

Mechanisms of Political Mobilization and Voting Behavior Change: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach to Local Elections in Surat Thani, Thailand

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Abstract

Comprehensive models capturing how campaign fundamentals translate into voter responses through mobilization, including reciprocal relationships, remain underdeveloped in Southeast Asian subnational contexts. This study examines how political mobilization patterns mediate the associations between electoral success factors and changes in voting behavior in the 2025 Surat Thani Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) chief executive election. Drawing on mediation theory and dynamic campaign models, structural equation modeling was applied to survey data from 430 eligible voters selected through multi-stage sampling to test a model that integrates five electoral success dimensions, six mobilization patterns, and multidimensional voting behavior. Model fit was acceptable (CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.058, $\chi^2/df = 2.14$). Electoral success factors were associated with voting behavior both directly and indirectly through mobilization, with the indirect pathway accounting for approximately half the total effect. Mobilization patterns showed bidirectional associations with success factors, with the forward pathway substantially stronger than the feedback pathway, suggesting an asymmetric reciprocal structure. These findings contribute to population and social studies by refining our understanding of how subnational electoral dynamics in consolidating democracies are shaped by traditional authority, digital communication, and institutional networks, with implications for mediation theory and dynamic campaign models. Findings are interpreted as patterns consistent with dynamic electoral processes rather than definitive causal evidence.

Keywords

Mediation analysis; political mobilization; structural equation modeling; subnational elections; voting behavior

Introduction

Electoral competition in decentralized political systems operates through complex mechanisms in which campaign strategies, mobilization processes, and voter responses interact dynamically rather than through linear causal sequences. Although individual electoral predictors have been extensively documented, three substantive gaps remain in existing scholarship. First, most studies examine isolated bivariate relationships between specific factors and electoral outcomes, offering limited insight into the multidimensional pathways by which electoral inputs translate into voting behavior. Second, research predominantly assumes unidirectional causation flowing from campaign inputs to behavioral outputs, neglecting potential feedback mechanisms whereby mobilization success may reshape perceived campaign strength (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Third, advanced analytical techniques capable of disaggregating direct, indirect, and reciprocal pathways remain scarce in subnational electoral research, particularly in Southeast Asian contexts. These limitations are especially consequential in settings such as Thailand's Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAOs), which were subsequently restructured and strengthened through decentralization reforms and vested with substantial fiscal authority, where traditional and contemporary campaign modalities coexist amid increasingly sophisticated voter evaluation criteria (Arghiros, 2001).

The February 1, 2025 election for Surat Thani PAO chief executive provides an analytically productive context for addressing these gaps. Six candidates competed for the support of 935,896 eligible voters across 19 districts, with 551,791 voters participating, resulting in a turnout rate of 58.96% (Election Committee of Surat Thani Provincial Administrative Organization, 2025). As Thailand's largest southern province, with diverse economic activities encompassing agriculture, fisheries, and tourism, Surat Thani reflects socioeconomic heterogeneity characteristic of provincial Thailand while providing sufficient scale for rigorous quantitative analysis. Three features make this case particularly suitable for modeling complex electoral mechanisms: multi-candidate competition ensures sufficient variation in electoral strategies and voter preferences; temporal distance from national political upheavals minimizes confounding effects of macro-level dynamics; and the province's demographic and economic diversity enhances external validity beyond single-district case studies.

To address these gaps, this study tests three interconnected research questions. First, do political mobilization patterns mediate the relationship between electoral success factors and voting behavior change, and if so, to what extent? Mediation theory posits that distal predictors influence outcomes substantially through proximal mechanisms rather than exclusively through direct pathways (Baron & Kenny, 1986). However, such mediation has rarely been examined in subnational electoral contexts in consolidating democracies. Second, what are the relative magnitudes of direct versus indirect effects in shaping voting behavior? This decomposition clarifies whether electoral support depends primarily on campaign fundamentals, mobilization execution, or their strategic integration. Third, do reciprocal associations exist between success factors and mobilization patterns, suggesting dynamic rather than unidirectional campaign processes? Dynamic campaign models propose that early mobilization success may enhance perceived candidate viability and generate momentum effects (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Empirical tests of such bidirectional relationships remain scarce in subnational research.

A critical conceptual clarification underpins these questions. This study treats electoral success factors as antecedent structural conditions reflecting candidate characteristics, policy

platforms, resource endowments, support networks, and contextual circumstances. Political mobilization patterns, by contrast, refer to the operational processes by which these conditions translate into voter contact, communication, and influence. This distinction, elaborated in the Literature Review, addresses potential conceptual overlap and clarifies the analytical logic of testing both forward and feedback pathways.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) offers methodological advantages for addressing these questions, enabling simultaneous examination of multiple pathways, incorporating measurement error in latent constructs, and providing comprehensive model fit indices for evaluating theoretical specification (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2016). These capabilities are particularly valuable for modeling electoral processes in which campaign strategies, mobilization efforts, and voter responses plausibly interact through mutually reinforcing mechanisms rather than unidirectional sequences. Most prior studies of Thai provincial elections rely on descriptive statistics or single-equation regression that cannot capture such multidimensional pathways.

This study contributes to scholarly knowledge across three interconnected domains. Methodologically, it demonstrates the application of SEM to subnational electoral research in consolidating democracies, providing a replicable analytical template for disaggregating complex political processes. Theoretically, it advances understanding of mediation and feedback mechanisms by moving beyond linear input-output conceptualizations toward asymmetric reciprocal models in which campaign capacity and mobilization activation mutually shape one another, though to differing degrees. Substantively, by examining how traditional authority structures, digital communication, and institutional networks jointly shape political participation, the research contributes to broader population and social studies debates concerning how micro-level political behavior evolves within decentralizing societies, informing theoretical and practical debates about democratic development and governance quality.

Literature review

Election Success Factors in local Thai politics (ESF)

Electoral success in Thai local elections reflects structural conditions operating at individual, organizational, and contextual levels, conceptualized as antecedent capacities that candidates possess prior to and independent of specific campaign activities. Five dimensions emerge consistently from existing scholarship.

Candidate characteristics, including perceived integrity, administrative competence, and understanding of constituent needs, consistently predict electoral performance (Kulachai et al., 2023). Evidence from Surat Thani further indicates that voters viewed candidates associated with financial electoral fraud negatively, underscoring the electoral relevance of perceived integrity (Pannarai & Maneekarn, 2022).

Policy platforms constitute a second dimension. While earlier scholarship emphasized clientelistic exchanges (Hicken, 2002), recent work reveals growing programmatic competition in which candidates articulate distinctive policy visions for local development (Pannarai & Maneekarn, 2022), paralleling patterns in other Southeast Asian decentralized contexts where programmatic appeals increasingly complement traditional patronage strategies (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

Resource endowments represent a third dimension, encompassing financial, human, and organizational capacities that enable sustained campaign operations (Kantaros, 2022). Resource endowments are conceptually distinct from the mobilization activities they enable: resources represent potential capacity, whereas mobilization represents activation of that potential.

