



Social capital, citizen participation in public administration, and public sector performance in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationships among social capital, citizen participation, and public sector performance in Thailand. The findings indicate that social networks, a core component of social capital, tend to increase the motivation and ability of Thai citizens to participate in public affairs and thereby tend to increase the effectiveness of public goods provision. Provincial and local authorities do not tend to improve public goods and services a great deal as government resources increase. In Thailand, where the accountability of the public sector is often weak, social capital and citizen participation therefore can improve public sector accountability and performance.

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1. Introduction

In the past three decades, public administration was dominated by a customer-oriented approach associated with the new public management (NPM) doctrine (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Kettl, 2005). As an alternative to the NPM model, Denhardt and Denhardt (2000) and Osborne (2006, 2010) proposed a new public governance (NPG) or new public service (NPS) idea that was based on the concept of democracy and citizen participation as an essential precondition for effective institutional performance. It is argued that horizontal relationships between public administrators and their fellow citizens are necessary to improve public sector performance in the delivery of public services and to increase citizens' satisfaction with the quality of public service (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000: 554–555). Based on democratic values, the NPG approach elevates citizens and civil society to be on par with government officials. Public administration in this context of citizen participation is defined as the interaction of citizens and public administrators and direct participation of citizens in public policy decisions, public service delivery, and quality improvement processes (Callahan, 1982, 2007; Roberts, 2004: 316). In this view, citizens and civil society are regarded as an integral part of the governance process. Thus, it has been increasingly proposed that public administration is moving from “the government age” to a system of governance in which public authorities are no longer

solely responsible for the provision of public services; citizens and social organizations have the capacity to participate in public administration and co-produce public services (Osborne, 2006: 381).

Citizen participation is particularly important at the subnational level, concerning both deconcentrated units of the central state and decentralized local authorities. State and local governments have to be interested not only in improving their performance but also in maintaining public confidence in the implementation of public services. In this context, citizen participation is a very important resource in terms of improving service delivery. The incorporation of citizens into public administration strengthens the effectiveness of public service delivery because the adoption and implementation of new decisions will be better adjusted to the respective local problem situations. Similarly, Franklin and Ebdon (2002: 389) have argued that if the government does not know what service consumers want, it is unlikely that they can meet the needs of citizens. In sum citizen involvement in administration is supposed to reflect the opinions and needs of the people that the government should serve.

Turning to Thailand, citizen participation in public administration has been encouraged by decentralization reforms. The first serious efforts at political and fiscal decentralization are generally attributed to former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai's first administration, 1992–1995 (Krongkaew, 1995). However, the main push for substantial and continuous decentralization was provided by the implementation of the 1997 Constitution. As a result, important duties and responsibilities were assigned to local administrative bodies. The decentralization process in Thailand is therefore appropriately understood as a fundamental institutional change

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to create options for local participation and to increase downward accountability. Certainly both upward and downward accountability mechanisms are important for successful decentralization (Agrawal & Ribot, 1991: 475). Public officials are upwardly accountable to their superiors in a hierarchy and downwardly accountable to the citizen. Veron, Williams, Corbridge, and Srivastava (2006) showed that upward accountability was as necessary to control for corruption as was downward accountability. However, the present study is particularly interested in downward accountability. In Thailand, local authorities consist of two branches; the council (monitoring branch) and the committee (operating branch). Both are mainly composed of elected representatives, and they constitute the main sources of local accountability. In addition to elections, other accountability measures include the rights to access information on local management practices and the right to impeach local representatives and executives. Apart from electing local representatives, the major entry point for citizen participation is the preparation of local development plan. In the local development planning process, local authorities are required to establish civic forums at the village and the Tambon (sub-district) levels. These forums will send delegates to participate in the local development planning process (Chaowarat, 2010: 106). Another form of citizen participation is the provincial-level civic assemblies, which bring various social groups together, such as government officials, members of civil society, academics, and representatives from the private sector. These assemblies fulfill tasks similar to the civic forums but at the provincial level. Though their resolutions do not have binding authority, they nevertheless provide popular input into the administrative planning procedure (Connors, 2007: 226). However, not all civic forums and assemblies function as envisaged (Chaowarat, 2010: 98–106; Suwanmala, 2007: 144–145). While civic forums can be essential channels for citizen participation, much depends on the willingness of public officials and villagers constructively to implement this mandate. In their study of civic engagement in one local community in Northeastern Thailand, Dufhues, Theesfeld and Buchenrieder (2015: 802) found that local officials did not call meetings of the civic forum meeting and its members did not complain. Some members did not even notice that the meetings did not take place. Punyaratabandhu and Unger (2009: 282) also point out that, due to the hierarchical structure of Thai society, critical interlocutors vital for holding public authorities accountable tend to be rather weak. Punyaratabandhu (2008: 10) adds that most urban residents do not participate, for instance, in activities related to community development planning. Additionally, many civic forums were established in an undemocratic manner (usually set up by local authorities) which tends to minimize the influence of local residents (Manor, 2004: 194).

Conventional studies on citizen participation in Thailand tend to emphasize the limitations of civic engagement in public administration. However, recent years have seen a growing numbers of scholars who stress the increasing emergence of civil society groups in Thailand, and the increasing demand for greater participation in public administration by these groups. Shatkin (2004: 14), for example, points out that the recent increase in demand for citizen participation in Thailand was largely driven by emergent civil society networks, which saw it as a mean to promote transparency and downward accountability in government, and to overcome the power of corrupt politicians and bureaucrats. Moreover, in their study of social capital in Thailand, Wun-Gao, Jumnianpol, and Nuangjamnong (2014: 99–100) found that the majority of rural Thai people tended increasingly to participate in voluntary organizations and networks, such as agricultural groups, community business groups, micro finance groups, health promotion networks, and elderly development networks. Many of these voluntary organizations and networks were set up by local or

provincial governments or received financial support from public funds. Increasingly, the Thai government recognized these civic organizations and networks as partner for promoting development (Krueathep, 2004: 217; Wun-Gao et al., 2014: 104). With the 2014 military coup in Thailand, it comes as no surprise that the current Thai government does not have civic engagement, including local government support more generally (Unger and Mahakanjana, 2016: 185), high on their agenda. Yet, after a return to more democratic conditions (elections are anticipated for February 2019) civil society should regain its potential of being a powerful means to increase citizen-government accountability and to improve public sector performance.

This paper shares the spirit of these recent scholars. In contrast to the earlier studies that emphasized the limited capability of the Thai citizens to participate in public affairs, the present study aims to show that civil society networks can be an essential channel for citizen participation and thereby can improve public sector performance. In order to scale up the civil society networks and citizen participation in public administration, it is important to identify the connection between civil society networks and citizen participation and to explore their potential effects on public sector performance. The findings from this study should help to contribute to a better understanding of the relationships among social capital, citizen participation, and public sector performance in Thailand and beyond.

