A More Powerful Force: Examining Non-Electoral
Participation During Conflict in the Deep South of Thailand

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Abstract

The conflict areas in the southernmost provinces of Thailand--Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, and four districts of Songkhla have a long history of resistance to the authority of the Thai central government. When most people think of 'conflict', they tend to imagine a confrontation that ends with violence. Interestingly, in spite of the ongoing attacks, the local people in the conflict areas of southern Thailand do not disregard political participation. The conflict and violence act as a trigger that stimulates people's motivations to participate through non-violent means, largely due to experiencing violence and suffering. Therefore, due to concerns for the importance of political participation in the conflict area, this article would like to examine how the ongoing conflict impacts on non-electoral participation. Based on fieldwork in the Deep South of Thailand and interviews with both governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as university students and lecturers, this article found that conflict and non-electoral participation can be linked in a positive way, in which conflict and violence lead to a greater desire for meaningful political participation; and when people participate, it leads to less violence. This article also emphasizes that when non-electoral participation is interrupted by either the Thai state or the militants, it could cause hesitation to participate non-violently, which possibly contributes to more conflict and violent participation by people in the conflict area. The experiences of conflict and violence, instead of leading only to violent actions, also motivate people to be more active in politics through peaceful means as they seek to reduce suffering from the insurgent violence. While people in the conflict areas seem to have a significant increase in electoral participation which is a low-level of participation, non-electoral participation, which is a higher-level of participation, seems to have a more mixed outcome. Three modes of non-electoral participation, namely participation through the state, participation through civil society, and participation through cyber society are discussed in this article.

Keywords: non-electoral participation, peace and conflict, political participation, southern Thailand

Conflict as participation

When people think of 'conflict', a word with negative meaning, they often imagine a confrontation that ends up with violence. However, conflict or hardship may be predominantly "influential, and in an unexpected direction, a positive one" (Blattman, 2009, p. 245). The same factors that lead to conflict and violence can also

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be a pathway leading more people to peaceful political participation. There are several studies from various regions that portray similar patterns of positive effects from conflict and violence on the level of political participation[2]. They found that people who experienced violence are highly likely to participate in many more types of social and political activities than are those who experience fewer traumatic experiences of violence.

Conversely, conflict and violence can also reveal negative effects to political actions in a way that motivates aggressive political behavior, if there is evidence of state oppressive acts that obstruct personal rights and deny citizen participation. Authoritarian regime and state repressive security structures can then transform popular pubic resistance into violent armed revolution as a response to a brutal and discriminate use of force by the state. As Thoms & Ron (2007) mentioned, denial of political participation rights is linked to internal conflict. Abuses of such personal integrity rights as the inequality in accessing basic needs and political participation can be recognized as "direct conflict triggers" that lead to conflict emergence and escalation (Thoms & Ron, 2007. P. 704).

In sum, on the one hand, conflict and the state's repressive actions during a conflict can damage confidence in the political system and impede people from participation. Moreover, there is a

possibility that this condition can turn them to the use of violence as another way to preserve their political interests. On the other hand, conflict can promote the shared feeling of non-violent actions among groups of people who suffer from the conflict and want no more harm and violence in their communities. With this sense of feeling, conflict can be regarded as a more powerful force to popular participation that can turn problems into resolutions.

Objectives

The article aims to analyze non-electoral participation of people in the conflict area in order to respond to these following objectives;

1. To be able to explain how and why people participate politically during a period of conflict.

2. To be able to analyze the relations between the violence in the Thai Deep South and the level of non-electoral participation.

3. To be able to provide alternative strategies for the Thai government to cope with the violent situation in the southernmost part of Thailand in order to lessen the existing crisis tension.

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[2] For example Blattman (2009), whose research focused on war and political participation in Uganda, found that violence can lead to greater collective action and victims of violence are considerably more likely to vote and to lead in their communities. Experiencing violence increases voting among the former soldiers in Uganda. Bellows & Miguel (2006) studied war and collective action in Sierra Leone and found that individuals who directly experienced violence show higher

levels of political mobilization and engagement than non-victims. They are more likely to attend community meetings, join social and political groups, and vote. Later, Shewfelt (2009) examined social and political life after wartime trauma in Aceh, Bosnia, and among Vietnam veteran in the United States. His conclusion is similar to the former studies that individuals who experienced more extensive wartime trauma are generally more likely to participate.