Support networks provide both material resources and social legitimacy, encompassing traditional structures such as village headmen and community leaders, organizational connections through local government institutions, and partisan ties to national political parties (Kongkirati, 2012). Conceived as structural conditions, these networks represent relational endowments candidates can draw upon, distinct from operational activation during specific campaigns.

Political and social context constitutes the fifth dimension, shaping the broader environment within which campaigns operate. National political trends, economic conditions, and social cleavages influence local electoral dynamics through interaction with local factors (Suwanmala, 2007). Comparative research further suggests that subnational electoral outcomes depend on interactions between local conditions and national political dynamics in contexts undergoing institutional transition (Eaton, 2017; Falletti, 2010).

Political Mobilization Patterns (PMP)

Political mobilization encompasses operational strategies through which candidates activate and channel electoral support. Unlike electoral success factors that represent structural capacities, mobilization patterns refer to the actions, processes, and communication channels deployed during specific campaigns to translate latent capacities into voter contact and influence.

Traditional patterns of Thai local politics often center on community leaders, particularly subdistrict headmen (*kamnan*) and village headmen (*phu yai ban*), who serve as intermediaries between candidates and voters (Scott, 1972). These local authorities command social respect rooted in their position within traditional hierarchies, and their endorsements carry substantial weight, particularly among older and rural voters who maintain strong attachments to traditional authority structures (Suwanmala, 2007).

Economic activities and the provision of assistance represent another mobilization pattern, with ongoing scholarly debate over whether such activities constitute simple vote-buying or more complex relationship-building (Hicken, 2011; Schaffer, 2007). Recent evidence suggests that effective economic mobilization involves longer-term reciprocal relationships rather than transaction-based exchanges, with candidates building reputations as community benefactors over extended periods (Banyaem et al., 2024).

Contemporary campaigns increasingly employ digital mobilization through social media platforms (Lee & Blevins, 2025). Comparative research demonstrates that digital technologies enable direct candidate-voter communication and facilitate volunteer coordination (Boulianne, 2020; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021), with effectiveness varying substantially across demographic segments (Chayawong, 2021; Tucker et al., 2017). Digital and traditional channels increasingly operate in complementary rather than substitutive fashion (Kreiss, 2016).

Additional mobilization patterns include networks through other local government organizations, national political party connections, and business groups offering financial support within specific economic sectors (Phatarametravorakul et al., 2023). These patterns reflect the diversification of mobilization strategies in contemporary Thai subnational politics.

Voting Behavior Change (VBC)

Voting behavior encompasses multiple dimensions extending beyond simple turnout or vote choice. The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) posits that behavior results from attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, shaped by information exposure and social interactions. In electoral contexts, this framework translates into pre-election information-seeking, election-day behaviors, information-dissemination activities, post-election engagement, and technology-mediated participation (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Boulianne, 2020).

Research on Thai electoral behavior reveals an evolution from purely clientelist patterns toward more complex decision-making that incorporates policy evaluation and civic-duty considerations (Pannarai & Maneekarn, 2022). Comparative work in Southeast Asia documents similar trends, with subnational electorates exhibiting growing programmatic awareness even where patronage structures persist (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). However, how mobilization efforts shape these multidimensional behavioral responses remains underdeveloped, as most studies examine isolated behaviors rather than comprehensive behavioral change across the electoral cycle.

Conceptual distinction between electoral success factors and mobilization patterns

A clear conceptual distinction between electoral success factors and political mobilization patterns is essential for analytical precision when modeling reciprocal relationships, reducing the risk of construct overlap and clarifying the theoretical logic of bidirectional pathways.

Electoral success factors are conceptualized as antecedent structural conditions that reflect what candidates possess: personal characteristics, policy positions, resource endowments, support-network ties, and contextual circumstances. These dimensions are relatively stable across short time horizons and shape the possibilities for campaign action rather than constituting campaign action itself. Political mobilization patterns, by contrast, are conceptualized as operational activation processes reflecting what candidates do: specific activities undertaken through community leaders, social media platforms, economic assistance, local government channels, party networks, and business groups. These patterns are observable behaviors that occur during the active campaign period and can be adjusted strategically.

This distinction supports three analytical implications: the two constructs remain empirically distinct despite being theoretically related; the distinction provides logical justification for both forward and feedback pathways, in which structural conditions enable activation while successful activation may strengthen subsequent perceptions of campaign capacity; and the distinction implies that the two pathways need not operate symmetrically, since structural conditions are likely to be more stable than activation processes. This asymmetry is examined within the analytical model and revisited in the Discussion.

Mediation mechanisms and reciprocal dynamics

Mediation theory proposes that relationships between distal causes and outcomes operate substantially through intermediate mechanisms rather than solely through direct pathways (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Applied to electoral contexts, this framework suggests that success factors influence voting behavior in part through their effects on mobilization processes, with partial rather than complete mediation more commonly observed (Hayes, 2022). Contemporary methodological scholarship has refined mediation analysis through causal mediation frameworks that explicitly model the assumptions required for valid inference (Imai et al., 2010, 2011), emphasizing that cross-sectional designs constrain the strength of mediation inferences. The present study therefore interprets mediation findings as patterns consistent with theoretical expectations rather than as definitive causal evidence.

Dynamic campaign models emphasize feedback mechanisms and reciprocal causation, challenging linear frameworks (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). The rationale for a feedback pathway from mobilization patterns to electoral success factors draws on two complementary perspectives. From a resource mobilization perspective (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), successful mobilization activities generate visible signals of organizational capacity that may attract additional resources, volunteers, and endorsements. From an organizational feedback perspective (Tilly, 1978), social and political organizations adapt iteratively to operational outcomes, with early performance shaping resources and legitimacy available for subsequent action. Applied to electoral competition, these perspectives suggest that early mobilization success may generate reinforcing benefits, in which visible endorsements and supporter engagement signal viability and attract further resources.

While recent research has examined electoral mobilization and political engagement in digital contexts (Choomsook et al., 2024; Vaccari, 2017), comprehensive models that simultaneously test direct, mediated, and bidirectional relationships remain rare, particularly for subnational elections in consolidating democracies. Two methodological considerations warrant attention: bidirectional associations identified through cross-sectional SEM are best interpreted as patterns consistent with theoretical expectations rather than as confirmation of temporal causal sequence; and survey-based SEM designs are susceptible to common method variance, which can inflate observed associations when predictors and outcomes are measured through the same self-report instrument (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012).