According to social capital¹ theory (on the characteristics of this concept, see the theoretical framework, below), social capital, including social networks and trust, can foster public administrators to work closely with citizens and thereby can increase public sector performance. Putnam's seminal work, *Making Democracy Work* (1993: 123), demonstrates that "citizens who are active in local organizations, even non-political ones, tend to take greater interest in public affairs. This interest renders the government more accountable to the citizens." Increasing evidence also indicates that social capital is critical for increasing the willingness and capacity of government officials and the general public to work together to address common needs. According to the World Bank (2015a: 1–2), social networks and trust facilitate valuable information exchange and thus reduce the costs of extensive regulations and enforcement. The existence of social networks, therefore, should increase the likelihood of participation and cooperation by building trust and fostering shared norms between government officials and citizens. Social capital, thereby, can increase institutional performance by increasing the effectiveness of public service provision (Gibson, 2001: 55–56; Keefer & Knack, 2005: 710; Putnam, 2002).

To date, research on social capital in developing countries, published in leading interdisciplinary development journals, has primarily focused on the effects of social capital (social networks and trust) on development outcomes such as resources management (Pham & Talavera, 2018), inequality and poverty reduction (Fafchamps, 2006; Fukuyama, 2001; Zhang, Zhou, & Lei, 2017), public health (Miller, Scheffler, Lam, Rosenberg, & Rupp, 2006), community development (Adhikari & Goldey, 2010; Narayan & Pritchett, 1999), and environmental outcomes (Pretty & Ward, 2001). Although there has been an increasing number of research that examines the links between social capital and public sector performance (Coffe & Geys, 2005; John, 2005; Knack, 2002; Rothstein, 2001), most of it tends to study these linkages at the macro-level. Relatively little is known about how social capital affects motivation and capability of individual citizens to

¹ Social capital refers to the networks and norms that enable collective action. It encompasses the relationships and customs that shape social interactions. Social networks (collections of individuals that promote and protect personal relationships) and social trust (collective attitudes that foster greater cohesion and more robust collective action) are normally used to operationalize social capital.

participate in the administrative process at the micro-level. By contrast, this paper on the Thai case will examine the impact of social capital on the motivation and capacity of citizens to participate in public affairs as well as the effect of social capital on public sector performance at the provincial and local-government levels. The following questions will be addressed in this paper: Does social capital induce Thai citizens to have greater interest in public affairs? And does social capital increase the effectiveness of public sector performance?

Specifically, this study has three main objectives. First, it examines the patterns of social capital of Thai citizens, particularly their degree of involvement in social networks and trust in other citizens. Second, the paper examines the effects of social capital on the motivation and ability of the citizens to participate in public affairs, and third it studies the effects of social capital on public sector performance. Finally, the policy implications of the findings are explored.

It should be noted that public sector performance can be evaluated in many dimensions. Public organizations are required to meet multiple organizational goals. As a consequence of the publicness of public services, their achievements are judged by a diverse array of constituencies, such as citizens, taxpayers, staffs and politicians. Despite the resulting different perspectives, there are key elements of performance that all stakeholders are likely to value, such as the speed with which services are delivered, the extent to which they meet the needs of the citizens and the capacity of public organizations to perform their tasks efficiently and effectively (Andrews, 2011: 52). The focus of public sector performance in this study is on public service output (services delivered), and on the extent to which social capital and citizen engagement significantly influence public service delivery decisions.

2. Theoretical framework

Since the publication of Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* in 1993, the concept of social capital has achieved new prominence in much of the social science research. In his study, Putnam evaluates the institutional performance of twenty Italian regional governments. His central finding is that the variations in the performance of these governments are closely related to the vibrancy of civil society and voluntary associations in each region. In northern Italy, where citizens have a high degree of social capital, as measured by voter turnout, newspaper readership, membership in choral societies and football clubs, and confidence in public institutions, regional governments tend to be able to work in collaboration with their fellow citizens, and "are efficient in their internal operation, creative in their policy initiatives and effective in policy implementation. In southern Italy, where civic engagement is weaker, regional governments tend to be corrupt and inefficient" (Putnam, 1993: 81). Social capital scholars (e.g. Boix & Posner, 2000, Knack, 2002, Keefer & Knack, 2005) have proposed three mechanisms to explain the linkages between social capital, citizen participation and institutional performance. First, under a democratic system, elected representatives have to implement policies preferred by a majority of their constituents and press bureaucrats to provide public services as efficiently as they can. Since the effective operation of government depends on the ability of citizens to hold elected representatives accountable, social capital will improve public sector performance to the extent that it makes citizens more active in public affairs. Active participation in community organizations will help in doing this by providing opportunities for citizens to discuss civic affairs, increase their awareness of political issues, and assess whether or not the government is doing everything that it should to improve their welfare (Boix & Posner, 2000: 17; Putnam, 1993: 81). Social

capital, therefore, holds government officials accountable to the citizens, increases the demand for citizen-government collaboration, and compels the government to improve institutional performance. Second, social capital can foster virtue among the citizens. Civic engagement fosters a common identity, gives citizens experience in governing, and builds quality of judgement. Social capital, therefore, can promote good governance "by shifting community tastes from particularistic interests (how can I get richer?) to more community-oriented concerns (how can our neighborhood be improved?). In Putnam's terms, social capital encourages the articulation of demands on government which are to everyone's benefit rather than helping some members of society at the expenses of others" (Boix & Posner, 2000: 18). In this sense, social capital can enhance citizen-government cooperation, reduce the costs of extensive regulations and enforcement, and facilitate the implementation of government policies. A civic community will be, by and large, a rule-abiding community, in which the costs of implementing government policies will be low (Knack, 2002: 744). Finally, social capital can also reduce communal divisions. In many communities, citizens are divided into hostile political blocks or ethnic and religious groups. Low levels of social capital may increase such communal divisions, and high levels of social capital can increase a willingness to bridge social cleavages. Social capital, therefore, can increase cooperation and shared norms and thereby can increase the willingness and capability of government officials and the general public to work together in the interest of securing common benefits such as well-functioning governmental institutions (Boix & Posner, 2000: 19; World Bank, 2015a: 5).

According to Putnam and Goss (2002: 4), social capital is defined as the networks and norms that enable collective action. It encompasses relationships and customs that shape social interactions. Social networks (collections of individuals that promote and protect personal relationships) and social trust (collective attitudes that foster greater cohesion and more robust collective action) are normally used to operationalize social capital (World Bank, 2015a: 1–4). Accordingly, social capital consists of two distinct concepts: networks and trust, which constitute, respectively, the structural and cultural components of social capital. The relationship between the two concepts is generally assumed to be asymmetric rather than reciprocal. Social networks are believed to produce reciprocal norms and trust, even though such social norms may help increase social networks. Thus, social networks can be regarded as the core component of social capital (Boix & Posner, 2000: 21; World Bank, 2015a: 4).

Social capital scholars have indicated that not all social networks are alike. Putnam and Goss (2002: 10) classified social networks into 4 different types: formal versus informal, thin versus thick, inward-looking versus outward-looking, and bridging versus bonding. Moreover, different types of social networks are known to have different effects on shared norms and trust. Networks that are organized vertically or hierarchically can become a basis for the pursuit of narrow interests in patron-client relationships, and they can preclude access to information and material resources that would otherwise be used to assist the community (World Bank, 2015a: 2). Earlier research (Pharr, 2000: 175; Warren, 2001: 45) revealed that horizontal networks of co-equal volunteers were found to be the most likely to produce reciprocal norms and trust. Additionally, empirical research on social capital has tended to focus on formal and informal networks. However, when formal networks are compared with informal ones, the latter are proposed to be a more productive component of social capital. Putnam and Goss (2002: 9), for example, pointed out that informal groups are more likely to play "the socialization role of creating habits of the heart." In view of this prior work, the present study focuses on formal and informal social networks in order to see the patterns of the involvement of the Thai population in these social networks

and to determine whether these types of social networks have an impact on the motivation to participate in public affairs and have an effect on public sector performance. In Thailand, many formal social networks and organizations (e.g. agricultural groups, community business networks, micro finance groups, and health promotion networks) are set up by provincial and local governments or receive public support funds (Wun-Gaeo et al., 2014: 103). It is, therefore, interesting to study whether these formal (hierarchically organized) social networks have an impact on civic engagement in public affairs and public sector performance that differs from the impact of informal networks.

