

POPULISM WITH THE CIVIL STATE REGARDING THE USE OF POLITICAL POWER IN A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to analyze populism and the civil state with regard to the use of political power in a democratic system based on the current political situation in Thailand involving a wide variety of important political phenomena that are referred to as populist politics, which were the heart of the constitution of the year 2007. However, the present political system is still gravely flawed because it has been monopolized by politicians and capitalists and remains quite problematic in terms of vote-buying corrupting the elections, use of influence and the patronage system in localities for intimidation of people, and also the use of the state power and the power of money to allow for the winning of elections based on the systemic weaknesses. Moreover, the fraudulence of politicians by using the “populist” policies model is greatly related to the political parties or government that has the opportunity to jointly administer the country. Populism has therefore been unavoidably applied as a selling point to gain political results in the pursuit of power and the benefits for their own supporters without considering the results that follow. This has led to the guidelines for the administration of the country by the government of General Prayut Chan-o-cha, which has focused on creating the participation of every sector for solving problems and management using policies that are referred to as public policy. This is a guiding framework for the implementation of the economic policies of the government that aim to address the weaknesses of populist policy as mentioned for the benefit of the people, which is an important goal, and to push the power toward development of a sustainable foundational economy.

Keywords: Populism, The Civil State, Political Power, Democratic System

INTRODUCTION

The period following the national election in the year 2001 is considered the starting point of political changes in Thailand since the Thai Rak Thai party, which was led by Pol. Lt. Col. Thaksin Shinawatra, won the election with the highest number of votes in history, especially throughout the countryside. Therefore, this election, which involved an indirect democratic process that opens the opportunity for the people to choose their representatives who jointly hold various political positions and is, therefore, is an expression of consent from the majority of the people, was considered at that time to be one of the necessary transitional periods in the political process of Thai society.

Due to the policies of this government, it was widely regarded as the strong hope of Thai people that made politics in the year 2001 the start of there being changes in behaviors in the elections of Thailand. Political policies are frequently mentioned as the Thai Rak Thai party applied the policies of “populism” for use in campaigning focused on reaching the low-income and poor people and farmers in the countryside at the grass-roots level. This had importance concerning the model of the democratic system of Thailand, which resulted in the

phenomenon of receiving an overwhelming number of votes in this election. If there is an analysis of the factors that allowed the Thai Rak Thai party to receive such an enormous response, it would be the setting of the policies that reached the hearts of the people at the grass-roots level by volunteering to jointly solve the problems of poverty and the debt of the people. When considering the phrase “populist policy” in the context of Thai society, it can be seen that the policies mentioned that received popular support were focused on economic stimulation by encouraging the consumption by the people together with new resource allocation by focusing on the development of the country. This economic development was conducted in two dimensions, namely in the capitalist dimension, which was an upper-level development that continued to use the capitalist dimension to open free trade with other countries and investment in exports. In contrast, in the second dimension, there was the lower-level development at the grass-roots level by applying a socialist system that required subsidies from the central government to create opportunities for the poor (Angtrakul, 1991).

When the phrase “the civil state” first appeared in the period of Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha, it was promoted as the primary policy as a guideline for allowing Thailand to restore peace, order, and unity and to develop the country to have sustainable strength, stability, and wealth. Therefore, the principle of the civil state is cooperation for the creation of power in providing benefits to the country rather than for oneself or the government bureaucracy. Instead, it is done for “every person of the populace” Lekwattananon (2016), by the participation of all sectors in the “civil state” model, such as the 20-year national strategy that allows the Thai people to be able to accept and agree with the strategies. This demonstrates the creation of opportunities and equality in the social sector and the reduction of the economic and social inequality of the country in order to provide sustainable growth. Therefore, application of this public policy was carried out in the drive for development of the country by focusing on the creation of participation between the government sector, the private sector and the general public in order to raise the level of the quality of life of the Thai people as well as strengthen their ability in the competition of the country by allowing every person to be able to freely participate in national development following “the civil state” strategies by their own initiative (Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2018), as follows:

- 1) Follow-up for an understanding of the policies and problem-solving guidelines of the government and government agencies.
- 2) Participation in offering opinions and giving constructive and beneficial feedback with regard to solving the problems in various areas through speaking onstage or other appropriate channels.
- 3) Respect and behavior in accordance with the law so as to maintain peace and order.
- 4) Learning about their rights and duties as citizens and respecting the rights of others equally.
- 5) Public consciousness in assistance and generosity for others who lack opportunities with regard to communities, society and the country.