Violent conflict in the Deep South of Thailand

The conflict and violence in the southernmost provinces of Thailand - Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, and the four districts of Songkhla have occurred for more than a century[3]. The area has a long history of resistance to the authority of the central government since being incorporated into the kingdom of Thailand in 1902. The takeover of the territory provoked a kind of hostility, especially among the Patani[4] elites who were loyal to the Sultans of Patani. As a result, the occupation by Siam without the mutual consent of Patani residents brought about a national security problem resulting in uprisings and violence in the former Patani, mostly led by the local elites and traditional leaders, against Siamese control. After the change from an absolute monarchy to a modern democratic form of government with a constitutional monarchy in 1932, it provided hopeful opportunities, at least another channel to convey the message to the state, for the Malay-Muslims to participate in the Thai political process.

However, the feeling of exclusion among the Malay community prevailed and was intensified when the Thai government promoted the concept of Thai-ness during the premiership of Field Marshal Plaek Phibulsongkram. The government believed that promoting a common identity of being Thai would make all minority groups in the country enhance their sense of belonging to the Thai kingdom. The sense of belonging would attach the minority groups to the country and remove any threat that they could possibly cause against the nation (Christie, 1996, p. 186). The assimilation policies, instead, caused negative attitudes towards the Thai state among the minorities, especially Malay-Muslims in the Deep South. Their pessimism was worsened by the oppressive actions of some heavy-handed, corrupt, and abusive government officials as well as some greedy and deceitful residents, both Muslims and non-Muslims, who took advantage of this vulnerable situation for their own private interests (Gowing, 1975, p. 31). Many complaints and petitions from the local Malay-Muslims concerning the unjust behavior of Thai officials were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth inciting distrustful feelings and simmering resentment during the conflict in the Muslim south (Aphornsuvan, 2004, p. 31).

After Thaksin Shinawatra came to power as prime minister of Thailand in January 2001 and employed hard-line policies as well as limited popular participation in political activities, the security situation in the Deep South of Thailand deteriorated. Among other problems, the government's declaration of a war on drugs and the decision to remove the military from its security responsibilities in the Malay-Muslim provinces and hand over authority to the police created more distrust and worsened the situation (Ockey, 2008, pp. 149-150). However, during Thaksin's first few years as prime minister, there was no sign of an increase in violence, yet tensions continued

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[3] The majority ethnic community in the southernmost provinces of Thailand - Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, and the four districts of Songkhla is Malay and their religion is Islam, whereas Thailand (then called Siam) is a Buddhist-dominant nation.

[4] "Patani" refers to the Malay Sultanate of Patani, known as Greater Patani or Patani Raya, before the annexation by Siam, which included the present provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun, and part of Songkhla. "Pattani" (with two "t") refers to the Thai province of Pattani in the present day.

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to build up quietly. In 2004, the situation deteriorated and went downhill very suddenly.

The conflict and violence in the Malay-Muslim provinces have existed for longer than the oldest living people in the South and have now become a fact of life for people in the conflict area. In the past, the conflict and violence occurred as a consequence of other factors. Nowadays, since the conflict and violence have existed for very long time, it has become a cause of other problems, not a consequence. Although the recent number of violent incidents in the Deep South seems to have decreased[5], the violence is still intense, uncontrollable, and shows no sign of ending.

Non- electoral participation during violent conflict in the Deep South

Despite the ongoing attacks in the Deep South, the local people in violent conflict areas do not disregard participation in both electoral and non-electoral activities. For electoral participation, the voter turnout rate at the national elections in 2005 and 2011 collected by the Office of the Election Commission of Thailand surprisingly shows an increasing rate of voter turnout in the southernmost area where the conflict continues[6]. Besides elections, political participation by people in the form of non-electoral activities such as interest group involvement, civil society or participation in community political activities is also rising.

There are two types of non-electoral participation, voluntary and involuntary

participation, which will be the focus of this study. Voluntary participation is a "personal willingness to participate" (Eremenko, 2011, p. 6) without being forced by laws or state authorities. Voluntary participation is, for example, participating in public hearings, sharing opinions at village meetings, organizing civil society activities, and taking part as village defence volunteers. Involuntary participation refers to forms of activities that a person is forced to engage in by laws or state authorities. Involuntary participation includes, for example, participating in trials due to being arrested, contacting state authorities to get a license, and contacting a public prosecutor in security cases. Involuntary participation may not tell us anything because this kind of participation is not a person's choice. However, involuntary participation is important as it greatly impacts on voluntary participation and vice versa. This section will then focus on both voluntary and involuntary political participation in order to inspect to what extent the ongoing conflict and violence influence political participation and interaction between the Thai state and its people in the conflict areas of the Deep South. This article divides modes of non-electoral participation into three categories, political participation through the state, political participation through civil society, and political participation through cyber society.

