การพัฒนากิจกรรมทางการเมืองภาคพลเมืองตามระบอบประชาธิปไตย
DEVELOPING CIVIC POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

พระจักรกฤษ จนฺทโชโต (จันทรโชติ)
Phra Jakkrit Jandajoto (Jantrachot)

วัดพระธาตุขามแก่น ขอนแก่น ประเทศไทย
Phra That Kham Kaen Temple, Khon Kaen, Thailand
Author Corresponding Email: jakkrit@gmail.com

บทคัดย่อ: การเมืองภาคพลเมืองถือเป็นแนวคิดและหลักการสำคัญในการพัฒนาระบบการเมืองภาค พลเมืองและการพัฒนาประชาธิปไตยชุมชนแบบมีส่วนร่วม ซึ่งมีวัตถุประสงค์หลักในการสร้างความตื่นตัวและ ความตระหนักในสิทธิของประชาชนในชุมชนท้องถิ่นภายใต้กรอบสิทธิตามรัฐธรรมนูญ เพื่อให้ประชาชน สามารถปกป้องสิทธิของตนเอง จัดการและแก้ไขปัญหาด้วยตนเองได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ รวมถึงเน้นความ เสมอภาคและการมีส่วนร่วมในการตัดสินใจเรื่องส่วนรวม ตลอดจนการเรียนรู้ประชาธิปไตยแบบตรงไปตรงมา โดยกระบวนการพัฒนากิจกรรมทางการเมืองภาคพลเมืองในระบอบประชาธิปไตยนี้ประกอบด้วยการพัฒนา ความสามารถทางการเมือง การส่งเสริมวัฒนธรรมการเมือง การเสริมสร้างความเข้มแข็งของสถาบันทาง การเมือง การสนับสนุนขบวนการและเครือข่ายทางการเมือง การกระจายการสื่อสารทางการเมือง การพัฒนา มาตรการและกลยุทธ์ทางการเมือง การสร้างบรรทัดฐานทางการเมือง การปลูกฝังแนวคิดทางการเมือง การ สร้างผู้นำ การส่งเสริมภาวะผู้นำ การมอบทางเลือกที่หลากหลาย และการส่งเสริมอุดมการณ์ทางการเมืองใน กลุ่มประชาชน

คำสำคัญ; การเมืองภาคพลเมือง, ประชาธิปไตย, สิทธิชุมชน, ความเสมอภาค, การมีส่วนร่วม

Abstract: Civic politics plays a crucial role in the development of civil political systems and the promotion of participatory community democracy. The primary aim is to foster awareness and understanding of the rights of individuals within local communities, grounded in constitutional rights. This enables individuals to protect their own rights, address issues effectively, and participate in public decision-making with an emphasis on equality. Additionally, it promotes direct engagement with democratic principles. The process of developing civic political activities in a

democratic context involves enhancing political capabilities, promoting political culture, strengthening political institutions, supporting political movements and networks, disseminating political communication, developing political strategies and policies, creating political norms, cultivating political ideas, building leadership, offering leadership development, providing diverse political options, and encouraging the growth of political ideology among the people.

Keywords: Civic politics, democracy, community rights, equality, participation

Introduction

Since Thailand transitioned to democracy on June 24, 1932, by granting the people the right to choose their representatives in the council through elections, the process of representative democracy became central to governance. Over time, the ruling class has pushed the narrative that elections are the sole means of legitimizing political actions, even those that infringe upon the rights and way of life of the people. Politicians often justify their actions as being supported by the majority, as seen in various media. This approach has distorted the concept of democracy, not only for politicians but also for the public, as it limits political expression to voting alone. However, in a true democracy, ongoing public participation in political discourse and decision-making is essential.

Elections are more than just a means for citizens to cast their ballots and select representatives. They also serve as a critical channel for conveying the needs and desires of the people to those in power, functioning as an essential process of political socialization. However, if the public perceives democracy as ending with the act of voting and fails to engage in other forms of political expression, then elections alone cannot be considered successful in establishing a truly democratic system. A complete democracy requires the continuous assertion of popular sovereignty, where citizens actively participate in political activities, discussions, critiques, and opposition to unjust government actions. The examination and oversight of state power must extend beyond the election process to ensure a vibrant and functioning democracy.