Research gaps and study contributions

Three substantive gaps in existing scholarship motivate this study. First, research has predominantly examined electoral success factors and mobilization patterns as separate phenomena, with limited investigation of how the two interact through mediation and reciprocal pathways. Second, prior research has largely assumed a unidirectional causal relationship from campaign inputs to voter behavior outputs, neglecting potential feedback dynamics. Third, the application of advanced analytical techniques to model such complex pathways remains limited in subnational electoral research, particularly in Southeast Asian contexts, despite the expansion of comparative scholarship on subnational politics following decentralization reforms (Eaton, 2017; Falleti, 2010).

This study addresses these gaps with three distinguishing features: the model specifies interconnections among success factors, mobilization patterns, and voting behavior through

direct, indirect, and reciprocal pathways; it incorporates bidirectional pathways while explicitly acknowledging that the two directions need not exhibit equivalent strength; and it employs structural equation modeling to simultaneously estimate multiple relationships while accounting for measurement error.

Beyond confirming existing frameworks, the study seeks to extend them by proposing an asymmetric reciprocity framework in which campaign capacity and mobilization activation are reciprocally related but to differing degrees, reflecting differential stability between structural conditions and operational processes. The study also contributes to broader debates in population and social studies by examining how traditional authority structures, digital communication, and institutional networks jointly shape political participation in decentralizing societies.

Research hypotheses development

Building on the theoretical framework synthesizing mediation theory, resource mobilization perspectives, and dynamic campaign models, this study tests four hypotheses, framed as expected associations rather than definitive causal claims, given the cross-sectional design.

H1: Electoral success factors are positively associated with voting behavior change, reflecting voters' direct evaluation of campaign fundamentals.

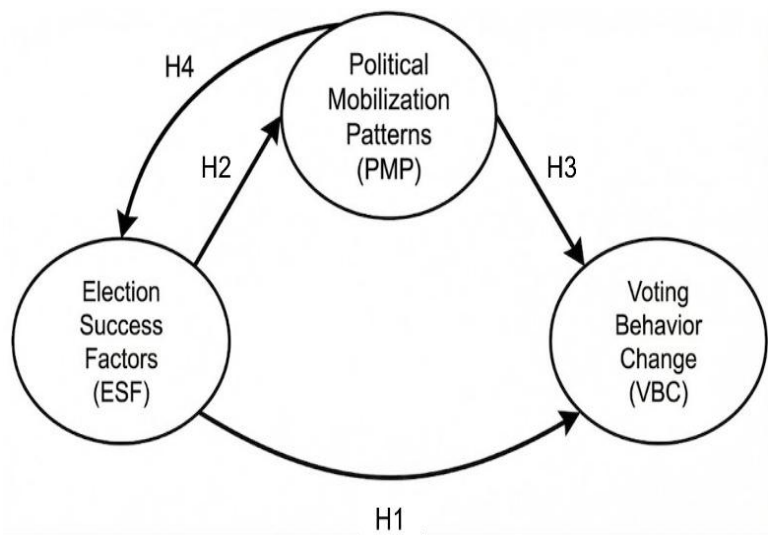
H2: Electoral success factors are positively associated with political mobilization patterns, reflecting the role of structural capacity in enabling operational activation.

H3: Political mobilization patterns are positively associated with voting behavior change, indicating that mobilization processes serve as proximal mechanisms through which campaign capacity translates into voter response. Considered jointly with H1 and H2, this specifies a partial mediation pattern.

H4: Political mobilization patterns are positively associated with electoral success factors, suggestive of reciprocal dynamics. Drawing on the conceptual distinction between structural conditions and operational processes, this pathway is expected to be observable but weaker than the forward pathway specified in H2, since structural conditions are likely to exhibit greater stability than operational activation. This expectation of asymmetric reciprocity is examined empirically and revisited in the Discussion.

Figure 1 presents the hypothesized structural model.

Figure 1: Hypothesized Structural Model



Methodology

Research design and sample

This quantitative study examined electoral mechanisms in the 2025 Surat Thani PAO chief executive election using survey data from 430 eligible voters selected through multi-stage probability sampling from a population of 935,896 voters across 19 districts (Bureau of Registration Administration, Department of Provincial Administration, 2025). The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) formula at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, yielding a minimum required sample of 384. To account for potential incomplete responses and data-collection errors, the sample size was increased by approximately 10% to 423 and rounded to 430 respondents to facilitate proportional allocation across the 19 districts.

The multi-stage sampling procedure comprised four stages. First, proportional stratified sampling was applied at the district level, with the sample allocated across all 19 districts in proportion to the number of eligible voters in each district. Second, subdistricts within each district were selected using systematic random sampling. Third, villages or communities within the selected subdistricts were chosen through simple random sampling. Finally, respondents within the selected villages or communities were selected using proportional stratified random sampling, with gender and age groups used as the principal strata. This procedure was designed to ensure broad geographic coverage and demographic diversity across Surat Thani Province.

Data were collected through face-to-face structured questionnaires administered by trained research assistants during August 2025, approximately six months after the February 1, 2025 election. This post-electoral data collection window was selected to enable comprehensive measurement of the full electoral behavioral cycle, including post-election engagement behaviors such as following election results, monitoring the elected candidate’s performance, and ongoing political evaluation. Collecting data after the complete behavioral cycle had unfolded ensured that all five dimensions of voting behavior change, including post-election behavior, could be measured authentically rather than projected prospectively. The six-month

interval also helped reduce immediate post-election emotional reactions that can bias retrospective evaluations of campaign exposure (Bartels, 2002; Wlezien et al., 1997), although the implications of this design choice for recall-based measurement are addressed in the Limitations section.

The research protocol received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Sirindhorn College of Public Health Yala (Approval No. SCPHYLIRB-2568/413), with all participants providing informed consent and strict confidentiality maintained throughout the study.

Measurement

Three latent constructs were measured through multiple observed indicators using five-point Likert scales, with anchors adapted to each construct's evaluative focus.

Election Success Factors (ESF) consisted of 25 items distributed across five dimensions of five items each, using a five-point agreement scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items across the five dimensions include: "The candidate possesses knowledge, ability, and experience in local administration" (candidate characteristics); "The candidate's support network is strong and covers all areas" (support networks); "The candidate's policies are distinctive and responsive to citizens' needs for provincial development" (policy and campaigning); "The candidate manages teams and volunteers effectively" (resource management); and "Public expectations for local change influence electoral decisions" (political and social context).

Political Mobilization Patterns (PMP) included 30 items distributed across six mobilization strategies, with five items each, using a five-point intensity scale from 1 (*lowest intensity*) to 5 (*highest intensity*). Sample items across the six patterns include: "The candidate receives support from municipal mayors and subdistrict administrative organization chiefs in the area" (local government organization networks); "Community leaders and village headmen play an important role in encouraging residents to vote" (community leaders); "The candidate receives financial or resource support from local business groups" (business groups); "The candidate is a member of, or formally supported by, a national political party" (national party networks); "The candidate regularly donates funds or goods to communities, temples, and educational institutions" (economic activities and assistance); and "The candidate creates supporter groups and networks through social media platforms such as Facebook and LINE to mobilize support" (social media).