As mentioned above, social trust constitutes the cultural component of social capital. It is defined as the collective attitudes that people have about their fellow citizens (Cook, 2001: 82). Social capital scholars have indicated that there are many different types of trust and not all types of trust equally contribute to the formation of the civic-engagement community (Cook, 2001: 77; Uslaner, 2002: 14). Trust in strangers or the people that one does not know personally can contribute more to civic virtues and engagement. This type of generalized trust (also labelled as thin trust)², is built on the expectation of the goodwill of unknown people. It requires relationships among people of heterogeneous rather than homogeneous backgrounds. In contrast, the type of trust in particular individuals or groups may not contribute to the emergence of a civic community. This type of trust, which is often called particularized trust (also labelled as specific trust or thick trust), is likely to grow among those people that share similar demographic or socio-economic backgrounds. Particularized trust, therefore, tends to create an expectation of goodwill only within members of one's own group and distrust in those of other groups. Particularized trust may thus be regarded as "unsocial rather than social capital" (Levi, 2005: 47). In order to measure social trust, World Bank (2015a) and Asian Barometer Survey (2003) also classify particularized trust into two categories: competence-based trust and commitment-based trust. The former evolves when trust is bound in a relationship between individuals with specific professional or technical competence. The latter arises when trust is confined only to friends or relatives. In accordance with these arguments, the present paper's focus is on both generalized and particularized trust (particularly competence-based trust and commitment-based trust) to see whether these types of social trust have an effect on civic engagement in the public sector, and thus on public sector performance.

3. Research design and measurement

In this paper, it is hypothesized that citizens that are embedded in social networks and infused with norms of trust tend to have more supportive attitudes toward citizen participation, have greater capability to participate in public affairs, and thereby can increase the effectiveness of public sector performance. The data used in this study have been primarily collected via a provincial survey conducted in 2016. The survey involved a target sample of 2,604 respondents in 24 provinces³ in Thailand. The sample population was spread across all four of the country's major regions. Out of this target, 2,508 respondents completed the questionnaires, which represents a return rate of 96.3%.

The 24 provinces were randomly selected from Thailand's 76 provinces. They included six provinces each in the central, northern, northeastern, and southern regions. In larger provinces (population 500,000 and above), six districts, and in smaller provinces (population lower than 500,000), four districts were selected for the survey through a random sampling procedure. Within each district, 21 respondents were selected for the survey (see Appendix 1). In each of the sampled districts and provinces, one or, in most cases, more than one government official was asked to fill out the questionnaires about district and provincial socio-economic conditions.

From the survey, four questions were selected to measure the citizen's involvement in social networks. These four questions have been widely used in many surveys to measure social network involvement (e.g. Asian Barometer Survey, 2003; World Bank, 2015a: 3–5⁴). The first question asked respondents about the citizen's involvement in formal networks: "Are you an active member of any organizations or formal groups?" In the second question, the respondents were asked to name up to three of the most important formal associations they had joined. The third question asked about the citizen's involvement in informal networks or circles: "Are you an active member of any informal groups, circles or regular gatherings?" And in the fourth question, the respondents were asked to name up to three of the most important informal groups they had joined. With the above questions, four distinct types of social network involvement can be classified: (1) non-involvement; (2) informal network involvement; (3) formal network involvement; and (4) full involvement. Non-involvement means those that involve in neither formal nor informal networks. Informal network involvement means those that involve exclusively in informal groups. Formal network involvement means those that involve exclusively in formal groups. And full involvement means those that involve in both formal and informal networks.

From the same survey, two questions were selected to measure social trust. The first question asked about interpersonal trust: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with them?" This first question has been used in numerous surveys (e.g. Knack & Keefer, 1997; World Bank, 2015a: 3). The second question measured attitudes toward strangers: "Would you agree or disagree with the statement that in working with someone, it is preferable to work with friends or relatives, even if a stranger is more qualified?" This second question has also been used in many surveys (e.g. Asian Barometer Survey, 2003; Knack & Keefer, 1997). It is used to measure trust in strangers. From these two questions⁵, four distinct types of social trust can be classified: (1) generalized trust; (2) competence-based trust; (3) commitment-based trust; and (4) particularized trust. With generalized trust, most people are trustful and can be worked with even if they are strangers. Regarding competence-based trust, most people are not trustful in principle, but some people can be worked with on the grounds of professional or technical competence. With commitment-based trust, most people are trustful in principle, but it is preferable to work with friends or relatives. In particularized trust, most people are not trustful in principle, and trust is confined only to one's immediate circle of friends and relatives.

² Granovetter (1973) was the first to address the difference between generalized trust and specific trust including trust in family and friends. Putnam (1993) distinguishes between thin and thick trust.

³ The population of this study is Thai citizens aged 18 and above. With the total population above age 18 (in all provinces in Thailand) being 45,092,955 in 2016 (<http://service.nso.go.th>), the sample size is 2,500 ($e = 0.02$) which is the lowest number of responses from the respondents according to the Yamane method for sample size calculation.

⁴ Asian Barometer: A Comparative Survey of democracy, governance and development. www.asianbarometer.org; Park and Shin (2003). "Social Capital and Democratic Citizenship: The Case of South Korea" Asian Barometer Working Paper series No. 12, Taipei: National Taiwan University and Academia Sinica.

⁵ Validity and reliability of these two questions were also determined. Overall validity (Indexes of Item-Objective Congruence-IOC ≥ 0.6) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.906) were high.

4. Social networks in Thailand

To what extent are ordinary Thais involved in social networks? Table 1 identifies the types of social network involvement of ordinary Thai citizens. In the table, it can be seen that about half (50.02%) of Thai citizens tend to stay away from social networks, both formal and informal. Among those that are involved in social networks, 24.9% join informal networks, belonging to informal groups exclusively. Thirteen point three percent join formal networks, belonging to formal groups only. And only 11.6% are member of both formal and informal groups. These findings suggest that the Thai population is moderately involved in social networks, and among those that are involved, most tend to join informal networks.

