classical territorial analogy to this belt could be identified with the same certainty that predetermined Classical Gaul and Britain as Western analogies to the Moon and Mars in the study context. The most suitable celestial object for extraterrestrial colonization in the outer and entire solar system, Saturn's moon Titan, with its dense atmosphere and methane resources (Zubrin, 2019), was left out of this study due to its far distance from Earth, drastically reducing human settlement prospects in the foreseeable future. However, future research should address the possibilities of settling Titan, as it offers in many ways the best conditions for humans living outside of Earth, should advancements in spaceship engine design make this distant world reachable.

Lastly, this paper focused on Western space colonization, as the political-comparativist approach of Historical Cycles could only be applied to still-developing high cultures such as the West. The West still had to move through the development phases of its civilizational winter, whose patterns allowed for an approximate predetermination of the next four centuries within limitations. Other space-faring civilizations, such as China, were neglected in the study context, except for direct responses to Western space exploration, as China had already completed its historical cycle about two millennia ago. Hence, Spengler's analogy approach, based on cyclical pattern repetition, was no longer applicable to contemporary Chinese developments. Also, it was the unique Western technology that enabled space conquest (Spengler, 1998, 2018). Non-Western space-faring cultures, such as the Chinese or Russians, only adapted Occidental technology out of necessity, responding to a Western power challenge, and would forget it after the West's demise in the early 25th century. Instead, they possessed due to their different cultural prime symbols, such as the predestined Chinese way through life, tao, or the Russian plain without limit, not the Western drive to develop it, as they lacked the Western longing for infinity (Ehret & Sani, 2022). An examination of especially Chinese space exploration efforts, comparative to the long-term analysis of Western efforts in this study, would be necessary, though it could not be based on Spengler's theoretical framework.

 © Authors

References

Alcock, J. P. (2011). *A brief history of Roman Britain: Conquest and civilization*. Hachette.

Alvarez, T. (2020). *The eighth continent: An ethnography of twenty-first century Euro-American plans to settle the Moon* (Doctoral dissertation, The New School). ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. https://www.proquest.com/openview/95e2de8e8c8e9fb9397908dcb3ff7d08/1?cbl=44156&pq-origsite=gscholar

Bedard, P. (2019, July 17). China to mine Moon, asteroids and races to be "#1 space power by 2045". *Washington Examiner*. https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/washington-secrets/china-to-mine-moonasteroids-races-to-be-1-space-power-by-2045

Broughton, T. R. S. (1951). *The magistrates of the Roman Republic, vol. 1: 509 B.C. - 100 B.C.* American Philological Association.

Broughton, T. R. S. (1951). *The magistrates of the Roman Republic, vol. 2: 99 B.C. - 31 B.C.* American Philological Association.

Brown, H. M., Boyd, A. K., Denevi, B. W., Henriksen, M. R., Manheim, M. R., & Robinson, M. S. (2022). Resource potential of lunar permanently shadowed regions. *Icarus, 377*(7), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.icarus.2021.114874

Chavy-Macdonald, M. A., Oizumi, K., Kneib, J. P., & Aoyama, K. (2021). The cis-lunar ecosystem – a systems model and scenarios of the resource industry and its impact. *Acta Astronautica, 188*(11), 545–558. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actaastro.2021.06.017

Dallas, J. A., Raval, S., Saydam, S., & Dempster, A. G. (2021). An environmental impact assessment framework for space resource extraction. *Space Policy, 57*(3), 62–73. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spacepol.2021.101441

Doboš, B. (2022). Tortoise the Titan: Private entities as geoeconomic tools in outer space. *Space Policy, 60*(2), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spacepol.2022.101487

Doboš, B. (2023). *The geopolitics of space colonization: Future power relations in the inner solar system*. Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003377252

Drinkwater, J. (2014). *Roman Gaul: The three provinces, 58 BC – AD 260*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315796505

Ehret, M. (2022, June 1). Ad Astra – zu den Sternen [Ad Astra – to the stars]. *Akademische Blätter, 124*(2), 18–21. https://aka-blaetter.de

Ehret, M., & Sani, M. A. (2022). The impact of the Russo–Ukrainian War on Sino–German relations. *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal, 8*(3), 755–805. https://icaps.nsysu.edu.tw/p/404-1131-305796.php?Lang=en

Fenegan, S., & Styler, T. (Producers), & Jones, D. (Director). (2009). *Moon* [Film]. Sony Pictures Classics.

Foust, J. (2023, March 13). NASA planning to spend up to 1 billion on space station deorbit module. *Space News*. https://spacenews.com/nasa-planning-to-spend-up-to-1-billion-on-space-station-deorbit-module/

Gare, D., & Ritter, D. (2008). *Making Australian history: Perspectives on the past since 1788*. Thomson Learning.

Godfrey, W., Bowen, M., Klausner, I., & Chazelle, D. (Producers), & Chazelle, D. (Director). (2018). *First Man* [Film]. Universal Pictures.

Goswami, N., & Garretson, P. A. (2020). *Scramble for the skies: The great power competition to control the resources of outer space*. Rowman & Littlefield.

