# THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED POLICY RESPONSES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CITIZEN PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

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## ABSTRACT

*During the COVID-19 pandemic, a person's psychological capital could be said to be volatile due to insecurities regarding health and employment, and perceived policy responses may be one way to preserve an individual's psychological wellbeing. The purpose of this research is to examine citizens' perceptions regarding public policy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and how they are associated with their psychological capital. The investigation was performed by implementing a survey among a representative sample in Thailand. R program and PLS-SEM were applied to the data extracted from 195 surveys. The findings reveal that perceived public policy responses during the COVID-19 pandemic are significantly associated with citizens' degree of psychological capital through the mediating effect of their satisfaction toward policy responses. The results suggest practical implications for policymakers for enhancing and preserving their citizens' satisfaction and psychological capital during challenging times through timely and effective policies. In addition, citizen satisfaction plays a strong significant mediating role on the association between perceived public policy response and psychological capital. The study analyzes the mediating role of citizens' satisfaction with policy responses. The results revealed that the perceived government policy responses toward the COVID-19 pandemic played an important role during the pandemic because they could enhance citizen satisfaction with such responses and further improve a person's hope, efficacy, and optimism. The study contributes to the literature by adding empirical evidence to support the role of government policy responses and relief measures, especially when citizens are confronting uncertainty and adversity in both their physical wellbeing and job security. Specifically, government policy responses and relief measures can contribute to a citizen's hope, efficacy, and optimism, which will help people to remain confident, competitive, and perseverant during such crises as the pandemic.*

**Keywords**: Policy Response, Citizen Satisfaction, COVID-19, Psychological Capital, Thailand

## INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic of corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19)has exhibited a substantial impact worldwide socially and economically since it was first identified in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019. Only one month later, on 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel corona virus outbreak as a global pandemic and a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), which is the WHO's highest level of alarm under international law (World Health Organization, 2020). As of 19May 2021, there were 164,244,659 confirmed global cases in more than a hundred countries/sovereignties, and there were 3,404,925 global deaths (Johns Hopkins CSSE, 2021).

In Thailand, the COVID-19 outbreak was first discoveredon 13 January 2020 from infected tourists who traveled from China. Due to the high number of Chinese tourists in Thailand, the total number of cases has risen dramatically since. As of 19 May 2021, there were 113,555 cases and 649 deaths in Thailand (Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand, 2021).

The pandemic has had significant effects on all regions of Thai society and the country's economy. The unemployment rate has increased to the highest level, and there was a sharp decline in business and household spending. Most of the newly unemployed people were from the service, commerce, manufacturing, and agricultural sectors, respectively. (National Statistical Office - NSO, Thailand). In addition, the country's GDP growth and the headline inflation rate have turned to negative figures (National Statistical Office, Thailand, 2021). Socially, there has been a change in people's lifestyle and behavior toward the "new normal," where people maintain social distancing, limit person-to-person contact, and businesses implement the Work-From-Home (WFH) concept, which includes limiting the number of employees at the workplace and allowing for flexible working hours.

Due to the huge impact of the pandemic on the country's, the Government of Thailand has been implementing several response policies and measures attempting to stop and prevent the spread of disease, as well as to support and heal individuals and businesses. According to Eastern Economic Corridor CCSA (2021), Bank of Thailand (2020), and Ministry of Finance, Thailand (2021), the response policies on relief and stimulus packages are as follows:

The response policies on relief and stimulus packages that aimed to help the household and business sectors and to restore the country's economy amid the COVID-19 outbreak include a discount on utility bills—including the electricity and water—an increase in home and mobile internet speed to support work-from-home endeavors, and a campaign offering monetary support of 3,500 Thai Baht per person per month for people who were Thai citizens, age 18 years and older, not civil servants, with lower than 300,000 Thai Baht in annual income, and with no more than 500,000 Thai Baht in their total bank accounts.