Table 2 shows a list of formal groups or associations, including cooperatives, alumni associations, community development groups, credit union groups, micro-finance groups, political parties, labor unions, sports and leisure groups, producer groups, temple groups, and other volunteer groups that Thai citizens are mostly associated with. Among those that joined these formal networks, the majority were members of producer group (39.8%), cooperative (23.2%), volunteer group (20.2%), temple group (16.2%), and community development group (15.6%). It is quite notable that, in Thailand, occupational ties, such as producer groups (e.g. community business groups, one-tambon-one-product group), cooperatives, and agricultural associations seem to be the most important basis for formal social connections, followed by volunteer, temple, and community-development groups. In Thailand, despite massive rural-urban migration, 50.8% of the Thai population still live in rural areas, as estimated in 2014 (World Bank, 2015a, 2015b: 29). Community organizations and networks, including community business groups, agricultural cooperatives, farmers' organizations, community development organization and other types of community saving organizations, such as micro-finance, credit unions, etc., tend to prevail in most Thai local communities. It should be noted that many of these formal networks or associations are initiated by or are closely linked to provincial and local governments. For instance, numerous voluntary networks such as health promotion networks, elderly development groups, producer groups, agricultural organizations and cooperatives, and micro finance groups were mostly set up by provincial and local governments or received financial support from public funds. The implications of this will be further discussed in the conclusion. In the same provincial survey conducted in 2016, respondents were also asked about the functions of these formal groups or associations. The answers indicated that these local social networks tend to play very important roles in community development, which includes the provision of resources and information to the members, providing goods and services, assessment of community needs, planning and implementing development programs, monitoring and evaluating community development, and interacting with local or provincial governments and the private sectors. All of these activities tend to socially bridge the members of the community. It is notable as well that, in Thailand, membership in national-level organizations, such as trade associations, labor unions and political parties, tends to be very limited.

Table 3 lists the informal social networks that Thai citizen are socially connected with. In the table, it can be seen that the most popular types of informal social networks tend to be community gathering (25.6%), informal circles of friends that exchange information (20.7%), and informal circles of friends that share common hobbies (20.3%), general social gathering (18.8%) and informal circles of friends that go to the same temple (18.2%). In the Thai context, the village temple is considered to be a center that binds the villagers. The village temple council organizes a multitude of

Table 1

Types of social network involvement in Thailand.

Types of social network involvement	Percent (%)
Formal network involvement	13.32
Informal network involvement	24.99
Full involvement	11.67
Non-involvement	50.02
(N)	(2,508)

Source: Provincial survey 2016.

Table 2

Types of formal networks and memberships.

Types of formal groups or associations	Percent membership (%)
Cooperatives (e.g. consumer and producer cooperatives)	23.2
Agricultural associations	10.9
Alumni associations	9.6
Community development organizations	15.6
Credit union groups	8.9
Labor unions	2.3
Micro finance groups	10.5
Parent teacher associations	1.8
Political parties	2.1
Producer groups (e.g. community business groups, one-tambon-one-product groups)	39.8
Residential associations	1.6
Sports or leisure groups	11.2
Temple groups	16.2
Trade associations	2.9
Volunteer groups (e.g. environmental protection networks, health promotion networks, elderly development groups)	20.2

Note: Each figure shows the percentage of the type of formal group mentioned by respondents. Since up to three groups for each respondent were coded, the percentage could not be summed.

Source: Provincial survey 2016.

Table 3

Types of informal networks and memberships.

Types of informal groups	Percent membership (%)
Circle of colleagues that interact after work	6.5
Circle of friends that share common hobbies	20.3
Circle of friends that do business together	6.7
Circle of friends that help each other out	1.2
Circle of friends that exchange information	20.7
Circle of friends that go to the same temple	18.2
Community gathering	25.6
Family gathering	1.3
General social gathering	18.8
Informal credit-loan circle	8.2
Informal circle of alumni	10.1
Informal circle of veterans	0.2
Informal circle of hometown natives	8.6

Note: Each figure shows the percentage of the type of informal group or circle the respondents mentioned. Since up to three groups for each respondent were coded, the percentage could not be summed.

Source: Provincial survey 2016.

religious and community activities for the village. During festival holidays, village temples organize parades, folk art performances, and other ritual festivities. The villagers are expected to participate in and contribute to these activities in order to fulfill their obligations to the community. Village temples are, therefore, an important symbol of the village community which socially bridges its members.

In sum, although involvement in social networks tends to be important for many Thais, about half (50.02%) of the Thai people are not involved in any social networks. Among those that join

these networks, 13.3% belong to formal social networks. In order to be socially connected with other people, 24.9% of the Thai people tend to rely on informal networks, such as community gathering and informal friendship networks. These findings indicate that the Thai people as a whole tend to moderately join social networks.

5. Patterns of social trust in Thailand

Do the Thai people trust their fellow citizens? When our provincial survey asked a question about interpersonal trust (“Would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with them?”), only 38.8% of the Thai people expressed trust in other people. This means that a substantial majority of the Thai people were reluctant to trust other people. When the same survey asked another question regarding trust in strangers (“Would you agree or disagree with the statement that in working with someone, it is preferable to work with friends or relatives, even if a stranger is more qualified?”), a large majority of the Thai people (70.1%) disagreed with the statement, which means that they tend to express their trust and willingness to work with strangers given their appropriate qualifications. Only 29.9% of the Thai population remained committed to working with friends or relatives only.

From the above two questions, four distinct types of trust can be classified: generalized trust, commitment-based trust, competence-based trust, and particularized trust. Table 4 identifies the types of social trust associated with the Thai people. According to the table, it can be seen that nearly half (42.5%) of the Thai people belong to the competence-based trust category. This means that in the view of the majority of Thais, most people are not trustworthy, but some of them can be trusted and worked with on the grounds that they have professional or technical competence. Next to the first type of social trust is generalized trust. Quite a small number (27.6%) of the Thai people exhibit this type of trust. That is, in their view, most people are trustworthy and can be worked with even if they are strangers. A much smaller number (18.7%) of the Thai people belong to the particularized trust group, where trust is confined only to a small circle of friends and relatives. The smallest proportion (11.2%) of the Thai people belong to the commitment-based trust category. That is, in their view, most people are trustworthy in principle, but it is preferable for them to work only among friends and relatives whom they have personal ties with.

In sum, the findings indicate that the cultural component of social capital, as measured by generalized trust that can contribute more to civic virtues and engagement, does not appear to prevail in Thailand. That is the number of Thai people that, trust others unconditionally, constitute a relatively small minority of the population. The Thai people tend to differentiate trust-in-principle from trust-in-action. Nearly half of the Thai population belong to competence-based trust. This means that, in the view of the majority of Thais, most people are not trustworthy in principle, but some of them can be trusted and worked with on the grounds that they have appropriate qualifications. It is also encouraging to know that only a small proportion of the Thai people exhibit particularized trust, which is often viewed as having a negative effect on social capital. Obviously, Thailand is far from being a low-trust society. However, the majority of the Thai people still belong to competence-based trust group, which is confined to people with specific professional status and backgrounds.

6. Social capital and citizen participation in Thailand

Social capital scholars maintain that social networks and trust, the two key attributes of social capital, can increase the motivation and ability of citizens to participate in public affairs, foster

Table 4

Types of social trust in Thailand.

Types of social trust	Percent affiliated (%)
Generalized trust	27.6
Commitment-based trust	11.2
Competence-based trust	42.5
Particularized trust	18.7
(N)	(2,508)

Source: Provincial survey 2016.

demands for citizen-government collaboration, and thereby improve public sector performance. Some scholars (e.g. Uslaner, 2002: 137, Knack, 2002: 780) regard social trust as primary to social networks. They have argued that generalized trust motivates people to join voluntary associations and to get involved in public affairs. However, as with most scholars of social capital, it is assumed in this paper that networks and trust can both influence citizen participation.