It can be said that this public policy has differences from the populist policy, which are that populist policy is more focused on economic development at the macro level in terms of large businesses. In contrast, the public policy is focused on developing a foundational economy to transform populism into the civil state, which will be successful only when the government sector and the public sector have common aims. Although the public policy is focused on the foundational economy, it is thought that inequality will still exist regardless of which period or whatever the regime is. The most crucial factor is how well the people eat and live, in which some degree of reducing the inequality by the government sector is required to support the people to have sustainable incomes and make a living for themselves.

It can be seen that when comparing “the civil state” and “populism”, the civil state is a process for working that does not separate the people from each other; every person has a role with all sectors, including the government, public and private sectors, whereas populism comprises policies which solely assist people who are suffering and emphasizes the stimulation of consumption. However, a large budget is used to provide this assistance, and the policies are often used as tools for channels in politicians’ election campaigns. This

fostered the belief that the process of the civil state will provide the policies that can replace the populist policies by focusing on the participation of all sectors in the development of the country, which will lead to the development of the democratic model.

Models of Populist Policy and the Civil State

Populism

“Populism” is an English language term that comes from the Latin language root-word “Populus”, which translates as “the people” based on the original definition of populism as a political doctrine that supports the rights and power of the ordinary people in the battle with leaders that have prerogatives and privileges, from which many thinkers have provided the various definitions as follows.

Kesanuch, et al., (2017) stated that populist policy occurred for the first time in the latter part of the 19th century in the countries of Russia and the United States of America and was referred to as the process of the Narodniks (Narodichestvo), which was a political ideology that was disseminated during that period. This concept provided support resulting in benefits for the poor people with the hope of popularity and a robust political base mainly without considering the requirements for reasonableness in terms of economic support, which made the approaches to populism have various forms. However, there were similar aims and goals, which included the admiration of the people, which is in line with Thammajai (2018), who mentioned that populism in Thailand comprises the policies that are aimed at appealing to people at the grassroots level by the appropriation of government funds to arrange for various projects in order to assist in the short term only. This is regarded as the building of a famous political base with the main focus on the votes and satisfaction of the people.

Populist policy in the period of the government of Pol. Lt. Col. Thaksin Shinawatra starting in the year 2001 and continuing after that was based on the results of the election on 6 January 2001, in which the Thai Rak Thai party won approximately 150 seats more than the rival Democrat Party. This winning by a landslide resulted from the populist policies that promised the people at the grass-roots level from the 30-baht treatment of every disease and the debt moratorium program to crop price insurance, village funds and numerous others. These various policies demonstrated that the people have numerous needs and must strongly rely on the resources of the land, which may lead to a lack of financial stability or loss concerning the country's economic system in the long term. "Populism" is therefore often applied for use in an interpretation that is narrow, which is stated as the presentation of the policies appealing to the people for the hope of benefits in fiscal terms regardless of the loss or fiscal burdens that the state must bear in the future. Secretariat of the House of Representatives acting as Secretariat of the National Reform Council (2011).

Nevertheless, the implementation of populist policy overwhelmingly created the satisfaction of the people, which made "populism" become the policy that is politically marketable as a guideline in the political campaigns of other parties, which is by Kasornsuwan (2003), who stated that populist policies are merely tools for the political campaigns of parties. From finding ways to solve the problems of poverty and create justice for the poor to the capitalist groups that also receive the benefits from the populist policy, there is a characteristic conflict of interest which is the result of the process of stimulating consumption by the government, which makes the people merely consumers whose spending is not related with production in any way. This is reflected by the phenomenon of the increased expansion of goods, which although the income of households will increase, expenses are also higher, similar to Laothamatas (2006), who categorized the definitions of populism into five characteristics, which are:

- 1) Populism in Russia and America was populism in the original definition that occurred in the end of the 19th century and involved the social changes of farmers, which was the largest segment of the population of the country that wanted social changes at that time.

- 2) Populism in Latin America involved the process of populism that started in Argentina during the decade of the 1920s by creation of policies to provide aid to the poor in order to focus on the voter base and policy foundation from the people, which made the leaders and the people have an increased closeness.
- 3) Populism in western nations is characterized by politics in which some political parties receive support from the people who give them preference or have the same political views.
- 4) Populism as a method for development or a rural development concept emphasizing agriculture as an alternative type of development that does not emphasize the urban development style of western nations.
- 5) Populism that gives importance or value to the people that is characterized by politics that focus on the common people and thus must always implement the policies of populism in order to continuously satisfy the demands of the people.

