POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE GENERAL ELECTION OF THAILAND: A CASE OF STUDENTS IN SAKON NAKHON RAJABHAT UNIVERSITY

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Abstract- This research aims to study the political participation of the students in regular programs of Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University in the general election of Thailand, and to compare the political participation behavior in the general election of each groups of the students divided according to demographic factors. The samples were 400 students in the regular programs from five main faculties who were selected by using simple random technique. The sample size was determined by using Taro Yamane. The main tool used to collect the data was the questionnaires. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, together with the independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA. The data analysis revealed that the level of political participation of the respondents in the general election, before, during, and after the election, was all found to be at high level. The top three aspects of pre-election participation were: checking their eligibility in voting; getting involved in an election campaign; and learning about political parties and candidates. In terms of the participation during the election, the top three aspects were: casting a ballot; observing vote buying; paying interest in vote-counting process, whereas in terms of the participation after the election, the top three aspects were: paying close attention in the formation of the government; paying interest in the result of voting; and paying close attention to the announcement of the official results of the election. When comparing the political participation of the respondents divided according to the demographic factors (i.e. gender, year of study, and faculty), there was no variance in all demographic factors used to analyze, therefore, the hypothesis related to the difference of political participation of the students in the general election based on the demographic profile was rejected.

Index Terms- general election, political participation, students

I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a system of government in which citizens exercise power by electing representatives from among themselves to form a government body. Democracy has as its default principle the concept of majority rule. Or in the words, in democracy, the government is formed based on the majority of votes from the citizens of the country who have basic rights that the state cannot take away from. In democracy, the citizens can exercise their right directly or used through their representatives whom they have elected. The democracy in which the public decisions are made by the citizens directly is referred to as a direct democracy. One of the main examples of the direct democracy is the referendum. Another type of the democracy is known as a representative democracy in which the citizens exercise their power through their elected representatives. The example of the representative democracy is the general election. Democracy is characterized by the principle of political and legal equality of the citizens as well as the political participation of the citizens. It is argued that the political participation of the citizens is a major indicator of the level of the democracy in a society. This means that in a society that the political participation of the citizens is high, the level of the democracy in that society is also high, whereas low level of political participation of the citizens means low level of democracy in that society [1].

Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University is an educational institution that aims to develop and enhance the youths' skills, knowledge, morality so that they can become good citizens of the nation. These youths are essential resources of the country who can shape the future of the nation. They have a significant impact on the national growth. The role of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in developing the youths is correspond to the national economic and social development plan which sets people as the center or the key of the development of the nation. In 2014, there were a total of 14,897students in the university. The main roles of the students do not cover only learning from the textbooks, but they also encompass participation in other significant activities including: 1) taking part in setting the national policy and planning the economic and social development at both national and regional levels; 2) participating in political decision-making; 3) participating in inspecting the procedure of the exercise of state power; 4) supporting and contributing in the public activities; and 5) contributing in educating other people about the democratic form of government with the king as Head of State. With the aim to gain an understanding to role in political participation of the students, this research focuses on the political participation of the students in regular programs of Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University in the general election of Thailand.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

(1) to study the political participation of the students in regular programs of Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University in the general election of Thailand; and
(2) to compare the political participation behavior in the general election of each groups of the students divided according to demographic factors.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Related studies on the political participations in the general election are as follows:
Pusanga (2012) points out that political participation refers to the many activities used by citizens to influence the decision-making process of the state leader in setting the policy and encourage the government to develop the country based on their wishes [2].
Inboon (2012) states that political participation means giving an opportunity for people to make a decision and set what they actually want. This is a means to enforce the power of people so that they can actively manage the resources, make the decision, and control activities of the society, rather than being passive citizens [3].
Thongploy (2013) argues that political participation can be defined as practices that aim to influence the decision-making process of the government [4].
Jeeramakorn (2009) defines political participation as practices of people that have an influence on the political system. Such practices, in turn, affect the goals and/or policy setting process of the government and the election process of the national leaders. The effect of these practices can be either direct or indirect, one time or continuous, and legal or illegal [5].
Kantikul (2010) studied about a political participation model of the people in Dusit District, Bangkok and found that the most accessible and simplest way for people to participate in political activity is local representatives or MPs election. This study also report that people will participate in political activities only once they are forced by law [6].

In summary, the concept of political participation used in this research is that it refers to rightful behaviors or participation in various activities of people in a society according to their willingness and the laws such as paying close attention to the political news and activities, encouraging other people to use to right to votes, participating in the campaign, and discussing and expressing views about the political issues.

Office of the election commission of Thailand (2014) states that Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2007 prescribes the types of political participation as follows [7].:

1. Pre-election activities include
1.1 Checking the eligibility in voting
1.2 Learning about the political parties and candidates
1.3 Getting involved in an election campaign
1.4 Participating in the campaign speech given by the candidates
1.5 Inspecting the misconduct that may happen
1.6 Studying the candidates' profile
1.7 Negotiating the political policy

2. Activities during the election:
2.1 Observing vote buying
2.2 Casting a ballot
2.3 Paying interest in vote-counting process
2.4 Taking part as a committee in a Polling Station Commission
2.5 Reporting when finding unusual events
2.6 Encouraging other persons to cast the
2.7 Rejecting vote-buying
2.8 Inspecting the events to ensure that the election follows the rules

3. Activities after the election include:
3.1 Paying close attention to the announcement of the official results of the election
3.2 Paying interest in the result of voting
3.3 Paying close attention in the formation of government
3.4 Paying close attention to the performance of the elected candidates
3.5 Taking part in a group for the recall of an elected politician when misconduct is found.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As mentioned earlier that the primary aim of this research is to study the political participation of the students in the regular programs of Sakhon Nakhon Rajabhat University, Sakon Nakhon province, Thailand in the general election of Thailand, therefore, in order to achieve this aim, the research utilized the quantitative research method.