In order to estimate the relationships between social networks and trust on the one hand, and citizen participation on the other, three types of social network involvement dummies (with non-involvement as a reference category) and three types of social trust dummies (with particularized trust as a reference category) were used as the independent variables in explaining the variation in citizen participation. Citizen participation was also differentiated into two dimensions: attitudinal and behavioral. The attitudinal dimension of citizen participation was measured according to the supportive attitude toward citizen participation. From the provincial survey, two questions were selected to measure this variable: (1) “Which of the following statements comes closer to your own view? Citizen participation is always preferable in local public administration; for people like me, it does not matter whether we have citizen participation or not”; (2) “Which of the following statements comes closer to your own view? Citizen participation in local public administration is capable of solving the problems of our community; citizen participation cannot solve our community’s problems.” The responses to these two questions⁶ were coded and combined to construct a 3-point index ranging from 1 to 3. The behavioral dimension of citizen participation was measured simply by counting the number of citizen participation activities that the respondents had attended in the past three years. From the survey, the following question was selected to measure citizen-participation activities: In the past three years, how many times have you (1) contacted government officials because of personal, family or neighborhood problems; (2) given your opinion on policies and practices to government officials or local council; (3) engaged in voluntary work for the community; (4) participated in campaigns to solve local problems; (5) participated in public meetings; (6) attended public hearings; (7) served on a committee or working group with government officials?

In order to estimate the effects of social networks and social trust on citizen participation, two regression models were developed. The first model estimated the relationship between the attitudinal dimension of citizen participation (support for citizen-participation) and the types of social network involvement and social trust, along with other socio-economic control variables (including age, years of schooling, income per year, size of the population in the district, and distance from district downtown). The second model estimated the relationship between the behavioral dimension of citizen participation (citizen-participation activities) and the types of social network involvement and social trust. The socio-economic control variables were also included as explana-

⁶ Validity and reliability of these two questions were determined. Overall validity (Indexes of Item-Objective Congruence-IOC ≥ 0.6) and reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.906) were high.

tory variables in the second model. All of the dependent, independent, and socio-economic control variables for these two regression models are listed in [Appendix 2](#).

Table 5 shows the coefficients from the regression analysis. In the first model, it can be seen that all types of social network involvement tend to have significant effects on the support for citizen participation. Being formal network involvement or informal network involvement instead of non-involvement had positive significant effects on the support for citizen participation. Being full involvement instead of non-involvement also had positive significant effects on the support for citizen participation. This means that Thai citizens that are active members of formal groups, informal groups, or both tend to support citizen participation. That is, they tend to value the importance of citizen participation in public affairs and believe that citizen participation is capable of solving the community problems. Most types of social trust, except generalized trust, were not seen to have a significant effect on the support for citizen participation. Having commitment-based trust or competence-based trust had no significant effect on the support for citizen participation. Having generalized trust instead of particularized trust had positive significant effects on the support for citizen participation. This finding, therefore, lends support to social capital theory. The socio-economic variables, except community size, had no significant effect on the support for citizen participation. Community size had positive significant effect on the support for citizen participation. That is, urban residents, those that live in a district with a large population, tend to be more likely to support citizen participation in public affairs and believe that citizen participation is capable of solving the community problems.

The second model examined the effect of social capital on the behavioral dimension of citizen participation. According to that model, it can be seen that all types of social network involvement tended to have significant effects on citizen participation activities. Being full involvement instead of non-involvement had significant effect on citizen participation activities. Its effect was in the expected positive direction and was quite substantial in magnitude. Being formal network involvement or informal network involvement instead of non-involvement tended also to have positive significant effects on citizen participation activities. That is, the Thai citizens that are active members of formal groups, informal groups, or both tend to have more ability to participate in public affairs (e.g. give opinions on policies and practices to government officials, engage in voluntary work for the community, participate in campaigns to solve local problems, participate in public meetings and public hearing, etc.). None of the types of social trust, however, had a significant effect on citizen participation activities. Having generalized trust or commitment-based trust or competence-based trust had no significant influence on citizen participation activities. These findings, therefore, suggest that social networks rather than social trust tend to determine the behavioral dimension of citizens' participation in public affairs. Additionally, some socio-economic variables also have significant effects on citizen participation activities. Thai citizens with a higher education and income tend to participate more in public affairs.

In sum, it can be concluded that, in Thailand, social networks tend to increase both the motivation and capability of the Thai citizens to participate in public affairs, whereas social trust, particularly generalized trust, tends to have a positive effect only on the motivation of the Thai citizens to participate in public affairs.

7. Social capital, citizen participation, and public sector performance in Thailand

Social capital scholars have argued that social capital can improve public sector performance. Citizens that are active in local

Table 5

The impact of social capital on citizen participation.

	Dependent variables	
	(Model 1) Support for citizen- Participation	(Model 2) Citizen- participation activities
	(Coefficients β)	(Coefficients β)
<i>Independent variables:</i>		
Types of social network involvement		
Formal network involvement	0.198 (2.58)*	0.343 (3.46)**
Informal network involvement	0.180 (2.76)*	0.102 (2.03)*
Full involvement	0.236 (3.72)**	0.532 (4.01)**
Types of social trust		
Generalized trust	0.136 (2.02)*	0.061 (0.91)
Commitment-based trust	0.033 (0.34)	−0.049 (−0.76)
Competence-based trust	0.013 (0.54)	−0.024 (−0.57)
Socio-economic variables		
Age	−0.007 (−0.43)	−0.031 (−0.28)
Years of schooling	0.035 (0.23)	0.505 (3.57)**
Income per year (in thousand baht)	−0.012 (−0.56)	0.422 (4.06)**
Community size (no. of population in a given district)	0.221 (2.34)*	0.024 (0.48)
Distance from district downtown (km)	−0.041 (−0.26)	−0.032 (−0.33)
N	2,508	2,508
Adjusted R Square	0.567	0.686
F	10.305	15.823

Note: The models include three social network involvement dummies and three social trust dummies by using non-involvement and particularized trust as reference categories. T-statistics are in parenthesis. * indicates significance at the 0.05 level, ** indicates significance at the 0.01 level.

Source: Provincial survey 2016.

organizations tend to take greater interest in public affairs and render the government more accountable to the citizens. Social capital, therefore, can increase the effectiveness of public goods or services provision (Keefer & Knack, 2005; Putnam, 2002). In his recent study of social capital in the United States, Putnam (2000) examined the institutional performance of fifty states and found that crime rates and tax evasion tended to be lower, and schools and public health sectors tended to work better, in states where social capital is higher.