Civic politics is becoming increasingly visible in Thailand, gaining influence as it emphasizes the power of the people. This shift has led to a growing belief in society that civic politics may provide the path forward for the country. While the influence of representative politics is gradually diminishing, the failure to adapt to these changes will eventually result in a loss of legitimacy for representative leaders, as they no longer reflect the true consensus of the people. When representative democracy proves insufficient to address the nation's problems, there is a need to find strength in other sectors that can transform Thailand's political system into a more authentic democracy. This requires recognizing the people's role as the true source of

sovereignty and expanding democracy beyond the confines of political competition, moving towards a model that embraces direct democracy and public participation. This shift marks a departure from the traditional political model that prioritized politicians and political parties, towards a new approach that values the diverse roles of people and society in collectively addressing the nation's challenges.

In Thai politics, the terms "revolution" and "coup" are often used interchangeably, depending on how those who seize power choose to label their actions. Historically, the word "revolution" has been favored for its solemn and authoritative connotations, helping to solidify the power gained. However, from a political science perspective, the change of government on June 24, 1932, is arguably the only true revolution in Thailand, as it fundamentally transformed the system of governance from an absolute monarchy to democracy. Other instances of power being seized through force are more accurately described as coups, as they did not alter the basic principles of the regime. To clarify these terms in the context of Thai politics: A "revolution" refers to the seizure of power through unconstitutional means, leading to the cancellation of the existing constitution, the possible promulgation of a new one, and a fundamental change in the regime, such as shifting from an absolute monarchy to democracy or communism. A "coup," on the other hand, involves seizing power unconstitutionally but continuing to use the old constitution or establishing a new legal framework, often with the intent of holding elections shortly thereafter. According to the Political Reform Committee (1995), Thailand has experienced one true revolution, twelve rebellions, and eight coups.

1. The Meaning of Civic Politics

Civic politics encompasses various interpretations depending on specific goals. Some examples include:

Politics in the Public Sphere: This form of civic politics focuses on creating spaces, platforms, and mechanisms outside of Parliament, where public debate can take place. The goal is to raise and address various societal issues, expanding powers that benefit society as a whole.

Civil Society Politics (or Citizen Politics): This emphasizes the active participation of individuals and organizations within society. It involves debating and reaching agreements on various issues, as well as pushing certain topics into state policy discussions.

People's Politics (or New Social Movements): This newer form of social movement aims to raise awareness around shared human interests, such as the global environment, economic conditions under global capitalism, and resistance to globalization. Regardless of the specific form it takes, civic politics—whether as a civil society movement or a sector of civil society—relies heavily on the participation of

active citizens who are committed to protecting rights and promoting the common good. This active citizenry is a vital force in civic politics.

Describing citizens and civic politics depends on the context in which these terms are used. Citizens who are part of organizations or society, as well as those involved in the political sector, are not individualistic; instead, they prioritize social integration. This idea aligns with the concept of communitarianism, which is significant in academic circles. A key figure in this area, Amitai Etzioni, has argued that the power of groups and organizations is a driving force for building strong communities, especially during times when traditional political institutions face crises. Etzioni advocated for the revival of community power, which had existed in the past, to form a new movement. His work is rooted in the belief that many societal problems stem from the awakening of rights, particularly the emphasis on individual rights, which, while empowering, can also lead to conflicts within communities, as seen in the United States through the exercise of free speech.

Civic politics involves a scenario where people are granted their rights and freedoms to participate in policymaking. Decentralization allows people to determine their own way of life, provided it does not infringe on the rights of others within the legal framework. Any policy that may impact the public must involve the people from the beginning, enabling them to engage in various political activities on their own. According to the Office of the Secretariat of the House of Representatives, this model of civil politics encourages political engagement at the regional level, promoting grassroots participation and involvement in decision-making.

2. Civil Politics Model

According to the Secretariat of the House of Representatives (2011), several forms of civil politics enable citizens to engage directly in the political process:

Referendum: A referendum allows citizens to participate in political decision-making by voting on specific activities or issues. Referendums were first introduced in the 1949 Constitution, and subsequent constitutions also included provisions for them. The first referendum in Thailand took place in 2006 following the coup of September 19, 2006, where citizens voted on the 2007 draft constitution.