Although there have been such extensive policy measures that, according to a study by WHO, Thailand ranks first in the world of 184 countries for its ongoing COVID-19 recovery efforts (Stock Exchange of Thailand, 2020), it cannot be assumed that people were satisfied with these measures. As human capital is one of the significant pillars that supports the sustainable development of a country, however, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the instability of economic performance and high probability of job loss created the feeling of insecurity and had negative psychological effects on people. Generally, people's hope and self-confidence can be damaged due to the volatility of the job market and health concerns at this time. Citizens' satisfaction with government policy responses to COVID-19 could mitigate this effect by creating higher confidence, feelings of security, and the belief that they will be able to get through the pandemic. The four aspects of psychological capital include hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism and can be defined as how a person perceives changes in their environment and the degree to which they are confident that they are able to overcome resulting challenges. Therefore, a high degree of psychological capital is important, especially when a person is facing unexpected and unfavorable events. For this reason, the researcher was motivated to study the association between government policy responses toward COVID-19 and the individual's psychological capital, which could be mediated by the level of satisfaction with the policy responses.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Government policy responses and emergency measures are essential to restore and support the sustainable growth of an economy and the development of a society, particularly when acountry is facing adversity and such challenges as financial crises (Vegh & Vuletin, 2014; Gertler et al., 2012), natural disasters (Alexander, 2010; Barnes et al., 2008), and disease outbreaks (Bonita et al., 2013; Laar et al., 2020). Specifically, Cheng, et al., (2020) conducted a hand-coded dataset analysis to examine government policies in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic by employing a Bayesian measurement model. The empirical evidence showed that relatively easy-to-implement policies such as external border restrictions and public awareness campaigns came early in the course of the pandemic. However, implementing more difficult

policies such as curfews, educational institution closures, and event restrictions tended to happen later. La, et al., (2020) analyzed the COVID-19 situation in terms of Vietnam's policy responses by using a self-made web-crawl engine to scan and collect news related to COVID-19, and the findings demonstrated that the political readiness responses to the pandemic were prompt and effective in protecting the interests of its citizens. You (2020) reviewed the policies regarding crisis management and public health systems in South Korea by using documents and materials to learn how the country managed corona virus during the first quarter of 2020. The results showed that effective government policies that led to success included national infectious disease plans, collaboration with the private sector, stringent contact tracing, an adaptive healthcare system, and government-driven communication. Sabat, et al., (2020) studied the public sentiment toward the measures used by policymakers for COVID-19 containment by carrying out a survey among representative samples of the population in European countries. The scope of the study included people's support worries about COVID-19 consequences, and trust in sources of information. Overall results showed that citizens were satisfied with their government's responses to the pandemic. The findings also suggested that the pandemic acted as a stressor, causing health and economic anxieties even in households that were not directly affected by the virus. Therefore, the first hypothesis states that government policy responses toward COVID-19 might develop citizens' satisfaction with policy responses.

*H1: Government policy responses toward COVID-19 have a positive significant effect on citizen satisfaction.*

The establishment of psychological capital and the empirical evidence of its effect on personality factors, life satisfaction, performance achievements, and subjective wellbeing have been investigated extensively by several researchers such as Luthans, et al., (2010); Çakar (2012); Azizli, et al., (2015); Diseth et al. (2012); Natovová & Chýlová (2014); Pandey, et al., (2020). According to Avey, et al., (2009), the four angles of psychological capital include self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism. Self-efficacy is defined as individuals having the confidence and belief that they have an ability to make an effort toward an achievement when faced challenges. Hope refers to individuals having the perseverance to strive toward a goal and apply different ways to get there, while resilience means that individuals pursue self-development to be successful when they encounter difficult and challenging times. Optimism is the positive attribution of success at the present time or in the future (Luthans et al., 2010). These core psychological factors are the foundation of human motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional wellbeing. If a person does not believe that they are able to produce desired outcomes or lacks the perseverance to overcome challenges, they will have little motivation to carry out activities. As the COVID-19 pandemic has caused health concerns and threatened job security for many, hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism levels have most likely decreased. It is essential to study the degree of a person's psychological capital during the COVID-19 pandemic and to investigate whether the government policy responses have enhanced people's hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism during this situation. The influence of satisfaction with measures and responses to crises on each element of psychological capital in the context of employee satisfaction and corporate responses have been documented in Walumbwa & Hartnell (2011); Bardoel, et al., (2014); Wang, et al., (2014); Paek, et al., (2015); Flammer & Luo (2017); Kim, et al., (2017); Mao, et al., (2020). In this study, the association between a person's satisfaction and organizational responses to crisis is applied in the context of citizen satisfaction and government policy responses to COVID-19. Consequently, hypotheses 2 and 3 were developed based on this notion:

*H2: Satisfaction with policy responses has positive significant association with psychological capital.*
*H2a: Satisfaction with policy responses has positive significant association with hope.*
*H2b: Satisfaction with policy responses has positive significant association with efficacy.*
*H2c: Satisfaction with policy responses has positive significant association with resilience.*