Political participation through the state

After Thailand changed to a new political system in 1932, modes of political

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[5] According to the Deep South Incident Database (DSID), the number of violent incidents decreased from 1,832 incidents in 2004, to 548 incidents in 2018. For the latest statistics of the Deep South unrest, see www.deepsouthwatch.org.

[6] The voter turnout rate in Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat in 2011 increased by far2.2%, 5.3%, and 6%, respectively, from the year 2005.

participation opened for broader groups of people through more participation channels provided by the state. In addition to electoral participation, Thai citizens, including the Malay-Muslims, also participated by contacting the state and its agencies. However, there were some problems ranging from cultural differences between Thai state officials and the locals to oppression from state centralization policy and government officials. Political participation through the state before 2001 thereby was not popular among the Malay-Muslims in the Lower South.

The suspicions of the Thai state towards the Malay-Muslims also impeded political participation through the state. Haji Sulong was a good example of a Malay-Muslim who tried to make contact with Thai state officials in order to increase Malay-Muslim rights and recognition. Sadly, his dedication to the greater status of the Malay-Muslims within the Thai kingdom was paid for by his death at the hands of Thai police. As Ockey (2011, p. 119) argued, "Ironically, it was his involvement in Thai politics, rather than any attempt to separate from it, that would lead to his untimely death."

Moreover, the intervention in Islamic courts and the abandonment of the Malay language and Islamic culture under the assimilation policies led to the problem of discrimination and unjust practices by the Thai state officials. These problems increased the feeling of alienation among the Malay-Muslims and brought about the hesitation to participate or interact with state officials. Therefore, political participation through the state before 2001 was generally not pursued by the Malay-Muslims in the lower South.

Since the re-emergence of conflict and violence in 2004, security officers, especially the military, were the most criticized state actors for their aggressiveness and maltreatment of local Malay-Muslims. There were some periods during Thaksin's first term in government that security issues in the Deep South were in the hands of the Thai police. After the controlling power in the Deep South was returned to the Thai army following the coup in 2006, the Thai military had the leading role in managing the conflict and violence in the Deep South.

The nature of the military's work unavoidably brought people into involuntary participation. The security officers had to deal with intelligence as one of their main duties is to catch the separatists. They were determined to find a mastermind, but they made things worse. Such work needed cooperation and participation from local people but the military's excessive use of power discouraged local people from giving information voluntarily to state officials (International Crisis Group, 2005, p. 7). Even though the police and the military could get information from local people through forced participation, this kind of participation is seen as short-term or just one-time participation. The local people might have to participate because of fear but involuntary participation rarely brings about positive participation, and may not lead to useful information. Local people did not want to participate because the mistrust of most Malay-Muslims towards the Thai state blocked them from voluntary participation.

The operations of the Thai military in the conflict and violent areas of the Malay-Muslim majority provinces did not focus only on warlike operations. The Thai military applied both soft and hard tactics. These two strategies were known as the

hawk way and the dove way[7]. The hawk strategy of the military referred to the fighting and warfare-like operations, as well as torture and aggressive methods of interrogation. The dove strategy, on the contrary, was more focused on public relations and community development, which was mostly applied in villages that had lower degrees of conflict and violence. The military tried to improve its relationship with local people through religious leaders, the most respected people in Malay-Muslim communities. "We (the military) arranged many meetings and development projects and invited religious leaders to participate with us. We have to win the heart of a person the villagers respect the most first and then that person could help us to improve our relationship with the villagers", said a military officer who worked for many years in the conflict areas of the Deep South[8].

The two strategies had different effects on political participation. The hard tactics were aimed at not only overcoming the militants but also subjugating the locals to the Thai state. However, after more than ten years of controlling the conflict and violent areas with an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth strategy, the results were not very impressive as the violent attacks were still high and many Malay-Muslims felt more afraid and distrustful of security officers. Involuntary participation was high but voluntary participation was low. People tended to avoid direct contact with security officers, which created a low level of voluntary participation. Later, the military initiated community development and public relations programs to build a better

relationship and improve the image of the security officers. Thai soldiers were sent to talk to villagers and help in village development. Moreover, based on conversations with people and authorities in the conflict areas, many community meetings were arranged among the military, local bureaucrats, civil society, and local people to discuss and exchange views on not only conflict and violence but also economics and other issues[9].

Also, experience with violent acts and improper practices in the justice system pushed the victims to find a way to fight for their rights and freedom. Some of them tried to make their problems known by asking for help from civil society activists who had better legal knowledge and political skill in contacting and participating with state officials. Somchai Neelapaichit, a lawyer and a human rights activist, was one of the persons who stood up to help many Malay-Muslim victims demanding justice. His wife once asked him why more victims of violence did not stand up and fight for themselves. Somchai said it was "fear" (Neelapaijit, 2009, p. 12). The "fear" that they had made them leave the state. Somchai was defending several suspected Malay-Muslims who alleged torture while in custody against treason charges. However, his outstanding role in speaking up for many suspected Malay-Muslims led to his disappearance in 2004, allegedly by some authorities who wanted him to be silent forever.