Voting Behavior Change (VBC) contained 25 items distributed across five behavioral dimensions of five items each, using a five-point change scale from 1 (*lowest change*) to 5 (*greatest change*). Sample items across the five dimensions include: "You followed news and information about candidates more regularly" (pre-election behavior); "You took more care in considering candidates on the ballot" (election day behavior); "You shared more election-related information through social media" (information dissemination); "You followed the work and administration of the elected candidate more closely" (post-election behavior); and "You used social media platforms to search for information about candidates more frequently" (digital technology use).

Content validity was verified by three experts in political science, local governance, and research methodology using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977), yielding IOC indices ranging from 0.66 to 1.00, with all items exceeding the

0.50 acceptance threshold. Following expert review and item refinement, the revised questionnaire was pilot-tested with 30 individuals in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province who had characteristics similar to the target sample. Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with 0.70 adopted as the minimum acceptable criterion. The resulting Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.94 for Election Success Factors (ESF), 0.92 for Political Mobilization Patterns (PMP), and 0.90 for Voting Behavior Change (VBC).

Measurement model assessment

Reliability and convergent validity were assessed through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE), with all values exceeding recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2010). Table 1 summarizes these results.

Table 1: Measurement Model Assessment and Reliability Analysis

Variable	Items	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$
Election Success Factors (ESF)	25	0.94	0.94	0.72	0.85
Political Mobilization Patterns (PMP)	30	0.92	0.93	0.66	0.81
Voting Behavior Change (VBC)	25	0.90	0.91	0.61	0.78

Note: CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ = square root of AVE; All values exceed recommended thresholds (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.70$, CR ≥ 0.70 , AVE ≥ 0.50). Factor loadings ranged from 0.68 to 0.94 (all $p < .001$).

Discriminant validity was assessed using two complementary approaches. The Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) was satisfied, as all $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ values exceeded the corresponding inter-construct correlations (Table 2).

Table 2: Discriminant Validity Assessment (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

	ESF	PMP	VBC
ESF	0.85		
PMP	0.73	0.81	
VBC	0.68	0.64	0.78

Note: Diagonal elements (in bold) are $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$; off-diagonal elements are correlations between latent constructs.

The more stringent heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler et al., 2015) was additionally computed to address methodological concerns regarding the conservativeness of the Fornell-Larcker criterion. All HTMT ratios fell below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Table 3), providing robust confirmation that the three constructs are empirically distinct and supporting the conceptual distinction between electoral success factors and mobilization patterns elaborated in the Literature Review.

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT)

	ESF	PMP	VBC
ESF	-		
PMP	0.79	-	
VBC	0.74	0.71	-

Note: HTMT values below 0.85 indicate satisfactory discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Common method bias assessment

Because data were collected using a single self-report instrument administered at a single time point, the analysis incorporated diagnostic procedures for common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012). Procedurally, the questionnaire separated the three constructs into distinct sections with different evaluative anchors (agreement, intensity, change), interspersed items measuring different constructs, and guaranteed respondent anonymity. Statistically, Harman's single-factor test (Harman, 1976), performed through exploratory factor analysis with all 80 items loaded onto a single unrotated factor, indicated that the single factor explained 32.4% of total variance, well below the conservative 50% threshold.

A common latent factor (CLF) approach, implemented within the confirmatory factor analysis framework, indicated that the common method factor accounted for 18.2% of the variance in the indicators on average. Taken together, these diagnostics suggest that common method variance was not dominant in the data. Nevertheless, these procedures cannot fully rule out the possibility that shared method variance may have inflated some of the observed associations, particularly given the use of a single self-report instrument and the specification of a bidirectional model. The structural results are therefore interpreted with appropriate caution.

Data analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS 26.0 with maximum likelihood estimation. Analysis proceeded through five stages: confirmatory factor analysis to assess measurement model adequacy; common method bias diagnostics as described above; initial structural model specification incorporating hypothesized direct (H1: ESF → VBC), forward (H2: ESF → PMP), mediation (H3: PMP → VBC), and feedback (H4: PMP → ESF) paths; model refinement based on theoretically justified adjustments to error covariances; and multi-group invariance testing across demographic subgroups. Model fit was assessed using multiple indices with established cutoff criteria (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2016): CFI ≥ 0.90, TLI ≥ 0.90, RMSEA ≤ 0.08, $\chi^2/df \leq 3.0$, and SRMR ≤ 0.08. Standardized path coefficients (β) indicated association magnitude and direction. Direct, indirect (calculated as the products of relevant path coefficients), and total effects were computed to decompose pathways, and the statistical significance of indirect effects was assessed using both the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) and bootstrap resampling with 5,000 iterations (Hayes, 2022). Statistical assumptions, including normality (Mardia's coefficient < 5.0; Mardia, 1970) and the absence of multicollinearity (VIF < 5.0), were verified, with missing data (< 2%) handled using full-information maximum likelihood estimation.

Multi-group invariance testing

To evaluate whether measurement and structural relationships operated consistently across demographic subgroups, multi-group invariance testing was conducted using the sequential procedure recommended in the literature (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Three demographic dimensions were examined: age (≤ 40 vs. > 40), education (below bachelor's vs. bachelor's and above), and residence duration (< 20 years vs. ≥ 20 years, including those born in Surat Thani).

Three sequential models were estimated for each demographic dimension: the configural model imposed no equality constraints and served as the baseline; the metric (weak) invariance model constrained factor loadings to be equal across groups; and the scalar (strong)

invariance model additionally constrained intercepts. Invariance was evaluated using $\Delta CFI \leq 0.01$ and $\Delta RMSEA \leq 0.015$, which are regarded as more reliable than chi-square difference tests in large samples (Chen, 2007; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Table 4 summarizes the results.

Table 4: Multi-Group Invariance Testing Results

Model	χ^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	ΔCFI	$\Delta RMSEA$	Decision
Age (≤ 40 vs. > 40)							
Configural	1,847.3	862	0.918	0.060	-	-	Baseline
Metric	1,876.5	891	0.917	0.060	0.001	0.000	Supported
Scalar	1,912.8	920	0.916	0.060	0.001	0.000	Supported
Education (Below BA vs. BA+)							
Configural	1,851.6	862	0.917	0.061	-	-	Baseline
Metric	1,883.4	891	0.916	0.061	0.001	0.000	Supported
Scalar	1,924.7	920	0.914	0.061	0.002	0.000	Supported
Residence (< 20 yrs vs. ≥ 20 yrs)							
Configural	1,843.9	862	0.919	0.060	-	-	Baseline
Metric	1,873.1	891	0.918	0.060	0.001	0.000	Supported
Scalar	1,909.5	920	0.917	0.060	0.001	0.000	Supported

Note: $\Delta CFI \leq 0.01$ and $\Delta RMSEA \leq 0.015$ indicate invariance is supported (Chen, 2007; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

Across all three demographic dimensions, configural, metric, and scalar invariance were supported, indicating that the measurement model operated equivalently and that comparisons of latent constructs can be made meaningfully across subgroups. Subsequent structural invariance testing assessed whether path coefficients differed across subgroups; results are reported in the Results section.