 © Authors

Grove, N. S. (2022). 'Welcome to Mars': Space colonization, anticipatory authoritarianism, and the labour of hope. In A. M. Agathangelou & K. D. Killian (Eds.), *Time, climate change, global racial capitalism and decolonial planetary ecologies* (pp. 217–232). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003278054

Holland, T. A. (2024). From Apollo to the ISS: The televisual image in human spaceflight. *Television & New Media, 25*(1), 57–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/15274764231177438

Howard, R., Grazer, B., Wilkes, J., & Kamen, J. (Executive Producers). (2016–2018). *Mars* [TV series]. National Geographic.

Jackson, N. (2022). *Trajan: Rome's last conquerer*. Greenhill Books.

Jenkins, H. (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/8435.001.0001

Kinberg, S., Scott, R., Schaefer, M., Sood, A., & Huffam, M. (Producers), & Scott, R. (Director). (2015). *The Martian* [Film]. 20th Century Fox.

Klimchynskaya, A. (2022). Familiarizing the future: The diegetic prototype of Netflix's *Away*. *Science Fiction Film & Television, 15*(1), 81–91. https://doi.org/10.3828/sfftv.2022.6

Koch, J. S. (2018). Institutional framework for the province of all mankind: Lessons from the International Seabed Authority for the Governance of Commercial Space Mining. *Astropolitics, 16*(1), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/14777622.2017.1381824

Mann, D. (2022). Red Planets: Cinema, deserts, and extraction. *Afterimage, 49*(1), 88–109. https://doi.org/10.1525/aft.2022.49.1.88

Martichoux, A. (2024, November 13). What is DOGE, the new department Musk and Ramaswamy will lead under the Trump administration? *The Hill*. https://thehill.com/homenews/4988711-what-is-doge-the-new-department-musk-and-ramaswamy-will-lead-under-the-trump-administration/

Matyszak, P. (2003). *The Romans in Gaul and Britain*. Thames & Hudson.

Moore, R. D., Davis, M., Nedivi, B., & Wolpert, M. (Executive Producers). (2019 – present). *For All Mankind* [TV series]. Apple TV+.

Moss-Wellington, W. (2020). Individual and collaborative labour in the space crisis movie: From *Apollo 13* to *The Martian*. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video, 37*(7), 634–657. https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2020.1731274

Nelson, J. W. (2020). The Artemis Accords and the future of international space law. *American Society of International Law Insights, 24*(31), 1–7. https://www.asil.org/sites/default/files/ASIL_Insights_2020_V24_I31.pdf

O'Brien, D. (2020). Legal support for the private sector: An implementation agreement for the Moon Treaty. *Advances in Astronautics Science and Technology, 3*(1), 49–64. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42423-020-00059-w

Pitt, B., Gardner, D., Kleiner, J., & Gray, J. (Producers), & Gray, J. (Director). (2019). *Ad Astra* [Film]. 20th Century Fox.

Robinson, K. S. (2015). *The complete Mars trilogy: Red Mars, Green Mars, Blue Mars*. Harper-Collins UK.

Ryan, M. H., & Kutschera, I. (2007). Lunar-based enterprise infrastructure – hidden keys for long-term business access. *Space Policy, 23*(1), 44–52. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spacepol.2006.11.008

Schmidt, N., & Boháček, P. (2021). First space colony: What political system could we expect? *Space Policy, 56*(2), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spacepol.2021.101426

Shankar, N., Fergus, M., Ostby, H., Kosove, A., & Johnson, B. (Executive Producers). (2015–2022). *The Expanse* [TV series]. Alcon Entertainment; Amazon Studios.

Signatories of the U.S.-led Artemis Accords meet in person for the first time. (2023). *American Journal of International Law, 117*(1), 133–139. https://doi.org/10.1017/ajil.2022.88

 © Authors

Smith, M. (2024, January 9). NASA delays next Artemis missions to 2025 and 2026. *SpacePolicyOnline.com*. https://spacepolicyonline.com/news/nasa-delays-next-artemis-missions-to-2025-and-2026/

Song, H., Zhang, J., Ni, D., Sun, Y., Zheng, Y., Kou, J., Zhang, X., & Li, Z. (2021). Investigation on in-situ water ice recovery considering energy efficiency at the lunar south pole. *Applied Energy, 298*, 1283–1294. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apenergy.2021.117136

Spengler, O. (1998). *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* [The decline of the West]. Beck. (Original work published 1918)

Spengler, O. (2018). *Prussian socialism & other essays*. Black House Publishing. (Original work published 1919)

Swan, P. (2023). Cooperation & competition. *Space Flight, 65*(6), 20–23. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e35af40fb280744e1b16f7b/t/647654b8615a7b1dda530078/1685476536916/spaceflight-june-2023-3-cooperation-and-competition.pdf

Taylor, A. (2013). *Colonial America: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Woodard, C. (2011). *American nations: A history of the eleven rival regional cultures of North America*. Viking.

Wu, Z., & Wang, Z. (2023). The rise and commonalities of Eastern and Western science fiction film and television. *Frontiers in Art Research, 5*(18), 6–10. https://doi.org/10.25236/FAR.2023.051802

Yap, X.-S., & Kim, R. E. (2023). Towards earth-space governance in a multi-planetary era. *Earth System Governance, 16*(2), 51–55. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esg.2023.100173

Zubrin, R. (2019). *The case for space: How the revolution in spaceflight opens up a future of limitless possibility*. Prometheus.

Zubrin, R. (2021). *The case for Mars: The plan to settle the Red Planet and why we must*. Simon & Schuster.

 © Authors


JOPAG
Journal of Politics and Governance