The problems of the justice system and the high number of dismissals were gradually addressed[10]. The problems of the justice system brought about more

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[7] Interview, a scholar in Pattani, September 2012.

[8] Interview, a military officer in Pattani, September 2012.

[9] Interviews, military officers, local government officers, and local people in the Deep South, September 2012 and February 2013.

[10] Among all the 827 cases issued with prosecution orders between 2004 and March 2015, there were 431 cases or 52.12% where the court

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cooperation and political participation among justice officers, security officers, civil society organizations, and local people in the conflict areas to improve the justice system in the Deep South. For example, there was agreement between the Ministry of Justice, the Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre and the Courts of Justice in attempting to shorten the judicial process of the Court of First Instance to one and a half years. The development of a community justice center in the three southern provinces, aimed to increase feelings of trust by local people towards the justice system through cooperation between a civil network and the Ministry of Justice

Moreover, political participation through the justice system was blocked by some difficulties in the justice process, such as pressure from parties to the conflict (either state officials or the militants), the language barrier, time and money used during trials, to the risk of countercharges if they lost their cases. These difficulties in the judicial process resulted in the low level of political participation through the judiciary. Due to their feeling of distrust and fear, many Malay-Muslims felt insecure to contact judicial officers and chose to avoid any legal commitments, especially when they were mistreated by Thai state officials.

Studying political participation through the state cannot be completed without a focus on local officials whose responsibilities are considered as a bridge between the central government and the locals. The performance of local officials plays an important role in defining the pattern and level of political participation and portraying the image of the Thai state. In general, people participated with local government officials on many occasions.

For people in the conflict areas, interacting with local government officials can be in the form of voluntary participation such as participating in community meetings, contacting local officials for economic issues, and public hearings. In some cases, people are obliged by legal regulations to have contact involuntarily with local officials, such as when applying for a license. However, the form of relationship and participation between local people and local authorities was different at each level of the state authorities. The local authorities in Thailand range from the provincial governors, district chief officers (Nai Amphur), subdistrict headmen (Kamnan), to village headmen (Phuyaiban). However, the form of relationship and participation between local people and local authorities was different at each level so this section categorized local authorities into two groups based on the method of recruitment or acquisition of positions. The first group is the national civil service assigned as local bureaucrats, which comprises, for example, provincial governors and Nai Amphur. The second group is the elected native local officials, who are Kamnan and Phuyaiban.

The Thai state is now more open for Malay-Muslims to work in provincial governments. The conflict and violence made the Thai state see the advantage of allowing and encouraging more Malay-Muslims to work with the state in order to promote a more positive participation between local people and assigned local bureaucrats. The Malay-Muslims were increasingly acceptable to work with the Thai government and they were treated

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ordered dismissals. Therefore, among all of the 9,933 security cases from 2004 to May 2015, there were only 396 cases (or 3.99%) that were not

dismissed and were prosecuted through the final legal process (*Manager,* 25 June 2015).

more equally[11]. When people had positive experiences from involuntary participation, the promotion of voluntary participation with state bureaucrats would be, at least, less difficult.

Although the positions were more open for Malay-Muslims to work for their community, some Malay-Muslim bureaucrats had problems in gaining trust from their fellow Malay-Muslims. They were seen by the locals as untrustworthy for taking the Thai state side. So, political participation during the conflict and violence sometimes caused more problems. The Malay-Muslim bureaucrats who wanted to participate with the Thai state by working as state authorities were at risk of being separated from the Malay-Muslim community (McCargo, 2008, pp. 59-60). On the contrary, for local Malay-Muslims who wanted to participate through contacting state bureaucrats, they were at risk of being neglected or treated improperly by Thai state officials.

Similarly, although both kamnan and phuyaiban are recognized as influential positions, as Neher (1979, p. 195) noted many years ago, they have to engage in a "dizzying array of functions". On the one hand, kamnan and phuyaiban act as local representatives. Amongst other things, they are responsible for promoting peace and harmony in a community, managing public utilities, and presenting locals' demands to the government. On the other hand, kamnan and phuyaiban act as representatives of the Thai state. They have major roles in activities such as distributing government policies to local people, enforcing laws and reporting illegal acts to state authorities, and regularly attending meetings with local bureaucrats and officials (Neher, 1979, pp. 195-196).