Results

Sample characteristics

The sample consisted of 430 eligible voters drawn from all 19 districts of Surat Thani Province. As shown in Table 5, 53.02% of respondents were female, 39.07% were aged 41–59 years, 35.35% held a bachelor's degree, and 29.77% were employed in the private sector. The largest income group earned 10,001–20,000 baht per month (32.33%), while 57.44% were born and raised in Surat Thani. In addition, 84.88% of respondents reported voting in the February 1, 2025 PAO election. Overall, the sample covered diverse demographic and socioeconomic groups and all 19 districts of the province.

Table 5: Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents ($N = 430$)

Characteristic	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	199	46.28
	Female	228	53.02
	Not specified	3	0.70
Age	18–25 years	45	10.46
	26–40 years	135	31.40
	41–59 years	168	39.07
	60 years and above	82	19.07

Characteristic	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Education	Primary education or below	20	4.65
	Lower secondary education	71	16.51
	Upper secondary/vocational certificate	98	22.79
	Diploma/higher vocational certificate	54	12.56
	Bachelor's degree	152	35.35
	Above bachelor's degree	35	8.14
Occupation	Government/state enterprise employee	82	19.07
	Private-sector employee	128	29.77
	Self-employed/business owner	97	22.56
	Agriculture	63	14.65
	Student	28	6.51
	Unemployed	10	2.33
	Other	22	5.12
Monthly income	Below 10,000 baht	86	20.00
	10,001–20,000 baht	139	32.33
	20,001–30,000 baht	118	27.44
	30,001–40,000 baht	52	12.09
	40,001 baht and above	35	8.14
Residence in Surat Thani	Less than 1 year	4	0.93
	1–5 years	15	3.49
	6–10 years	28	6.51
	11–20 years	47	10.93
	More than 20 years	89	20.70
	Born and raised in Surat Thani	247	57.44
Participation in the 2025 PAO election	Voted	365	84.88
	Did not vote	65	15.12

Measurement model evaluation

Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that all standardized factor loadings exceeded 0.60, ranging from 0.68 to 0.94 (all $p < .001$). Composite reliability ranged from 0.91 to 0.94 and average variance extracted from 0.61 to 0.72, all exceeding recommended thresholds and supporting convergent validity (Table 1). Discriminant validity was supported under both the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table 2) and the more stringent HTMT criterion (Table 3), with all HTMT ratios below the conservative 0.85 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015).

The measurement model demonstrated acceptable fit (CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.062, $\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.28$, SRMR = 0.055). Modification indices indicated several theoretically justifiable covariances among error terms within constructs, reflecting shared variance among indicators that measure related aspects of the same dimension. Specifying these covariances improved fit to CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.058, $\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.14$, supporting progression to structural model testing.

Common method bias diagnostics

Harman's single-factor test indicated that a single unrotated factor accounted for 32.4% of total variance across all 80 items, well below the conservative 50% threshold (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A common latent factor (CLF) approach, implemented within the confirmatory factor analysis framework, indicated that the common method factor accounted for 18.2% of the variance in the indicators on average. Taken together, Harman's single-factor and CLF diagnostics suggest that

common method variance was not dominant in the data. Nevertheless, these procedures cannot fully rule out the possibility that shared method variance may have inflated some of the observed associations, particularly given the use of a single self-report instrument and the specification of a bidirectional model. The structural results, especially the relatively high explained variance values reported below, are therefore interpreted with appropriate caution.

Structural model results

The final structural model demonstrated acceptable fit across all indices (Table 6), supporting the overall theoretical specification.

Table 6: Structural Equation Model Fit Indices

Index	Obtained Value	Recommended Cutoff	Interpretation
CFI	0.92	≥ 0.90	Acceptable
TLI	0.91	≥ 0.90	Acceptable
RMSEA	0.058	≤ 0.08	Acceptable
CMIN/DF	2.14	≤ 3.0	Acceptable
SRMR	0.051	≤ 0.08	Acceptable

Note: Fit indices indicate that the hypothesized model adequately represents the observed covariance structure.

Path coefficient analysis revealed statistically significant associations across all four hypothesized pathways (Table 7). Electoral success factors were strongly associated with political mobilization patterns ($\beta = 0.78$, $p < .001$), supporting H2 and consistent with the theoretical expectation that stronger structural conditions are associated with more intensive mobilization activation. Political mobilization patterns were significantly associated with changes in voting behavior ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < .001$), supporting H3. Electoral success factors were also directly associated with changes in voting behavior ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < .001$), supporting H1 and indicating partial rather than complete mediation. The reciprocal pathway from political mobilization patterns to electoral success factors was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .001$), supporting H4. Notably, this feedback pathway was substantially weaker than the forward pathway ($\beta = 0.78$ vs. $\beta = 0.31$), a pattern consistent with the asymmetric reciprocity framework proposed in the Literature Review.

Table 7: Standardized Path Coefficients and Significance Tests

Hypothesis	Path	β	SE	t-value	p value	95% CI	Result
H2	ESF $\rightarrow$ PMP	0.78	0.042	18.45	$< .001$	[0.70, 0.86]	Supported
H3	PMP $\rightarrow$ VBC	0.52	0.042	12.37	$< .001$	[0.44, 0.60]	Supported
H1	ESF $\rightarrow$ VBC	0.45	0.039	11.54	$< .001$	[0.37, 0.53]	Supported
H4	PMP $\rightarrow$ ESF	0.31	0.038	8.16	$< .001$	[0.23, 0.39]	Supported

Note: ESF = Election Success Factors; PMP = Political Mobilization Patterns; VBC = Voting Behavior Change. Reciprocal path coefficients are interpreted as associations consistent with bidirectional dynamics rather than as direct evidence of temporal causal sequence, given the cross-sectional design.

Decomposition of effects

Decomposition of total effects revealed multiple pathways through which electoral success factors were associated with changes in voting behavior (Table 8). The total association ($\beta = 0.86$) decomposed into substantial direct effects ($\beta = 0.45$, 52% of total) and nearly equal indirect effects ($\beta = 0.41$, 48% of total) operating through mobilization mediation. The Sobel test confirmed the statistical significance of the indirect pathway ($z = 11.85$, $p < .001$), and bootstrap resampling with 5,000 iterations produced a bias-corrected 95% confidence interval of [0.34, 0.48] that did not include zero, supporting the robustness of the mediation finding.