7.1. Measuring the dependent variable

In order to examine the relationship between social networks and social trust, on the one hand, and public sector performance on the other, twenty four provinces⁷ (excluding the capital city of Bangkok) were used as the units of analysis (see a list of provinces in [Appendix 1](#)). Public sector performance was measured in terms of the effectiveness of the provision of public goods and services. The provinces in contemporary Thailand provide an ideal setting to examine the factors that affect public sector performance because of the variation in the performance of government authorities in each province. As in many countries, the Thai central government delegates and decentralizes responsibility for the provision of public goods and services to provincial-level and local authorities. Provincial and local authorities are implementers and are responsible for providing and maintaining public goods and services, such as infrastructure development, education, public health, and other basic public services for the population in each province on behalf of the central government. As indicated in [Table 6](#), some provinces provide their citizens with more adequate public goods and services, while other provinces provide them insufficiently. Examining the variation

⁷ The sample provinces were spread across all four of the country's major regions.

in the provision of public goods and services at the provincial level, therefore, allows us to estimate the impact of social capital on the effectiveness of public sector performance. Six indicators were used to measure public sector performance in each province: (1) percent of households having access to tap water; (2) percent of households having access to electricity; (3) percent of hospitals receiving hospital accreditation (HA); (4) doctors per population; (5) percent of schools passing standards and quality assessments; and (6) average years of schooling of population aged 15–59. These indicators were chosen for three reasons. First, these measures are relevant and comparable across different provinces. Second, water, electricity, public health, and education are the public goods most often needed and demanded by the citizens in all provinces. Third, the provincial-level and local authorities in each province are the main implementers and are responsible for providing and maintaining these public goods and services. These measures, therefore, were used to operationalize the degree to which a given province was effective in providing public goods and services. All of these indicators were drawn from the National Economic and Social Development Board's provincial development indicators database (eris.nesdb.go.th/pdf/90300-001.pdf) and the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (aqa.onesqa.or.th/SummaryReport.aspx). All of the dependent, independent, and control variables are listed in [Appendix 3](#).

7.2. Measuring the independent variables

In order to estimate the effects of social networks and trust on public sector performance, the paper calculated the fraction of the respondents in each province that had joined formal networks, informal networks, or that exhibited full-involvement, and the fraction of the respondents in each province that belonged to the generalized trust, commitment-based trust, or competence-based trust groups. These measures were used to operationalize the degree to which a given province was either high or low in the number of social networks its citizens associated with, and the level of social trust its citizens had. Additionally, according to the new public governance (NPG) idea, citizen participation in public administration itself is considered as an essential precondition for effective public sector performance. The citizen participation activity, measured by counting the number of citizen participation activities that the respondents in each province attended during the past three years, was also included as an independent variable in this study. It was expected to have a significant positive effect on public sector performance.

7.3. Control variables

In order to identify the effects of social capital and citizen participation on public sector performance accurately, the analysis controlled for two sets of factors that may also have an effect on public sector performance. All of these control variables were from the year 2014 in order to avoid simultaneity bias.

7.3.1. Government resources

The first set consisted of government resources. Public goods and services will improve because more resources are available. The amount of resources available to provincial and local authorities in a given province is thus included as control variable. These measures included the provincial development budget allocated by central government to each provincial government, and the total revenue received by all local governments in a given province.

7.3.2. Socio-economic variables

The second set consisted of socio-economic variables. As the level of economic growth increases, it is reasonable to suppose that

public goods and services will also improve because more resources are available for investment in public goods and services and because the demand for public goods and services increases. Gross provincial product (GPP) per capita is thus included as a control variable. Demand for infrastructure, education, and healthcare services is likely to increase in provinces with higher GPP per capita. The size of the provincial population and distance from Bangkok were also included to control for the variation in the demand for public goods and services as well as the variation in the cost of public goods and service provision. The demand for public goods provision should be higher in provinces with a larger population and in provinces that are closer to Bangkok, which is the center of commercial and industrial activities in Thailand. The costs of providing public goods and services or constructing public infrastructure should be higher in provinces that are located far from Bangkok.

7.4. Empirical results

[Table 7](#) shows the coefficients from the multiple regression analysis. According to the table, it can be seen that social networks have a positive impact on public sector performance. The estimated relationship between public goods provision and social networks as measured by formal network involvement was positive for all six public goods outcomes and statistically significantly different from zero for tap water and electricity. This finding was further supported by the estimates in which social networks were measured by full involvement. The estimated effect of social networks as measured by full involvement was positive for all six public goods provision outcomes and statistically significant for tap water, electricity, and years of schooling of the population. These findings, therefore, lend support to social capital theory. That is, the public sector tends to perform better in provinces where a large fraction of the population joins formal networks or engages in full network involvement (joins both formal and informal networks). This is because citizens that are active in local networks tend to take greater interest in public affairs and render the government more accountable to the citizens. Social networks, therefore, can increase the effectiveness of public goods provision.

On the other hand, social trust does not seem to have a significant effect on public sector performance. The estimated relationship between provincial public goods provision and generalized trust was positive for all six public goods outcomes, but statistically insignificant. The estimated relationships between provincial public goods provision and commitment-based trust as well as competence-based trust were also not statistically significant. These findings, therefore, are not supportive of social capital theory. However, it should be noted that some scholars (e.g. [Uslaner, 2002: 137](#), [Knack, 2002: 780](#)) regard social trust as primary to social networks. They have argued that social trust motivates people to join voluntary associations and to get involved in public affairs. So, the relationship between social trust and public sector performance may not be a direct one. This relationship, therefore, requires further study.

Additionally, citizen participation, as measured by the number of citizen participation activities that the respondents in each province attended in the past three years, has a positive impact on public sector performance. The estimated relationship between public goods provision and citizen participation was positive for all six public goods outcomes and statistically significant for tap water, electricity, and years of schooling of the population. These findings are supportive of the new public governance (NPG) perspective that citizen participation is an essential precondition for effective public sector performance.

Table 6

Provincial public sector performance: descriptive data.

Provincial public sector performance indicators	Lowest value [*]	Highest value [*]	Country average ^{**}	Total number of provinces
Percent of households having access to tap water	1.94	41.92	15.77	24
Percent of households having access to electricity	59.91	110.78	88.41	24
Percent of hospital receiving hospital accreditation (HA)	28.57	100.00	74.76	24
Doctors per population	0.18	1.24	0.37	24
Percent of schools passing standards and quality assessments	53.57	91.91	73.21	24
Average years of schooling of population aged 15–59	7.20	10.10	8.90	24

Source: National Economic and Social Development Board, Provincial development indicators database, 2016 (eris.nesdb.go.th/pdf/90330-001.pdf); Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessments, Schools Assessment Report, 2016 (aqa.onesqa.or.th/SummaryReport.aspx); Provincial survey conducted in 2016.

^{*} Lowest and highest values of twenty four provinces under study.

^{**} The average of all seventy six provinces in Thailand.

Table 7

Social capital, citizen participation, and public sector performance in twenty four provinces of Thailand.