Public Hearing: Public hearings are mechanisms by which the government or state allows citizens to express their opinions on controversial issues. These hearings can be initiated by either the government or citizen movements and are used to resolve conflicts between groups with differing views or benefits from government projects.

Public Dialogue: Public discussions or dialogues, referred to as "People Dialogue," are another form of civic politics. In Thai society, public dialogue serves as a mechanism to address political problems and divide factions. Professor Dr. Wanchai Wattanasap, from the Peace Studies Center at King Prajadhipok's Institute, used this

concept as a tool to address political issues between May and October 2008. This method, also known as Deliberative Democracy, promotes thorough discussion and decision-making.

Law Initiative by the People: Citizens can hold the political system accountable by proposing legislation. Once a sufficient number of citizens or voters support a bill, it can be submitted for public deliberation, often followed by a referendum. Legislative initiatives can be direct, where a referendum is held after the law is signed, or indirect, where the process follows after the legislature has not considered the law.

Other Forms of Protest: Strikes, demonstrations, and protests are methods used by citizens to express dissatisfaction, often related to economic injustices. These protests can take various forms, such as factory occupations, demonstrations, or rallies. They typically address political and social rights issues, and activities can include music, discussions, and criticisms of government officials or political parties. Sometimes, protests involve moving between multiple locations.

In contemporary Thailand, civil politics has gained legitimacy and is recognized as a valid form of political participation. Civil political movements are increasingly influential, balancing power with the parliamentary system. These movements are not just about everyday life but also about gaining access to state power. Many significant political initiatives and changes are now driven by the people (Thewanaruemitkul, 2012).

To summarize, civil political activities support various rights and freedoms, including the right to vote, run for office, propose laws, participate in referendums, and request the removal of political officials. Local administrators and council members also have the right to participate in managing and utilizing natural and environmental resources in a balanced and sustainable way.

3. Development of Civil Political Activities

Political development in a participatory democracy involves not only empowering citizens but also building their political competence. This process requires time, structured steps, and consideration of key factors to effectively develop civic political activities. The following are essential elements in this development, as outlined by Chaowana Traimat (2005):

Promoting Political Competence: This involves organizing comprehensive and ongoing training, skill transfer, and knowledge dissemination. It particularly emphasizes peaceful political struggle skills that aid in compromise and benefit coordination.

Promoting Political Culture: Building a political culture among citizens involves creating customs, traditions, ideas, and ethics that serve as common reference norms or models for collective political behavior.

Strengthening Political Institutions: The focus here is on establishing strong, efficient, and resilient citizen organizations. These organizations should operate systematically, maintain continuity, and develop leadership talent, ensuring they can withstand pressures and continue their missions effectively (Anuchat Puangsamlee and Krittiya Achawanichkul, 2009).

Encouraging Political Movements: Civic political movements should be active, engaging with various societal sectors, especially in the economic domain. These movements should be continuously developed and elevated to achieve higher levels of progress.

Building Political Networks: Developing strong political networks involves creating horizontal and vertical connections and fostering close collaboration among different groups of people through effective division of labor.

Enhancing Political Communication: Establishing an efficient and widely accessible information system is crucial. This includes developing up-to-date databases and a flexible political information exchange system that allows for widespread and effective communication among citizens.

Formulating Political Strategies: Promoting the development of effective political strategies that are appropriate for the political situation and goals. These strategies should leverage legal, constitutional, and political resources to maximize effectiveness, including conflict resolution, negotiation, and coalition-building.

Establishing Political Norms: This involves creating, accumulating, and sustaining traditions related to civic politics through continuous and tangible support.

Facilitating Political Socialization: Providing education and fostering values, attitudes, and behaviors that align with civic politics within civil political networks.

Developing Future Political Leaders: Encouraging the growth of new political leaders through educational programs that focus on developing skills and preparing the next generation of civic leaders.

Promoting Political Leadership: This includes fostering civic political leadership that prioritizes the public good over power competition, along with promoting figures who can serve as heroes for the masses.