So local officials, who work as intermediaries in the interests of the country and for the happiness of the locals, are the important actors who could either destroy or strengthen voluntary participation of people in the conflict areas. Also, the performance of local officials has impacted greatly on the people's decisions to contact the Thai state. However, the relationship between local officials, especially the assigned bureaucrats, seems to be quite estranged and the contact between them seems to be limited because of different backgrounds and the feeling of distrust. Compared to the assigned bureaucrats, the elected native local officials and the Malay-Muslims are in a better and closer relationship. The relationship with national civil servants assigned as local bureaucrats might be sour but at the same time it has indirectly strengthened the relationship between the elected local officials and the grassroots, especially in rural conflict areas where participation gets impeded.

The main question that this section aimed to answer is what kind of participation through the state should we expect to take place in the areas that are full of conflict and violence, where the relationship between local people and state authorities has been undermined for decades. This section indicates that political participation through the state in the conflict areas of the Deep South comprised both negative and positive participation. The two types of political participation are not separate but impact each other. Involuntary participation could undermine voluntary participation. Conversely, if people have positive experiences from involuntary participation, it could reinforce positive participation.

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[11] Interview, a local bureaucrat in Songkhla, September 2012.

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Participation through the state allows people to take their first step in contacting government authorities, including politicians, in various ways to meet different demands for either themselves or society. The state and its agencies are thus crucial actors for this mode of political participation that can control the effectiveness and reliability of this means of participation. However, if the political acts cannot fulfil a citizen's requirements, he/she may find collective acts of participation as another means to pressure the government.

Political participation through civil society

Political participation through civil society in this article refers to non-electoral political participation where individuals or groups of people participate in an organization or community activities with an aim to influence government decision-making on community policies (Verba et al., 1973; Huntington & Nelson: 1976). Unlike political participation through the state, political participation through civil society is unforced and voluntary. Taking part in civil society is based on the individuals' freewill, that is, people make their own choices to participate without being forced or legally obliged.

When the 16th constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand was promulgated in 1997, it was considered by many to be "the most liberal constitution Thailand has ever known" (Prapertchob, 2001, p. 104). The improvements in the 1997 constitution included the establishment of new mechanisms for human rights protections, administrative decentralization, and the encouragement of participatory democracy that opened more opportunities for civil society to work in communities with more

confidence. The promulgation of the 1997 constitution was considered a turning point in political reform in Thailand, which also importantly affected civil society in the conflict area of the southernmost provinces of Thailand. Many civil society organizations have emerged and been active in various areas in the three southern provinces since the 2000s as a result of the 1997 constitution and especially of the escalation of conflict and violence in the south in 2004.

Civil society in the conflict areas of the southernmost provinces of Thailand has made a lot of progress since the renewed conflict and violence in 2004. Knowledge and the know-how of the expert-led civil society organizations (CSOs) were transferred to local people through their political participation in civil society during the first stage of civil society development. The second stage demonstrated the efficiency of the local civil society activists, who applied political skills they had learned from the experts and from direct experience of forced/involuntary participation, in helping other victims and making change for their communities. Now, civil society has reached a third stage of development, in which many expert and local organizations collaborate and have gathered into a network. The next stage of development, which has not yet come, could be the creation of national civil society coalitions or networks around the country. When more people participate, it will create mutual trust and understanding among individuals that are likely to lead to political integration in a diverse society.

In the Deep South, where the majority of the people are Malay-Muslims, many local people were afraid of contacting Thai state officials because of both language barriers and the negative perceptions they had of Thai state authorities, as discussed previously. The

role of civil society was then very important as a third actor that could speak out on behalf of local people, especially the grassroots who mostly lacked political skills. In addition, during the conflict and violence, the Thai government gave importance mainly to national security and aimed at banishing separatists so much that they neglected other grievances of local people. Civil society thus played an important role in helping local people, a silent majority, who suffered the most from the conflict, but played the least significant role in the decision-making process, to increasingly participate in Thai politics.

However, one of the major problems, probably the biggest one that impeded political participation of people in the conflict areas, was the problem of untrustworthiness. Trust is one of the most vital factors that can encourage more participation in a community but cultivating trustworthiness in the midst of conflict areas is difficult. Although some local people felt more comfortable talking to civil society activists rather than to government officials, civil society activists, especially those from other regions, sometimes could not gain full trust from local people in the conflict areas. A Thai-Buddhist researcher based in Pattani explained that since there were many people from various agencies, both local and non-local activists, who came to talk to the locals, and mostly the same respondents did the interviews, they could not trust the opinions expressed.