In particular, populism has been frequently used in political discourse in Thailand since the period of the Thaksin government, which has made the public more familiar with populist policies. Thailand must face the declining economic conditions that demonstrate a trend of slowing down to be a source of working capital for the people in investment to create additional jobs and incomes for the people in communities. In which irresponsible policies require the spending of large budgets created by foreign debt in order to stimulate the economy, which has resulted in the condition of increased inflation in society and made the government adjust the economic situation to distribute wealth using a large budget focused on the creation of robust and widespread admiration. However, it does not focus on the source of where that power comes from but merely sets the policies for the people, and the world of politics is viewed as a matter of moral conflict between the leaders and the subordinates that involves pluralistic rejection, in which people that think differently may be rejected as not being Thai people because of differing political opinions. Therefore, it has resulted in the conflicts between ideas and beliefs regarding right and wrong and good and evil to find the will together, namely what the people need and how they act because of the policies of generosity concerning the lower-middle-class such as the 30-baht treatment of every disease, in which every person can obtain the four fundamental factors, namely food, clothing, medicine and shelter. These are the things that low-income and middle-class people need to sustain life more than financial wealth in the economy as the people at the grassroots level, which is regarded as one of the largest groups of people in Thailand. Thus, during that period, conflict was caused between the upper-middle class and the lower-middle class and the grassroots with ideas, attitudes, and needs that differ from each other. This was a result of the upper-middle-class group wanting economic growth without social benefits. Therefore, controversy occurred, increasing conflicts such as the red shirts group contemptuously conflicting with the yellow shirts group. Due to the people not having power, this led to an undermining of society, and authoritarianism followed.

Although populist policies represent one of the principal trends at the global level, there is also an increasing proliferation of neoliberal policies that can divert resources from the ordinary individuals entering the market, who can grow within the state of the economy or the capitalist markets. Moreover, the political power that slipped from the hands of the powerful and wealthy aristocratic elite to the politicians as a result of elections is increasing, which derives from the voters in the election. Therefore, the actual problem may not be the populist policies, but instead, it is the political leaders seeking benefits with the trend of populism attached with society when some give and those who receive from them. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that from this time onward, it is believed that after the election, no matter which political party or whoever forms the government, it will undoubtedly be impossible to avoid these types of populist policies.

The Civil State

Siam (2016) defined “the civil state” as the consolidation of all sectors, no matter whether in the public sector, the business sector or the government sector, for use by

considering the basis that “Every Thai person comprises the people of the state”. Thus, it is considered that power is an essential factor in solving the problems with changes or reform. Moreover, sustainable development of the country in every dimension and every aspect by the implementation following the strategies of “the civil state”, which can be divided into two sub-strategies, as follows:

1) The “government” with “the people” by “the state” being facilitators to support and open channels for “the citizens”, or the private sector and the general public, to jointly participate based on the democratic process in order to allow the people to understand the various types of administration work of the government and not cause conflicts to occur between the people and the government.

2) The “people” with the “government bureaucracy”, which is the working together of the people and the government officials for sustainable development by the creation of “the civil state network” in every aspect, will be an essential mechanism that links and strengthens the joint participation of all sectors as the guideline for the public administration of the current government. This will allow the management of the state budget to be efficient, create value and generate the highest benefits for the development of the country, development of communities, and development of the rights and welfare benefits by the state in order to raise the level of the quality of life of the people without causing the problem of inequality in society. This is similar to Sontijirawong (2015), who mentioned that the civil state is the cooperation of the state and civil society to solve economic problems and facilitate the drive for development jointly. The government will thus set public policy for every section of the civil service that will be applied as the guidelines for practices. So that the implementation of the work of the government sector will have integrity, transparency, correctness, effectiveness and efficiency as well as thorough distribution of power to local areas by allowing the people, communities, and the private sector to jointly participate in the development of localities, society and the country and cooperate with the state continuously in order to provide the most benefits for the state and the people.

Public policy therefore is a guiding framework in the implementation of the economic policies of the government of General Prayut Chan-o-cha by having the aim of the overcoming the weaknesses of populist policy with the important essence of public policy being the use of the power of the state for the benefit of the people. These are important projects, such as the “Chim-Shop-Chai (Eat-Shop-Spend)” program, the “We Tour Together” promotion, etc. Public policy thus has a principle focus on the creation of popularity and the admiration of the people in the short term. Therefore, this is the origin of the concept that is referred to as the civil state strategy that is the belief that the civil state has mechanisms with processes that are different from those of populism and is officially considered as the strategy for establishing the foundational economy.

In addition to the definitions of the characteristics mentioned, the phrase “the civil state” has also been defined in the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997 - 2001) as when the government sector and the public sector have a good understanding, responsibility and generosity with each other, and the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan also provides the definition as good relations between the government sector and the people through participation, similar to the definition of “the civil state” (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2016).