Providing Alternative Political Choices: Creating new options for citizen participation beyond traditional indirect methods. This includes empowering citizens to take direct roles in decision-making processes, particularly in resolving critical issues at both the community and national levels.

Fostering Political Ideology: Developing a distinct political ideology within the civil sector that is separate from those promoted by political parties, effectively inspiring political engagement and motivation among the people.

These steps are essential for developing a robust and participatory civic political environment that empowers citizens and strengthens democracy.

4. Local Development with Citizens - Building Human and Social Capital

Local development offers a prime opportunity to not only enhance the community but also to build human and social capital while fostering engaged citizens. This approach to development should consider the following principles, as outlined by Anek Laothamthat (2008, p.109):

Decentralization of Power: More power should be decentralized to local administration, municipalities, or smaller units like Bangkok districts. These smaller, compact units are better positioned to respond to local needs, making it easier for people to participate in community activities, both directly and indirectly.

Regular Community Meetings: Encouraging frequent meetings at the subdistrict or community level fosters direct engagement and collective decision-making, ensuring that local needs and perspectives are regularly voiced and addressed.

Budget Allocation for Community Networks: Providing a budget for communities enables them to create alliances or networks that benefit their local area. This financial support can be used to strengthen both individual community initiatives and broader regional collaborations.

Education and Local Identity: Offering educational resources that promote a love for the local area is essential. Establishing local libraries or city museums allows residents to explore the history, cultural evolution, and civilization of their community, fostering a sense of identity and pride in their locality.

Consideration of Community Characteristics: When dividing areas or creating sub-units in local government, it is vital to consider the nature and existence of the community, as well as the consciousness of its people. The structure should reflect the belief that the local area truly belongs to its residents, ensuring a sense of ownership and responsibility among the people.

By following these principles, local development initiatives can successfully create engaged citizens while building the human and social capital necessary for a thriving, self-sufficient community.
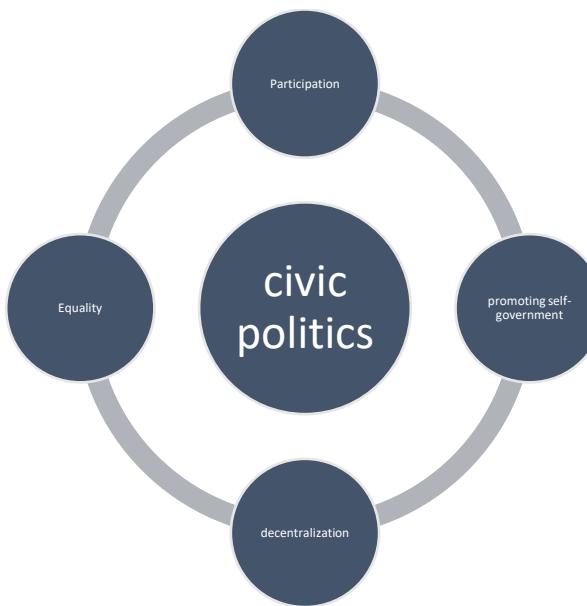
Conclusion

The movement driven by the political consciousness of the people seeks to reduce state domination by transferring power to the public, enabling direct self-management and participation in public policy decisions without relying solely on representative democracy. This involves not only voting but also actively scrutinizing and holding power accountable. Civic politics emphasizes critical cooperation with the state and a constructive commitment to the political development of citizens. It

gains political legitimacy in a participatory democracy, where individuals, groups, organizations, and networks actively engage and play key roles in the political process.

Knowledge Received:

Civic politics is a crucial concept and principle in fostering civic engagement and developing participatory community democracy. The primary goal of community democracy is to raise awareness of the citizenship rights granted to people in local communities, as outlined in the Constitution. This awareness empowers individuals in these communities to rise up, protect their rights, and address and solve problems on their own. Equality plays a significant role in ensuring that everyone participates in decision-making on public matters. Furthermore, through this process, communities learn about direct democracy—a form of governance that directly impacts people's lives. This type of democracy is not only theoretical but practical, addressing the everyday concerns and needs of citizens, particularly those at the grassroots level. It is described as a "democracy that can be eaten," signifying a system that genuinely solves the real-life problems of ordinary people, particularly those related to livelihood and well-being.

Figure 1: Civic Politics

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