Not only did they distrust outsiders, but also they were afraid of becoming suspects and being threatened by both the Thai military and militants. Therefore, many of them chose to be quiet and not participate in civil society activities. One civil society activist in the Deep South explained that almost every time he entered the conflict area and talked to villagers, he was told by the villagers that a few days after his interviews the military came to meet the villagers he talked to and asked for details of interviews between him and the villagers. Also, the villagers could be suspected by militants if the militants saw them talking to strangers from outside the village[12]. Therefore, local people preferred to keep a low profile. However, there also were some villagers who wanted to participate with civil society but the channels provided for participation were generally limited to some specific group of local people. Political participation through civil society was criticized as it was always the same groups of local people who participated in the activities. One interviewee from Pattani complained that the majority of villagers had few chances to speak out. Most civil society activists came into her village and talked only to the phuyaiban. Sometimes, the phuyaiban's opinions, she believed, could not reflect the majority of villagers[13].

In theory, civil society should function as an independent actor outside governmental control and influence but be able to make linkages between the two sides, society and the state (Gellner, 1994; MacGaffey, 1994; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 1998). The relationship between the state and the civil society is sometimes problematic. On the one hand, the state and the civil society could be a good partner, who support each other. Civil society acts as an intermediary with the state in promoting policy to local people and forwarding demands of local people to the state. On the other hand, the state and civil society could be enemies of

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[12] Interview, a civil society activist in Pattani, March 2013.

[13] Interview, a university student from Pattani, February 2013.

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each other. The roles of civil society in counterbalancing the power of the state occasionally have caused them to act against state policies.

The relationship between the Thai state and civil society organizations in the Deep South has demonstrated a similar pattern. The Thai government has played a two-pronged strategy towards the civil society in conflict areas. On the one hand, the Thai state encouraged political participation through civil society by funding and supporting many local CSOs and cooperating in many civil society activities. For example, the SBPAC initiated a project, volunteers for development of the South, to engender participation of local people in community development (Manager, 17 December 2017); the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) provided funds to support some student organizations to promote non-violent participation in the Deep South; and the Thai government gave funds to each village in the Deep South to establish local civil society groups. However, some complained that villagers had little knowledge for managing CSOs. So, the groups mostly were short-lived and ineffective[14]. An interviewee from Pattani said, "my village has some local groups formed by the phuyaiban. When the village received funds (from the government), they formed a group. These groups do not last long depending on how much funding they received[15]."

Although the Thai state increasingly illustrated a willingness to participate with civil society organizations by joining and supporting many civil society activities, the Thai state occasionally acted in a way that

seemingly opposed political participation of CSOs. Government control can come in a variety of ways; for example, many civil society activists could not gain trust or draw people to participate with them because the military followed closely behind them. "Whenever I talked to villagers, after I left, the military came and asked the villagers what we talked about. They felt unsafe and did not want to participate with us anymore", said a human rights activist in Pattani[16].

The roles of civil society in counterbalancing state power sometimes has caused more conflict between the state and the civil society. The state's aggressive actions towards civil society activities would be seen more often if their activities related to issues of violation of human rights and self-determination, which were considered sensitive issues for Thai national security. For example, a complaint was filed by ISOC against three human rights activists, Somchai Homla-or, a Thai-Buddhist member of the Law Reform Commission of Thailand, Pornpen Khongkachonkiet, a Thai-Buddhist Director of the Cross Cultural Foundation, and Anchana Heemmina, a Malay-Muslim President of the Duay Jai Group, due to publishing a report on human rights violations and torture of Malay-Muslims in the Deep South. The ISOC Region 4 spokesperson, General Pramote Promin, claimed that the report was based on false information and questioned the aim of the alleged activists saying that they aimed to discredit the ISOC and destroy the country (Prachatai, 9 June 2016).

The conflict and violence made it difficult for the Malay-Muslims in the Deep

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[14] Interview, a local authority and a civil society in Pattani, February and March 2013.

[15] Interview, a university student in Pattani, February 2013.

[16] Interview, a civil society activist in Pattani, March 2013.

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South to have an ideal civil society. Even though the degree of government control is different depending on the different degree of violence and level of trust in CSOs, government control negatively affects political participation and, in turn, obstructs the state's objective of national integration.

The increasing numbers of civil society organizations in southern Thailand encourages more people to engage in politics and ensures that people have voices in the policy-making process towards resolutions of the ongoing conflict. However, the feelings of insecurity and the suspicions of local people about the work of civil society organizations obstruct them from participating and cooperating in civil society activities. The civil society organizations in the Deep South of Thailand therefore struggle to prove their effectiveness and attract larger groups of local people to participate and strengthen the power of the civil society.