The Narrow Definition

- 1) Coordination of the power of all groups of “citizens” with all parts of “the state” in order to develop society at every level.
- 2) Coordination of the power of all parts of society so that the public can focus on developing society.
- 3) Cooperation to help build society.
- 4) Working together to combine the power of every segment to create ideas without excluding anyone.

The Broad Definition

- 1) The people, communities, and civil society have important roles in the development of local areas, society, and the country.
- 2) Management and development of the country by the government sector using the principle of the participation of the people extensively, sincerely, and continuously at every level.
- 3) The implementation of the work of the government sector with integrity, transparency, correctness, effectiveness, quality and efficiency as well as the distribution of power to local areas thoroughly and sufficiently.
- 4) All parts of society, including the government sector and the public sector, cooperate as “development partners” by jointly planning, implementing, following up, and evaluating so as to improve and develop continuously.

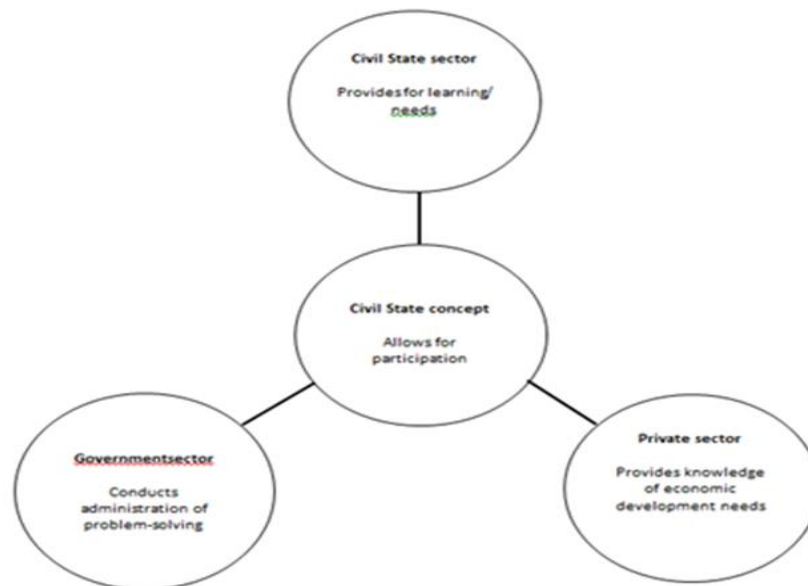


FIGURE 1
THE CIVIL STATE CONCEPT

The start of “the civil state” is officially interpreted as possibly occurring on 20 September 2015 in the work “Strengthening the power of the civil state for a foundational economy”, which mentioned public policies as the guiding policies in the development of the country by the government based on the civil state guidelines for the creation of the cooperation of all sectors in society including the government sector, the private sector, the academic sector, the civil society sector and the public sector in order to solve the problems and develop the country with the characteristics of Collaborative Governance. This would help to solve the problems and figure out ways to create the future for Thailand through a structure driving the economy of the country that strive to reduce inequality, develop the quality of people, and strengthen the ability in competition toward a new political model, which is believed to be an issue that Thai society is concerned with after the old-style politics have not been able to lead the country toward the direction of progress. This is expected to include new-generation political parties that will want to jointly participate in lifting the level of and developing the country. The phrase ‘new politics’ will actually become a reality, but to what degree cannot be conclusively and tangibly proven. The people are the owners of the power that have the right to vote for various groups, especially people at the grass-roots level that have not yet entered the political and administrative system. Actually this group, although the world will change and have technology as well as much information and news we learn about and know, as usual, will not be interested in which parties are real parties, which are fake or which group are merely parasites of the democratic system mainly in order to gain their own benefits.

Drivers of Public Policy

The government's setting of the guidelines driving the country based on the framework of the civil state comes from the first verse of the Thai national anthem that has the following meaning": "Thailand unites the flesh and blood of Thais. The land of Thailand belongs to the Thais. Long has been our independence, because Thais have been united forever...." (Pinpratip, 2015). In order to create unity, reduce inequality in society, develop the quality of the people and strengthen their ability in competition, there is the principle strategy (the Grand strategy) of four pillars, namely 1) governance, 2) innovation and production, 3) raising the level of the quality of human capital, and 4) the participation in wealth.