Dependent variables: public sector performance (provision of public goods)						
	Percent of households having access to tap water	Percent of households having access to electricity	Percent of hospital receiving HA	Doctors per 1,000 population ratio	Percent of school passing standards and quality assessments	Average years of schooling of aged 15–59
	(Coefficients β)	(Coefficients β)	(Coefficients β)	(Coefficients β)	(Coefficients β)	(Coefficients β)
<i>Independent variables</i>						
Social networks						
Formal network involvement	0.356 (2.33) [*]	0.232 (2.44) [*]	0.023 (0.03)	0.141 (0.78)	0.121 (0.45)	0.135 (0.58)
Informal network involvement	0.052 (0.71)	0.134 (0.14)	0.032 (0.14)	0.054 (0.64)	0.071 (0.07)	0.131 (0.32)
Full involvement	0.223 (2.14) [*]	0.312 (3.45) ^{**}	0.144 (0.03)	0.166 (0.11)	0.123 (1.52)	0.334 (2.58) [*]
Social trust						
Generalized trust	0.076 (0.83)	0.224 (1.41)	0.023 (0.12)	0.131 (0.48)	0.212 (0.65)	0.129 (0.58)
Commitment-based trust	−0.023 (−0.34)	−0.123 (−0.57)	0.111 (0.55)	0.097 (0.60)	0.092 (0.32)	−0.076 (−0.45)
Competence-based trust	−0.033 (−0.34)	0.056 (0.51)	0.341 (0.43)	0.034 (0.54)	−0.076 (−0.35)	0.211 (0.46)
Citizen participation						
Citizen-participation activities	0.355 (3.43) ^{**}	0.425 (3.33) ^{**}	0.012 (0.72)	0.222 (1.46)	0.114 (0.45)	0.223 (2.78) [*]
Government resources						
Provincial development Budget (in million baht)	0.132 (0.64)	0.131 (0.18)	0.022 (0.55)	−0.076 (−0.87)	−0.087 (−0.18)	0.146 (0.34)
Total revenue received by local governments (in million baht)	0.136 (0.37)	0.042 (2.56) [*]	−0.143 (−0.56)	−0.054 (−0.75)	−0.076 (−0.54)	0.056 (0.76)
Socio-economic variables						
Per capita GDP	−0.125 (−0.75)	0.053 (2.32) [*]	0.036 (0.46)	0.053 (0.33)	0.146 (0.73)	0.087 (3.56) ^{**}
Size of population (in million)	−0.021 (−0.22)	−0.167 (−1.52)	0.181 (0.43)	−0.024 (−0.54)	0.211 (0.82)	0.091 (0.44)
Distance from Bangkok (km)	−0.222 (−2.12) [*]	0.054 (0.77)	−0.049 (−0.65)	−0.144 (−0.69)	−0.262 (−2.47) [*]	−0.122 (−0.77)
N	24	24	24	24	24	24
Adjusted R square	0.948	0.922	0.843	0.821	0.823	0.912
F	47.261	48.740	43.361	50.664	48.867	48.862

Note: T-statistics are in parentheses. ^{*} indicates significance at the 0.05 level, ^{**} indicates significance at the 0.01 level, ^{***} indicates significance at the 0.001 level.

Source: National Economic and Social Development Board, Provincial development indicators database, 2016, Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessments, Schools Assessment Report, 2016, and Provincial Survey (2016).

7.5. Other explanatory factors

Contrary to what is generally expected, provincial and local authorities do not necessarily improve public goods or services a great deal as economic growth and government resources increase. In Table 7, it can be seen that the relationship between provincial public goods provision and per capita GDP is positive for five public goods outcomes and statistically significant for only electricity and years of schooling of the population. The magnitude of these effects is, however, relatively small for both electricity and years of schooling. Government resources also do not seem to have a significant effect on public goods provision outcomes. The size of provincial development budgets allocated by the central government to each provincial government had no significant impact on the six public goods outcomes. The estimated effect of the total revenue received by local governments in a given province on provincial public goods provision outcomes was positive for three public goods provision outcomes and was statistically significant for only electricity. However, the magnitude of this effect was relatively small.

It should be noted that the findings from the multiple regression analysis in Table 7 are based on the sample of twenty four provinces. This relatively limited number of sample size may affect the predictive power of the empirical model and may cause many estimated relationships to be statistically insignificant. However, social capital variables and citizen participation tend to have positive significant effects on the provision of some important public goods (particularly tap water, electricity, and years of schooling of the population).

To sum up, the findings in this section suggest that social networks and citizen participation can increase the effectiveness of public goods and services provision, particularly when the accountability of the public sector is weak. Provincial and local authorities do not tend to improve public goods and services a great deal as government resources increase. Resources matter, but so does how they are used. In Thailand, where the accountability of public sector is weak, public sector performance can be improved if citizens are actively involved in local organizations and have the opportunity to actively participate in public decisions and public service delivery.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

During the past decade, a growing number of social scientists have identified social capital and citizen participation in public administration as key factors contributing to public sector performance. Social capital scholars have emphasized that social networks and social trust, the core components of social capital, tend to foster the motivation and capability of the citizens to participate in public affairs and thereby can improve public sector performance. New public governance (NPG) scholars also emphasize citizen participation in public administration as an essential precondition of effective public sector performance.

The results presented in this paper reveal that Thai citizens are moderately involved in social networks. About half of Thai citizens stay away from social networks, both formal and informal. Among those that join these networks, 24.9% join informal networks. Thirteen point three percent join formal networks; and only 11.6% are members of both formal and informal networks. Equally notable was the finding that Thai citizens tend to differentiate trust-in-principle from trust-in-action. Nearly half of the Thai population belongs to the competence-based trust group. This means that, in the view of the majority of Thais, most people are not trustworthy in principle, but some of them can be trusted and worked with on the grounds that they have specific professional status and backgrounds. Those that trust others unconditionally, as measured by generalized trust, constitute a relatively small minority of the Thai population. This means that Thailand is far from a low-trust society. However, the majority of the Thai people still limit trust to people with appropriate qualifications.

Do social networks and social trust increase the motivation and capability of Thai citizens to participate in public affairs? In line with the literature on social capital, social networks tend to have significant positive effects on both the attitudinal dimension of citizen participation and the behavioral dimension of citizen participation. That is, Thai citizens that are active members of social networks tend to value the importance of citizen participation in public affairs and believe that citizen participation is capable of solving community problems. Moreover, Thai citizens that are active members of social networks also tend to have more ability to participate in public affairs (e.g. give opinions on policies and practices to government officials, engage in voluntary work for the community, participate in campaigns to solve local problems, participate in public meetings and public hearing). In contrast to social networks, most types social trust, except generalized trust, have no significant effect on either the attitudinal dimension of citizen participation or the behavioral dimension of citizen participation. Having generalized trust has positive significant effects on the attitudinal dimension of citizen participation but has no significant influence on the behavioral dimension of citizen participation. Thus, in Thailand, social networks tend to increase both the motivation and capability of the Thai citizens to participate in public affairs, whereas social trust, particularly generalized trust, tends to increase only the motivation of the Thai citizens to participate in public affairs.

Can social networks, social trust, and citizen participation improve public sector performance? The results presented in this paper reveal that social networks and citizen participation can improve the effectiveness of public goods and services provision particularly when the accountability of the public sector is weak. Provincial and local authorities do not tend to improve public goods and services a great deal as economic growth and resources increase. Government resources can be used for other purposes. When public accountability is weak, citizens can still make government officials organize and fund the public goods that they need when they are actively involved in local organiza-

tions and actively participate in public decisions and public service delivery.

What lessons can be drawn from this study? First, economic growth and the increase in government resources are not necessarily associated with public sector performance. Second, in order to improve public sector performance, it is necessary to pay more attention to social networks and the relationship between civil society and government authorities. In contrast to the conventional studies on citizen participation in Thailand (e.g. Suwanmala, 2007; Dufhues et al., 2015; Punyaratabandhu & Unger, 2009; Punyaratabandhu, 2008; Manor, 2004) that emphasize the limitations of civic engagement in public administration, the present study demonstrates that social networks and citizen participation in public administration do exist in Thailand and that they can make a difference regarding the provision of public services. Social networks are mostly visible in certain areas such as community development, environmental and resource management, agricultural development, and elderly and healthcare services. However, these efforts are piecemeal and have not been scaled up to provide a new direction in the country's public administration. It is, therefore, suggested that horizontal relationships between one's fellow citizens and citizen participation in public administration must be encouraged and expanded. This means that the roles of the government must be changed from controlling and directing the population to collaborating, empowering, and engaging with civil society. The government is no longer the central actor for governance. Civil society, social networks, non-governmental organizations, and private entities need to be accepted as partners in governance. The ultimate goal is to build strong social capital where there is trust between actors and respect for one another.