Political participation through cyber society

The advancement of communication technology and the popularity of internet usage since the 1990s has brought the world to the cyber society, with communication and information technology having penetrated into every society and impacted everyday lifestyles and activities of people. The relationship between human society and the internet network has greatly increased and provided new possibilities for popular participation. For Thailand, information technology has been gradually developed. After the development of a high-speed internet connection in Thailand since the late 1990s and the supporting government policies to encourage Thai people to have access to high-speed internet, the number of internet

users in Thailand has increased dramatically. The internet technology has changed both the political and non-political activities of Thai people, including many Malay-Muslims in the Deep South.

For many Malay-Muslims who lived in the midst of conflict and violence in southern border provinces of Thailand, they also benefited by this technology. The development of information technology not only provided them more opportunities for engaging in politics, but also greater opportunities for strengthening their ethnic identity, expanding their networks, and receiving more support from people outside the conflict zone through non-violent methods.

The internet technology offered an additional space for them to make new friends, create their own political network, and exchange their political opinions with others. Joining the militant groups and participating in violent acts were no more the only way to show their standpoint against the Thai state. Even though social media could not help in changing attitudes of some Malay-Muslim youths towards the Thai state, political participation through cyber society could at least help them to express their disagreement with the state in a non-violent form.

Some Malay-Muslim youths used the online channel of political participation as a substitution for a political movement that was prohibited in the Deep South under the martial law. Some political campaigns started by local student organizations were promoted through social media, such as their Facebook pages, and shared on social media platforms of national student organizations which had more members and followers. So, the online network helped in increasing the impact and awareness of their political campaign on people outside the region.

Whereas some academics argued "the logic of self-centered participation promoted by social media can represent a threat for political groups rather than an opportunity" (Fenton and Barassi 2011: 179), some Malay-Muslim youths demonstrated that the expansion of social media provided them with the possibility and privilege to strengthen the power of political groups and social movements. With the emergence of digital media, many political activities were transformed into a new form of political participation that enabled new political activities to function in conflict and violent areas of the Deep South.

Nowadays, individuals with a smart phone and internet access can report any news to the public through their own social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter, in a real-time basis. Despite the ease of reporting news online in the eyes of many people, there is much concern and awareness among new media groups in the Deep South of the importance of reporting sensitive news on conflict and violence with more caution and neutrality in order to avoid further conflict in society. While individuals outside the conflict zone may not be much concerned on the negative effects of reckless news reports that spread around the internet, some Malay-Muslim journalists are getting together to learn, discuss, and practice from academics and media experts to be professional journalists.

So, on the one hand, political participation through cyber society of the media may not be able to decrease political conflict and political division but it has become more obvious through cyber society than in former times. We can see more clearly the different ideas between Malay-Muslims and Thai-Buddhists regarding a conflict resolution and military actions from the contents that online reporters selectively present in their online platform and from the comments of internet readers that sometimes are very aggressive and inconsiderate. Although there have been attempts of small groups of journalists in the Deep South to demand constructive news reporting that should not expand more conflict in the communities, the emerging media, both in organizational and unorganizational forms, are very independent and disperse. So, it is difficult to persuade or control those native reporters to work in the same direction.

The implications of cyber politics, political activities in cyber society, not only benefit political participation of individuals in conflict areas, but also mean that the rebels can take advantage of the online networks and communication. In the past, many Malay-Muslim insurgents wanted to remain anonymous so they did not disclose their identities and never publicly announced their demands or claimed responsibility for any violent attack. However, the trend has gradually changed. With the help of technology, exiled militants living outside Thailand can communicate to their sympathizers, make political demands, and issue statements to the public and the Thai state through various online channels.

The flow of information and freedom of opinions' expression in a new public sphere worsen the ongoing conflict through harsh comments of both those who support and those who are against the Thai state. Therefore, in cyber society, not only are there militants who are dangerous and cause violence, but there are also internet users who carelessly use the internet to serve violent objectives; both these groups can cause more conflict in the area.

These challenging trends have impacted modes of participation of people both nationally and internationally and deepened disharmony and bad feeling, which could led to a new network of hatred

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in the conflict areas of southern Thailand. When people increasingly depend on the internet, the rebels can take advantage of the online networks and communications. Malay-Muslim insurgents nowadays can operate both in the physical world such as with bombings and shootings, and in the cyber society, such as with broadcasting their demands or sharing photos of the abuses by the Thai state to induce more people to join them.