For the important core strategies of "the civil state", which are strengthening the participation of every person for solving the problems, reform, and development of the country in every aspect, to succeed and provide the concrete results is not possible if there is a lack of cooperation and participation between the people, government officials and the government based on the targets in the strategy of "the civil state". When "the people" and "the state" work jointly already, it will lead to the strength and stability of the country in various areas including the economy, tourism and governance using the law that will effectively lead to safety in life and property including the opportunity to reach or receive the rights and welfare benefits of the state equally and fairly so as to not cause the problem of inequality in society as was the case in the past. The results obtained will have a positive effect with regard to raising the level of the quality of life and the income of all the people both directly and indirectly. Every person has the ability to participate in development of the country based on strategy of "the civil state".

In summary, the civil state is the coordination of the power, ideas, unity, and mutual cooperation of all sectors, which consist of the government sector, the private sector and the people, in creating the drive for Thailand to have strength, stability, wealth and sustainability by cooperation to solve the problems, focus on developing society at every level, and reduce social inequality in order to raise the level of the people's quality of life. When "the people" and "the state" work together, it will lead to the national strength and stability in various aspects from the economy to tourism as well as effective legal regulations, which will result in the protection of property and life in addition to the equal opportunity for receiving rights and welfare benefits from the state fairly and avoiding the problems of inequality in society.

Although "populist policy" is quite a familiar phrase due to being the policy that was applied for use by almost every the government in the past in order to raise the standard of life of the people, which was considered a positive situation, in the present it is often interpreted negatively because of the recurring problem of the practice of distributing money in exchange for popularity, votes, and satisfaction and to create attitudes for the people to be recipients of assistance only. The people therefore have the status of merely supporting their benefactors rather than being citizens, which, if it continues to be used unconsciously and irresponsibly, may lead to loss with regard to the economy and the society of the country. Thammajai (2015),

However, with regard to the civil state, many people view that this approach is merely another model of populism. Both of them have been analyzed by the scholars in many fields regarding the various points of the two policies as mentioned, including issues that are related to resolving inequality by the civil state with the government implementation of policies based on the requirements but without being the same as populism that includes campaigning and must be implemented according to the government campaigns. Nevertheless, both of these goals will make the people and the state of the economy of the country improve. However, in reality, regarding the public policy in the era of General Prayut Chan-o-cha, the government still lacks the guidelines for development to strengthen the country in terms of ability in competition as well as a lack of trust and confidence from the investors both

domestically and internationally due to the negative news occurring for many years as a result of the government coming from the succession of power of an authoritarian regime that will not be able to revive economy and develop the country further.

Political Power of the Government

Although the government makes efforts to manage the economic system in order to be beneficial for the people so as increase political popularity and be able to retain political power continuously, every government depends on carrying out the populist policies in order to seek for popularity in politics reflecting the influence of populism in Thai political circles into the present. Although “populism” can help the people have a good quality of life and improved well-being, there are the guarantees or standards of minimum living that are different from those in the past, which was in accordance with the principle of governance in a democratic system whereby the people are the owners of the country. However, the aim of merely winning the elections of politicians without reason and political ideology is a dangerous issue and may disrupt the stability of the country in the long term, as they can be used as tools for expanding the power base and maintaining political power Pipatseretham (2009), The implementation of populist policy without taking into account fiscal sustainability, which caused the rates of wages and employment to increase in the earlier period and resulted in incomes and consumption being at improved levels for a period of time, will in the following period start to have problems with the expansion of increased demand for domestic goods causing inflation to rise, and not actually leading to the development of the country Achavanuntakul (online).

CONCLUSION

This representative system of politics may not disagree with the populist policy model due to the use of power for the public benefits. The people greatly have the will and their demands with regard to these types of policies because they clearly lead to their own tangible benefits by which populism is involved with the policies that stimulate the economy at the grass-roots level, which will make the overall economy of the country have stability and growth in the long term. However, the weaknesses, which are that populist policies use large amounts of money in order to create popularity with the people, lead to a society of consumption and reliance on the state in the end. Nevertheless, the guidelines for solving the problems of the government as mentioned are still focused on economic development at the grass-roots level, which although this differs from the previous governments, the concept is still not very different in terms of the use of the financial budget in various projects so that the people have an increased income. The national development guidelines of the government should therefore emphasize the creation of strength for the public sector by the government sector acting merely as a supporter in terms of various development policies in order to be in accordance with the needs of each locality, so that these localities have strength and the ability to be self-reliant. If Thai society can go beyond populism, a welfare state system should be created to replace it. If there is still no economic readiness in terms of the financial conditions, social welfare must be developed as a system that allows society to jointly participate to reduce the fiscal burdens that occur. Furthermore, a civil state that has a foundation based on civil society and a sense of citizenship must be created in order to truly escape from and leave behind the populist system.

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