*H2d: Satisfaction with policy responses has positive significant association with optimism.*
*H3: Satisfaction with policy responses has a positive significant mediating effect on the association between policy responses and psychological capital.*
*H3a: Satisfaction with policy responses has a positive significant mediating effect on the association between policy responses and hope.*
*H3b: Satisfaction with policy responses has a positive significant mediating effect on the association between policy responses and efficacy.*
*H3c: Satisfaction with government policy responses has a positive significant mediating effect on the association between policy responses and resilience.*
*H3d: Satisfaction with government policy responses has a positive significant mediating effect on the association between policy responses and optimism.*

Figure 1 illustrates the research framework that summarizes all the hypotheses inthis study.
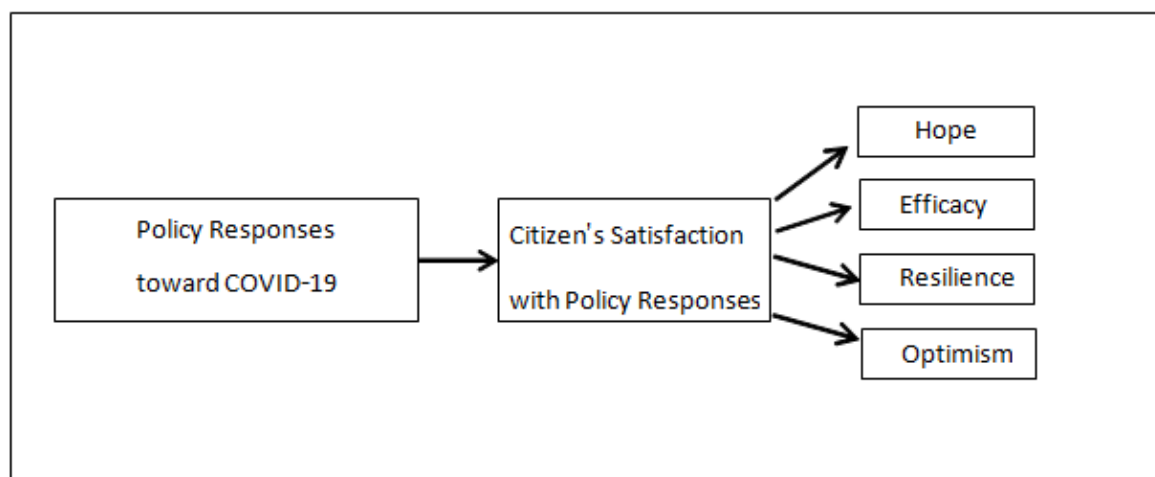


**FIGURE 1**
**RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

**DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

In order to investigate the data and test the hypotheses of this study, the primary data was collected from a questionnaire survey distributed to Thai citizens aged 18 years and olderwho lived in Thailand during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three hundred surveys were given out during the period of April 1-April 30, 2021, and 195 correctly completed forms were collected, resulting in a response rate of 65%. Table 1 shows the respondent profiles. Among respondents, there was a good balance between male and female (52.3:47.7); most of the respondents were in the age range of 30-50 years old (75.4%)—which is considered working- and middle-age; and most of the respondents were well-educated (98.5%obtained at least Bachelor's degree or equivalent).

| Table 1 RESPONDENT PROFILE | |
|---|---|
| **Characteristic** | **Percentage** |
| **Gender** | |
| Male | 52.3 |
| Female | 47.7 |
| Others | 0.0 |
| **Age (Years)** | |
| Less than 20 years | 0.0 |
| 20 - less than 30 years | 4.6 |

| 30 - less than 40 years | 35.4 |
|---|---|
| 40 - less than 50 years | 40.0 |
| 50 or higher | 20.0 |
| **Educational level** | |
| Lower than Bachelor degree | 1.5 |
| Bachelor degree or equivalent | 44.6 |
| Master degree or equivalent | 47.7 |
| Higher than Master degree | 6.2 |

Each variable within the framework of this study was developed based on previous literature in order to ensure that the results will yield a satisfactory level of reliability and validity. Participants were asked to rate each item by using a five-point Likert scale range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

## Perceived Policy Responses toward COVID-19

The measures of perceived policy responses toward COVID-19 have not been presented in previous literature; however, such perceived policy responses have been documented and publicly announced on the official website of the Thai government. Therefore, the measure of government policy responses toward COVID-19 were developed based on what the Thai government has implemented, including preventive measures against the disease spreading; financial support to Thai citizens; daily government updates to the public about the disease; and suggestions safe behavior during the pandemic.