Moreover, the global propaganda of Islamic terrorists has mistakenly shaped the perception of Thai-Buddhists towards Malay-Muslims as being potential separatists, who always create trouble and violence. This wrong perception has resulted in the increase of public hostility between the two sides. The internet not only expands and strengthens the network of the Malay-Muslim separatists, but also tightens the network of hatred through battles of opinions and harsh comments. Therefore, in the age of cyberization, not only are the militants dangerous and cause violence, but internet users, who carelessly use internet to serve violent objectives, can also cause more conflict in the area.

Conclusion

Political participation is important to the political system as an input channel of citizens' demands and proof of state legitimacy. The effectiveness of each mode of political participation thus depends not only on how many channels of participation the state provides but also how the state encourages and promotes political awareness of participation to its citizens. Without the political awareness of citizens, political participation channels are worthless and without state responsiveness and responsibility to people's demands, political participation is meaningless too.

Although the political rights and channels of participation for people in the

Deep South, especially those living in the conflict area, seem to be narrowed and restricted by state interference, this condition can be conducive to either expanding the violence or, simultaneously sparking the desire of more people to participate. People in the conflict area of southern Thailand still engage in Thai politics to some extent through many channels of political participation.

When studying non-electoral participation of people in the southernmost parts of Thailand, influence of the long-lasting conflict is an important variable that needs to be taken into consideration. Living in the midst of conflict and violence causes additional concern for the Malay-Muslims and other people in the area in deciding how or whether or not they should participate. Even though the Thai government does open opportunities for people to participate in politics through various channels as discussed above, the tight control under martial law and the surveillance by the military still limit political freedom of people there. The reactions of people are varied; some ignore politics, some turn against the state, and some turn this conflict into more participation.

The article shows that people living in a violent conflict area do not always get involved with violent means. On the contrary, they are more likely to participate through some forms of non-violent participation when they perceive incentives are high enough to overcome risks. Based on the study, people in the conflict areas do not disregard participation. Experiencing many losses and deaths could be a prime motivation for some Malay-Muslims to seek a way to stop all the conflict non-violently. The conflict and violence, although it is not the only reason, has encouraged a desire for participation among people who live in the midst of conflict areas.

Political participation through the state is seemingly the least used among the three channels since most local people only involuntarily participated, by force. Political participation through the state in the conflict areas of the Deep South comprised both negative and positive participation. The two types of political participation are not separate but impact each other. Involuntary participation could undermine voluntary participation. Conversely, if people have positive experiences from involuntary participation, such as being treated fairly while they were on trial, it could reinforce positive participation. In addition, there are also a number of people who choose to collectively participate in civil society activities, instead of participating individually through the state, to increase their voice and power to fight against state power and make their grievances heard.

This article found that political participation through civil society in the conflict areas of the Deep South has greatly expanded. There are groups of people, such as youths and women, who are very active. Compared to other regions with no violent conflict, Malay-Muslim and student activists are very active in public activities. The increasing roles of the local-led CSOs illustrates that experiences of conflict and violence do not prevent some people from the conflict areas from participating. Instead, the experiences of conflict and violence inspire them to participate non-violently to help their hometowns.

In addition, when the world entered to the age of cyberization since the 1990s, everyday activities, including political practices, become facilitated by internet technology. It provided a new possibility for popular participation by people in the conflict areas. The internet can be a constructive tool for participation through networks of hope by creating bonding feelings of people at the local, national, and global level. However, the use of internet can be more destructive if it can be employed by users to serve violent objectives which can cause more conflict and violence in the area.

The conflict in the Deep South of Thailand has lasted longer than the oldest living Thai in the region and has not been inflamed by one single factor but by multiple causes such as historical grievances, religious differences, social and economic marginalization, the injustice of the political system, and limited political expression. In the midst of conflict, frightened people often avoid risky behaviors because fear "heightens the desire for security" (Peterson 2002: 68). As a result, some people are too fearful to participate in any political activities; some distrust the state and prefer to close their eyes to politics, especially on any issue related to the conflict.

However, the same grievances can lead to the opposite reaction. As Thoms & Ron (2007) mentioned, denial of political participation is linked to internal conflict. Abuses of rights such as inequality in accessing basic needs or to political participation can be recognized as "direct conflict triggers" that lead to conflict emergence and escalation (Thoms & Ron, 2007, p. 704). This condition, on the one hand, can expand conflict and violence. On the other hand, it pushes people to be more active in politics through peaceful means as they seek to alleviate suffering from the violence. As this article stands, the same factors that lead to conflict can also be a pathway leading more people to peaceful political participation. As Bercovitch and Jackson (2009: 94) noted, "the greater the level of participation by all political communities and domestic constituencies, the higher the likelihood that certain

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problems can be alleviated before they turn into serious and irresolvable conflict."

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