Finally, in the Thai context, many formal social networks that Thai citizens are socially connected with, are closely linked to government institutions, instead of emerging solely from civil society. For instance, agricultural groups, community business networks, micro finance groups, or health promotion networks (see Table 2) were mostly set up by provincial and local governments or received financial support from public funds. In retrospect, Thailand's non-profit sector has long been under the influence of the government (Wun-Gaeo et al., 2014: 103–104). In the early years, religious organizations and ethnic minority associations were the dominant form in the non-profit sector. During the cold war period, the Thai government viewed the rise of non-profit sector with suspicion. However, during the modern time period, the Thai government not only recognized and cooperated with the non-profit sector, but also itself created civil society organizations as partners for promoting development (Beard and Phakphian, 2012). Although, the structure and operation of government-directed voluntary organizations in Thailand usually transplant administrative cultures as well as hierarchical and patronage relations into voluntary organizations, these local voluntary organizations can also help creating direct channels linking civil society and the government apparatus. In contrast to many social capital scholars that emphasize the negative effects of vertically or hierarchically organized social networks (see World Bank, 2015a: 2; Pharr, 2000: 175; Warren, 2001: 45), it is argued here that state-directed voluntary organizations and networks can have positive effects on citizen participation, provided they can create inclusive organizations encompassing people across diverse social groups and if they allow horizontal relationships to prosper (see also Wun-Gaeo et al., 2014: 104).

9. Conflict of interest

None.

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Appendix

See [Appendix 1–3](#).

Appendix 1

List of provinces, population and sample.

Province	Population aged 18 and above	Number of districts	Sample size
<i>Central region</i>			
Nonthaburi	749,362	6 districts	126
Pathum Thani	642,936	6 districts	126
Chanthaburi	364,876	4 districts	84
Ratchaburi	597,905	6 districts	126
Suphan Buri	628,124	6 districts	126
Kanchanaburi	547,991	6 districts	126
<i>Northern region</i>			
Pichit	413,058	4 districts	84
Pitsanulok	627,109	6 districts	126
Uttaradit	354,331	4 districts	84
Uthai Thani	242,487	4 districts	84
Tak	283,451	4 districts	84
Mae Hong Son	145,200	4 districts	84
<i>Northeastern region</i>			
Khon Kaen	1,285,332	6 districts	126
Maha Sarakham	689,600	6 districts	126
Buri Ram	1,087,037	6 districts	126
Ubon Rachathani	1,243,889	6 districts	126
Nong Khai	640,680	6 districts	126
Surin	968,976	6 districts	126
<i>Southern region</i>			
Krabi	273,071	4 districts	84
Chumphon	346,049	4 districts	84
Nakorn Si Thammarat	1,079,379	6 districts	126
Narathiwat	449,167	4 districts	84
Songkhla	911,718	6 districts	126
Satun	189,043	4 districts	84
Total		124 districts	2,604

Source: National Statistical Office of Thailand, Report on Population Characteristics, 2016 (<http://service.nso.go.th>)

Appendix 2

Dependent, independent, and control variables applied to explaining citizen participation.

Variable	Expect sign	Measurement	Data source
<i>Dependent variables</i>			
Support for citizen participation		Two questions were selected to measure this variable: (1) citizen participation is preferable in local public administration? and (2) citizen participation in local public administration is capable of solving the problems of the community? Responses to these two questions were coded and combined to construct a 3-point index ranging from 1 to 3	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Citizen participation activities		This variable was measured by counting the number of citizen participation activities that each respondent attended in the past three years. (including: 1) contacting government officials because of personal, family or neighborhood problems, 2) giving opinions on policies and practices to government officials or the local council, 3) engaging in voluntary work for the community, 4) participating in campaigns to solve local problems, 5) participating in public meetings, 6) attending public hearing, and 7) serving on committee or working group with government officials)	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
<i>Independent variables</i>			
Types of social network involvement			
Formal network Involvement	+	Dummy variable: 1 for those that have joined formal networks, 0 otherwise	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Informal network Involvement	+	Dummy variable: 1 for those that have joined informal networks, 0 otherwise	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Full Involvement	+	Dummy variable: 1 for those that joined both formal and informal networks, 0 otherwise	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Types of social trust			
Generalized trust	+	Dummy variable: 1 for those that belong to the generalized trust group, 0 otherwise	Provincial survey conducted in 2016

Appendix 2 (continued)

Variable	Expect sign	Measurement	Data source
Commitment-based trust	+	Dummy variable: 1 for those that belong to commitment-based trust group, 0 otherwise	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Competence-based trust	+	Dummy variable: 1 for those that belong to competence-based trust group, 0 otherwise	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Socio-economic variables			
Age	±	Age of the respondent	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Years of schooling	±	Years of schooling of the respondent	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Income per year	±	Income per year of the respondent	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Community size	±	Number of people in the respondent's district	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Distance from district downtown	±	Distance of respondent's home to district downtown (km)	Provincial survey conducted in 2016

Appendix 3

Dependent, independent, and control variables applied to explaining public sector performance (provision of public goods) in twenty four provinces of Thailand.

Variable	Expected sign	Measurement	Data source
<i>Dependent variables</i>			
Household having access to tap water		Percent of household having access to tap water	National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), Provincial Development Indicators, 2016 (eris.nesdb.go.th/pdf/90300-001.pdf)
Household having access to electricity		Percent of household having access to electricity	NESDB (2016)
Hospital receiving HA		Percent of hospital receiving hospital accreditation (HA)	NESDB (2016)
Doctors per population		Doctors per 1,000 population ratio	NESDB (2016)
School passing standards and quality assessments		Percent of schools passing standards and quality assessments	Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessments, Schools Assessment Report, 2016 (aqa.onesqa.or.th/SummaryReport.aspx)
Years of schooling		Average years of schooling of population aged 15–59	NESDB (2016)
<i>Independent variables</i>			
Social networks			
Formal network involvement	+	The fraction of respondents in each province that have joined formal networks	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Informal network involvement	+	The fraction of respondents in each province that have joined informal networks	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Full involvement	+	The fraction of respondents in each province that exhibit full-involvement (have joined both formal and informal networks)	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Social trust			
Generalized trust	+	The fraction of respondents in each province that belong to the generalized trust group	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Commitment-based trust	+	The fraction of respondents in each province that belong to commitment-based trust group	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Competence-based trust	+	The fraction of respondents in each province that belong to competence-based trust group	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Citizen participation			
Citizen-participation activities	+	The number of citizen participation activities that the respondents in each province attended in the past three years	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
<i>Control variables</i>			
Government resources			
Provincial development budget	+	Provincial development budget allocated by central government to each provincial government (in million baht)	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Total revenue received by local governments	+	Total revenue received by all local governments in each province (in million baht)	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Socio-economic variables			
Per capita GPP	+	Gross provincial product per capita	NESDB (2016)
Size of population	+	Number of people in each province (in million)	Provincial survey conducted in 2016
Distance from Bangkok	–	Distance from each province to Bangkok (km)	Provincial survey conducted in 2016

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