Table 8: Decomposition of Effects: Electoral Success Factors on Voting Behavior Change

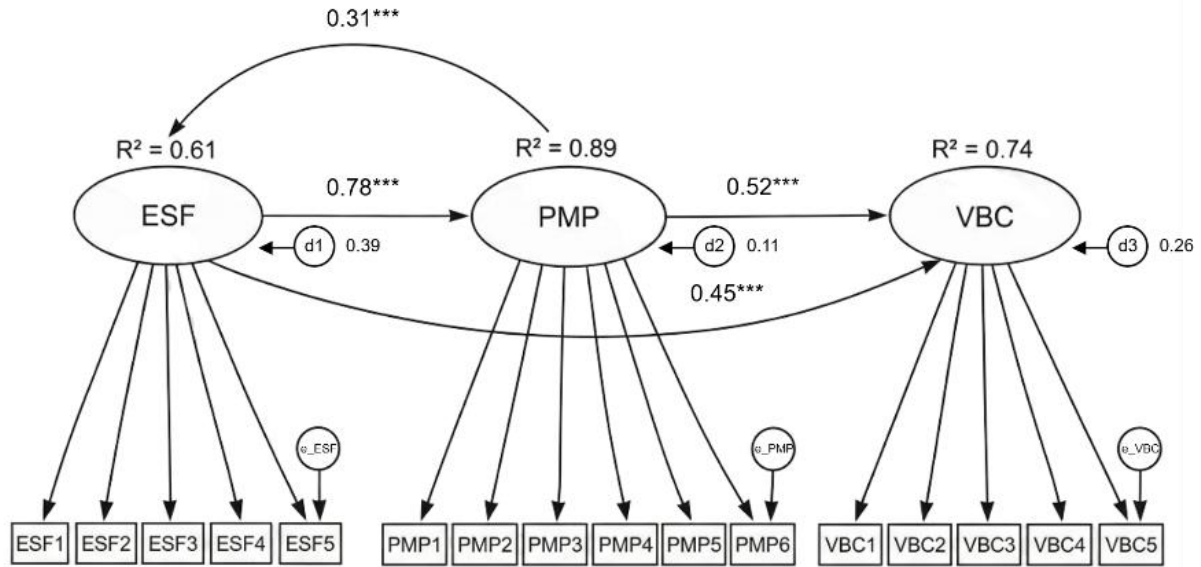
Effect Type	Coefficient	SE	<i>p</i> value	% of Total	Interpretation
Direct (ESF→VBC)	0.45	0.039	< .001	52%	Unmediated association
Indirect (ESF→PMP→VBC)	0.41	0.034	< .001	48%	Association mediated through mobilization
Total	0.86	0.028	< .001	100%	Combined pathways

Note: Indirect effect calculated as $\beta(\text{ESF} \rightarrow \text{PMP}) \times \beta(\text{PMP} \rightarrow \text{VBC}) = 0.78 \times 0.52 = 0.41$; Standard errors for the indirect effect were calculated using the Sobel test ($z = 11.85$, $p < .001$), with bootstrap bias-corrected 95% CI [0.34, 0.48] confirming significance under non-normality assumptions.

The model accounted for substantial variance in endogenous constructs ($R^2 = 0.89$ for PMP, $R^2 = 0.74$ for VBC, $R^2 = 0.61$ for ESF). These values exceed levels typically reported in electoral research and warrant careful interpretation. The comprehensive model specification integrates multiple theoretically interconnected pathways (direct, indirect, and reciprocal) that capture multiple sources of variance simultaneously, in contrast with single-equation regression. The latent construct approach used in SEM corrects for measurement error, which typically yields larger structural coefficients.

The reciprocal pathway also introduces variance shared between predictors and outcomes, contributing to the elevated R^2 for electoral success factors. Despite diagnostic evidence indicating that common method variance is unlikely to constitute a serious threat (32.4% Harman's single-factor variance; 18.2% CLF variance), the use of self-report data through a single instrument cannot fully exclude method-related contributions to the observed magnitudes. The Discussion section returns to this issue and interprets these findings with appropriate caution.

Figure 2 presents the final structural model showing all significant pathways with standardized coefficients.

Figure 2: Final Structural Equation Model with Standardized Path Coefficients

Note: Solid arrows represent significant standardized path coefficients. $d1$, $d2$, and $d3$ represent disturbance terms for ESF, PMP, and VBC, with values indicating unexplained variance ($1 - R^2$). The asymmetry between the forward pathway ($ESF \rightarrow PMP$, $\beta = 0.78$) and the feedback pathway ($PMP \rightarrow ESF$, $\beta = 0.31$) is consistent with the asymmetric reciprocity framework. Bidirectional associations are interpreted as patterns consistent with reciprocal dynamics rather than as direct evidence of a temporal causal sequence. Model Fit: CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.058, $\chi^2/df = 2.14$. *** $p < .001$.

Multi-group invariance results

Multi-group invariance testing evaluated whether the measurement and structural relationships operated consistently across three demographic dimensions. As reported in the Methodology section (Table 4), configural, metric, and scalar invariance were supported across all three dimensions (all $\Delta CFI \leq 0.002$; all $\Delta RMSEA \leq 0.001$), indicating equivalent measurement and supporting meaningful comparisons of latent constructs across subgroups.

Subsequent structural invariance testing evaluated whether the four hypothesized path coefficients differed across subgroups. Chi-square difference tests comparing freely estimated versus equality-constrained structural models yielded no statistically significant differences across age ($\Delta\chi^2[4] = 5.82$, $p = .213$), education ($\Delta\chi^2[4] = 4.97$, $p = .290$), or residence duration ($\Delta\chi^2[4] = 6.14$, $p = .189$). These results indicate that the hypothesized electoral mechanisms operate consistently across demographic subgroups, with comparable magnitudes of direct, indirect, and reciprocal associations regardless of voter age, education, or duration of residence, strengthening confidence in the generalizability of findings within the studied population.

Supplementary analyses

Bootstrap resampling with 5,000 iterations confirmed the stability of the parameter estimates. The $ESF \rightarrow PMP$ path showed bootstrap $\beta = 0.77$ (95% CI [0.69, 0.85]); $PMP \rightarrow VBC$ showed $\beta = 0.51$ (95% CI [0.43, 0.59]); $ESF \rightarrow VBC$ showed $\beta = 0.45$ (95% CI [0.37, 0.53]); and

PMP → ESF showed $\beta = 0.30$ (95% CI [0.22, 0.38]). All bootstrap estimates fell within narrow confidence intervals consistent with the original analysis. Standardized residual examination revealed no systematic misfits, with all residuals within ± 2.58 , supporting the adequacy of the structural model despite the methodological caveats articulated above.