The population of the study was 14,897 students in the regular programs from five faculties at this university. The samples of 400 students were selected by simple random technique. This number of the sample was calculated by using Taro Yamane. The main tool used to collect the data was questionnaires. The validity of the measuring instrument was determined by Content Validity Index (CVI) and the result was higher than 0.5. The modified questionnaires were tried out with other 30 samples. The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's coefficient alpha) was higher than 0.8.

The descriptive statistics were used in this study to analyze and interpret the data. These include percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Moreover, the independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA was also employed to analyze the data.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis is presented in 2 parts. Part 1 reports the analysis of the respondents' demographic profile and Part 2 discusses about the level of political participation of the students in the general election of Thailand divided in terms of pre-election, during the election, and after the election.

Part 1 The analysis of the respondents' profile

In this part the respondents' demographic profile in terms of gender, year of study, and faculty are presented as follows:

Table 1 Number and percentage of the respondents based on demographic profile

Demographic factors	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	212	53
Female	188	47
Total	400	100
Year of study		
1st year	62	15.5
2nd year	122	30.5
3rd year	119	29.8
4th year	71	17.8
5th year	26	6.5
Total	400	100
Faculties		
Faculty of Education	69	17.3
Faculty of Science	71	17.8
Faculty of Management Science	69	17.3
Faculty of Agricultural Technology	61	15.3
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences	130	32.5
Total	400	100

Table 1 shows that 53 percent of the respondents are male, and the remaining 47 percent are female. In terms of the year of study, 15.5 percent of the respondents are currently in the 1st year, 30.5 percent in the 2nd year, 29.8 percent in the 3rd year, 17.8 percent in the 4th year, and 6.5 percent in the 5th year. As in terms of the faculty, the majority of the respondents are the students from the faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, accounting for 32.5 percent, followed by 17.8 percent of the students from the Faculty of Science, and then 17.3 percent each from the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Management Science, and the remaining 15.3 percent are from the Faculty of Agricultural Technology.

Part 2 The analysis of the level of Political participation of the respondents in the general election using mean ($\overline{X}$) and standard deviation (SD) are presented in Tables 2-4

Table 2 Mean ($\overline{X}$) and standard deviation (SD) of the level of political participation of the respondents in the general election in terms of pre-election activities

Activities	Level of the participation		
	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level
1. Checking the eligibility in voting	4.37	0.65	high
2. Learning about the political parties and candidates	4.18	0.59	high
3. Getting involved in an election campaign	4.30	0.63	high
4. Participating in the campaign speech given by the candidates	4.16	0.61	high
5. Inspecting the misconduct that may happen	4.13	0.61	high
6. Studying the candidates' profile	4.14	0.64	high
7. Negotiating the political policy	4.12	0.66	high
Total	4.20	0.63	high

The data in Table 2 shows that the overall level of political participation of the students was at high level. The pre-election participatory activities which are found to be the top three, sorted in descending order, were: checking their eligibility in voting; getting involved in an election campaign; and learning about political parties and candidates.

Table 3 Mean ($\overline{X}$) and standard deviation (SD) of the level of political participation of the respondents in the general election in terms of activities during the election

Activities	Level of the participation		
	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level
1. Observing vote Buying	4.23	0.65	High
2. Casting a ballot	4.29	0.65	High
3. Paying interest in vote-counting process	4.27	0.62	High
4.Taking part as a committee in a Polling Station Commission	4.16	0.66	High
5. Reporting when finding unusual events	4.20	0.67	High
6. Encouraging other persons to cast the	4.22	0.62	High
7.Rejecting vote-buying	4.17	0.65	High

8. Inspecting the events to ensure that the election follows the rules	4.19	0.64	High
Total	4.22	0.65	High

The data in Table 3 reported that overall, the political participation of the students was found to be at high level. The top three aspects of such participation, sorted in descending order were: casting a ballot; observing vote buying; and paying interest in vote-counting process.

Table 4 Mean ($\overline{X}$) and standard deviation (SD) of the level of political participation of the respondents in the general election in terms of activities after the election

รายการ	Level of the Participation		
	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level
1. Paying close attention to the announcement of the official results of the election	4.17	.67	high
2. Paying interest in the result of voting	4.20	.63	high
3. Paying close attention in the formation of government	4.25	.61	high
4. Paying close attention to the performance of the elected candidates	3.81	.75	High
5. Taking part in a group for the recall of an elected politician when misconduct is found.	3.79	.74	high
Total	4.04	0.68	high

According to data shown in Table 4, in terms of the participation after the election of the students, the overall result showed high-level participation, with the top three aspects, sorted in descending order as follows: paying interest in the formation of the government; paying interest in the result of voting; and following announcement of the official results of the election.

When comparing the political participation of the respondents divided according to the demographic factors (i.e. gender, year of study, and faculty), using t-test and one-way ANOVA, the result reported that there was no variance in all demographic factors used to analyze (t = -0.87 and Sig = 0.54 for the gender, F = 1.45 and P = 0.38 for the year of study, and F = 1.78 and P = 0.19 for the faculty). Therefore, the hypothesis related to the difference of political participation of the students in the general election based on the demographic profile was rejected.

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