Discussion

This study examined the mechanisms by which electoral success factors are associated with changes in voting behavior, with attention to the mediating role of political mobilization patterns and the potential for reciprocal dynamics. Four principal findings emerged: electoral success factors were associated with voting behavior both directly and indirectly through mobilization, with the two pathways contributing nearly equally; the forward pathway from success factors to mobilization was substantially stronger than the feedback pathway, indicating asymmetric rather than symmetric reciprocity; the model accounted for high proportions of variance across endogenous constructs, warranting careful interpretation as discussed below; and the modeled relationships operated consistently across demographic subgroups.

Mediation mechanisms in electoral processes

The results are consistent with the mediation hypothesis, indicating an indirect association between electoral success factors and changes in voting behavior. The substantial indirect effect ($\beta = 0.41$, 48% of total) indicates that structural conditions are associated with voting behavior to a considerable extent through activation via campaign networks and communication channels, aligning with mediation theory predictions (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Hayes, 2022) while extending their application to subnational electoral contexts in consolidating democracies. Several processes plausibly underlie this pattern. Candidates with stronger structural conditions may leverage these advantages to recruit community leaders as endorsers, sustain social media presence, and conduct economic assistance activities that demonstrate commitment and build reciprocal relationships.

Each mobilization pattern thus represents one pathway through which latent structural capacity becomes operational engagement with voters.

The substantial direct effect ($\beta = 0.45$, 52% of the total) indicates that voters' responses are associated with candidate and campaign qualities even after accounting for mobilization intensity, suggesting that voter evaluation extends beyond contact frequency to a substantive assessment of candidate integrity, policy relevance, and administrative competence. These patterns are consistent with arguments that voter decision-making in Thai subnational elections extends beyond purely clientelist considerations (Pannarai & Maneekarn, 2022). However, the cross-sectional design precludes definitive claims about temporal evolution. The near-equal magnitudes of direct and indirect effects further suggest that successful campaigns require both strong structural conditions and effective mobilization execution (Phatarametravarakul et al., 2023).

Asymmetric reciprocity as a theoretical refinement

The statistically significant feedback pathway ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .001$) is consistent with dynamic campaign models that propose reciprocal causation challenging linear frameworks (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). However, the more substantively important finding concerns the asymmetry between forward and feedback pathways: the forward pathway from electoral success factors to mobilization ($\beta = 0.78$) was more than twice the magnitude of the feedback pathway from mobilization to success factors ($\beta = 0.31$), constituting a refinement of existing dynamic campaign models that typically posit reciprocal relationships without specifying the relative strength of opposing pathways.

Two theoretical perspectives illuminate this asymmetry. From a resource mobilization perspective (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), structural conditions such as candidate characteristics, established support networks, and accumulated resources represent durable organizational capacities developed over extended time horizons that are not easily reshaped by short-term mobilization activities. From an organizational feedback perspective (Tilly, 1978), social and political organizations adapt iteratively to operational outcomes, but the adaptation of structural features typically lags behind activation of operational processes. Applied to electoral competition, these perspectives suggest that candidates cannot easily reshape fundamental traits or accumulated networks during a single campaign cycle. However, they can adjust mobilization strategies in response to emerging conditions.

This asymmetric reciprocity framework refines existing campaign theory by conceptualizing electoral competition as involving differentially stable elements that exhibit reciprocal but unequal influence. Drawing on mechanisms of resource accumulation and organizational adaptation that operate across diverse electoral contexts, the framework offers potential generalizability beyond Thai subnational politics. Methodologically, the asymmetry also underscores the value of SEM for representing complex electoral processes, as approaches that treat success factors as exogenous or that treat reciprocal effects as symmetric would obscure the substantive difference between structural stability and operational fluidity.

Comparative mobilization effectiveness

While the overall mobilization construct was substantially associated with voting behavior ($\beta = 0.52$), constituent patterns varied in their observed intensity. Community leader networks showed the highest mean intensity ($M = 4.15$), consistent with findings regarding the durability of traditional authority in Thai politics (Scott, 1972; Suwanmala, 2007). Social media mobilization ranked second ($M = 3.94$), suggesting that digital channels are emerging as substantial components of subnational campaign repertoires alongside traditional approaches (Boulianne, 2020; Lee & Blevins, 2025).

Economic activities maintained moderate intensity ($M = 3.89$), consistent with arguments that effective economic mobilization increasingly involves relationship-building rather than transactional exchange (Banyaem et al., 2024; Hicken, 2011). National party networks and business groups showed lower observed intensity, indicating that PAO elections in this context remain primarily local affairs. These patterns are consistent with comparative research documenting the persistence of traditional authority structures alongside the increasing prominence of digital channels in Southeast Asian subnational politics (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Kreiss, 2016).

Critical reflection on explained variance and methodological considerations

The model accounted for a high proportion of variance in the endogenous constructs ($R^2 = 0.89$ for mobilization, $R^2 = 0.74$ for voting behavior, $R^2 = 0.61$ for electoral success factors). These values exceed levels typically reported in electoral research and warrant explicit critical reflection. Three factors plausibly contribute to the magnitude of explained variance. The comprehensive model specification integrates multiple theoretically interconnected pathways (direct, indirect, and reciprocal) that capture multiple sources of variance simultaneously, whereas single-equation regression typically yields lower R^2 values. The latent construct approach used in SEM corrects for measurement error, typically yielding larger structural coefficients than approaches that assume perfect measurement reliability. The reciprocal pathway also introduces variance shared between predictors and outcomes, contributing to elevated R^2 for electoral success factors.

Beyond these substantive contributions, self-report data collected with a single instrument cannot fully rule out the possibility that shared method variance contributes to the observed magnitudes. Although diagnostic procedures (Harman's single-factor test = 32.4%; common latent factor variance = 18.2%) indicate that common method variance is unlikely to constitute a serious threat (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012), these procedures cannot fully rule out method effects. The high R^2 values are therefore best interpreted as indicators that the comprehensive structural model captures a substantial portion of systematic variation, rather than as evidence that subnational electoral dynamics are nearly fully explained. Future research employing multi-method measurement and longitudinal designs would help disentangle substantive from method-related variance.

Theoretical contributions

The study contributes to electoral research in three respects that go beyond confirming existing frameworks. First, the asymmetric reciprocity framework refines dynamic campaign models by specifying that reciprocal pathways between structural conditions and operational activation need not be equally strong. While Rosenstone and Hansen's (1993) dynamic campaign model and subsequent scholarship have proposed reciprocal effects, the relative magnitudes of the forward and feedback pathways have rarely been empirically estimated and theoretically articulated. The current findings suggest asymmetry is itself a substantive feature of electoral dynamics, reflecting differential stability between durable structural elements and fluid operational processes.

Second, the study advances the application of causal mediation frameworks (Imai et al., 2010, 2011) to subnational electoral research in consolidating democracies. By systematically decomposing direct and indirect effects, it illustrates how mediation analysis can illuminate the proximal mechanisms through which distal structural conditions are associated with behavioral outcomes, while modeling a methodologically responsible interpretive stance that treats mediation findings as patterns consistent with theoretical expectations rather than as causal evidence.

Third, the study contributes a clear conceptual distinction between electoral success factors as antecedent structural conditions and political mobilization patterns as operational activation processes, addressing a recurring source of conceptual ambiguity in electoral research. This

distinction provides a logical foundation for testing reciprocal pathways without conflating constructs.

Implications for population and social studies

Beyond narrowly defined electoral research, the findings inform broader debates in population and social studies on how micro-level political behavior is shaped by intersecting social structures in decentralizing societies. The coexistence of traditional authority structures, digital communication channels, and institutional networks within a single behavioral system reflects the layered character of contemporary political participation in transitional societies, consistent with hybrid patterns in which multiple social structures jointly shape participation rather than displacement of older forms by newer ones. This pattern resonates with broader observations about social change in Southeast Asia, where modernization processes typically supplement rather than supplant traditional institutions.

The demographic invariance of the modeled relationships across age, education, and residence duration suggests that underlying behavioral mechanisms operate consistently across population segments, pointing to underlying behavioral logics that transcend conventional demographic boundaries, while leaving open the possibility that the specific content of mobilization varies across segments in ways not captured by the structural model. The findings further highlight the analytical value of treating subnational political behavior as a substantive object of study within population and social research, as decentralization reforms have created subnational arenas with significant political and fiscal authority.

Practical implications

For political practitioners, the findings suggest that successful campaigns benefit from investment in both structural conditions and mobilization capacity, given the near-equal contributions of direct and indirect pathways. Multi-channel strategies are advisable, with traditional networks remaining important alongside the increasing prominence of digital channels. The asymmetric reciprocity finding further suggests that early mobilization activities may yield secondary benefits by enhancing perceived campaign capacity. However, these feedback effects operate within constraints imposed by underlying structural conditions.

For policymakers, the findings indicate that Thai subnational electoral competition has evolved beyond purely clientelistic patterns, with voters incorporating substantive evaluation of candidate qualities and policy platforms. At the same time, the persistence of traditional mobilization channels and economic assistance activities suggests that democratic consolidation in subnational settings requires sustained institutional development beyond formal electoral reforms.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations warrant explicit acknowledgment. First, the cross-sectional design precludes definitive causal inference despite the methodological advantages of SEM, and the bidirectional pathways estimated here are best interpreted as patterns consistent with reciprocal dynamics

rather than as confirmation of temporal causal sequence. Second, data were collected approximately six months after the election to enable comprehensive measurement of the full electoral behavioral cycle, including post-election engagement. However, this design choice introduces the possibility of recall bias in respondents' reports of campaign exposure and pre-election behavior. Third, all variables were measured through self-report on a single instrument, raising the possibility of shared method variance influencing observed associations; although diagnostic procedures indicated that common method bias is unlikely to constitute a serious threat (Harman's variance = 32.4%; CLF variance = 18.2%), these procedures cannot fully exclude method effects. Fourth, the study focuses on a single electoral case in a single Thai province, which limits its generalizability to other subnational contexts, although Surat Thani's socioeconomic heterogeneity and competitive electoral environment enhance external validity within Thailand. Fifth, the three latent constructs aggregate multiple dimensions, thereby supporting comprehensive measurement but potentially masking within-construct heterogeneity.

Building on these limitations, future research could employ longitudinal panel designs with pre-election baseline and post-election follow-up measurements to strengthen causal inferences; combine self-report with behavioral observation, administrative records, and experimental manipulation to disentangle substantive from method-related variance; conduct comparative analyses across multiple provinces and countries to test the asymmetric reciprocity framework under diverse institutional conditions; disaggregate construct dimensions to identify which components drive observed relationships; investigate candidate-side strategic choices to complement the voter-side mechanisms examined here; and track the evolution of subnational electoral mechanisms as Thailand's decentralization reforms continue to develop. Such extensions would deepen understanding of the dynamic trajectory of subnational democratic consolidation in decentralizing societies.

Conclusion

This study employed structural equation modeling to examine the mechanisms through which political mobilization is associated with voting behavior in the 2025 Surat Thani PAO chief executive election. The results were consistent with a partial mediation pattern of the association between electoral success factors and changes in voting behavior, with direct and indirect pathways contributing nearly equally ($\beta = 0.45$ and $\beta = 0.41$, respectively). Reciprocal associations were also identified, with the forward pathway ($\beta = 0.78$) substantially stronger than the feedback pathway ($\beta = 0.31$), indicating an asymmetric rather than symmetric reciprocal structure. These relationships operated consistently across age, education, and residence duration subgroups, supporting the robustness of the modeled mechanisms.

The study advances three theoretical contributions. First, it proposes an asymmetric reciprocity framework in which structural conditions and operational activation are reciprocally related yet exert unequal influence, thereby refining existing dynamic campaign models that posit reciprocal effects without specifying their relative magnitudes. Second, the study illustrates the application of mediation analysis to subnational electoral research in consolidating democracies, modeling a methodologically responsible stance that treats mediation findings as patterns consistent with theoretical expectations rather than as causal evidence. Third, the study advances a clear conceptual distinction between electoral success factors, as antecedent structural conditions, and political mobilization patterns, as operational

activation processes, thereby providing a logical foundation for testing reciprocal pathways without conflating constructs.

Substantively, the results illuminate how subnational electoral competition operates in Thailand's evolving decentralized governance system. Successful campaigns appear to combine strong structural conditions with effective multi-channel mobilization, with traditional authority networks remaining important alongside the increasing prominence of digital communication channels. Economic activities and assistance remain relevant but appear insufficient without programmatic appeals, suggesting that subnational electoral competition has become a sophisticated arena where diverse strategies coexist. These patterns offer a basis for cross-national testing of the asymmetric reciprocity framework under diverse institutional conditions.

Beyond narrowly defined electoral research, the findings contribute to broader debates in population and social studies by illustrating how traditional authority structures, digital communication, and institutional networks jointly shape political participation in decentralizing societies. As Thailand's decentralization reforms continue to develop, subnational electoral arenas grow increasingly important for understanding democratic quality and the dynamics of social change in transitional societies, providing a foundation for continued investigation of how micro-level political behavior is shaped by intersecting social structures within decentralizing political systems.

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