*Citizen satisfaction*

The measure of citizens'satisfaction with policy responses and the scale of financial impact were referenced from Rungrut, et al., (2021) specifications. Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction on three aspects, including the overall government response during the COVID-19 pandemic; remedy measures during the pandemic; and policies to prevent the spread of disease.

## Psychological Capital

The scales for psychological capital, including hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, were implemented based on Luthans, et al., (2007). The reliability and validity of each variable was tested by employing the R software version 4.0.5 (2021-03-31) – "Shake and Throw"and SEM PLS package (Monecke & Leisch, 2012). There liability of each measure was tested by Dillon-Goldstein's rho, which is considered to be a better indicator than Cronbach's alpha (Ravand & Baghaei, 2016). As a rule, Dillon-Goldstein's rho should be higher than 0.7, suggesting unidimensionality (Chin, 1998). The Dillon-Goldstein's rhoof each measure is provided in Table 2. Based on the level of Dillon-Goldstein's rho, it can be concluded that the composite reliability of each measure is at a satisfactory level.

| Table 2<br>DILLON-GOLDSTEIN'S RHO OF EACH MEASURE | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Variable** | **PR** | **SA** | **HO** | **EF** | **RE** | **OP** |
| Dillon-Goldstein's rho | 0.94 | 0.94 | 0.89 | 0.94 | 0.87 | 0.88 |

Note*:* PR=government policy responses towards COVID-19, SA=Satisfaction on policy responses, HO=Hope, EF=Efficacy, RE=Resilience, and OP=Optimism.

The square root value of the average variance extracted on the diagonal is higher than the Pearson correlation coefficient in the same line. The value of factor loadings that belong to each

measure within each variable are higher than 0.70,suggesting that the discriminate validityis at a satisfactory level. Further, the results of the validity test through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA indicate an acceptable model fit. As illustrated in Table 3, the convergent validity is satisfied, as each of the variables'AVE, at higher than 0.5, is atan acceptable level (Henseler & Ray, 2016).

**Table 3**
**CFA ESTIMATES FOR THE VALIDITY ANALYSIS**

| Variable | PR | SA | HO | EF | RE | OP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Factor Loadings | > 0.87 | > 0.89 | >0.81 | > 0.92 | >0.74 | >0.76 |
| AVEs | 0.80 | 0.84 | 0.80 | 0.89 | 0.77 | 0.79 |

Note: PR=government policy responses towards COVID-19, SA=Satisfaction on policy responses, HO=Hope, EF=Efficacy, RE=Resilience, and OP=Optimism.

## Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses in this mediating model were tested by employing the R software version 4.0.5 (2021-03-31) – "Shake and Throw" and sem PLS package. The goodness-of-fit was acceptable (GoF=0.58). Table 4 shows that the association between perceived government policy responses toward COVID-19(PR) and citizens'satisfaction with policy responses (SA) is positive and significant (beta=0.80, p<0.01). In addition, satisfaction with policy responses (SA) has a strong significant positive association with the three aspects of psychological capital, which are hope (beta=0.34, p<0.01), efficacy (beta=0.34, p<0.01), and optimism (beta=0.28, p<0.05). However, satisfaction with policy responses has an insignificant association with resilience (beta=0.29, p>0.05). In particular, there exists a mediating role of citizen satisfaction on the link between perceived government policy response and citizens' psychological capital. Therefore, hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 are supported at the 99% confidence level. The results suggest that when a person perceived that there is higher level of government policy responses on the COVID-19 pandemic, a person tended to develop a higher degree of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism. In addition, the significant mediating role of satisfaction implies that when a person perceived that there is a higher degree of government policy responses, a person tended to have a higher level of satisfaction with the government policy responses and, consequently, this higher degree of satisfaction tended to increase a person's degree of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism.

The paths of control variables included the demographic factors of respondents' age, education, and gender. The results from table 4 show that age and gender are not significant to a person's satisfaction with policy responses. However, education has a positive significant association with satisfaction (beta=0.14, p<0.05). It can be inferred that a person with a higher degree of education tended to exhibit a higher degree of satisfaction toward government policy responses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 4 shows the results from hypothesis testing, including the coefficients, the lower bound, and the upper bound from the bootstrapping procedure. In order to obtain the statistical inference, the parameters were set with 500 subsamples at a 95% confidence interval. It can be seen that the confidence interval values for each significant path are outside zero.

**Table 4**
**COEFFICIENTS FROM THE PLS-SEM ESTIMATION**

| Hypothesis | Paths | Coefficients | Lower | Upper |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | PR→SA | 0.80*** | 0.65 | 0.90 |
| H2a | SA →HO | 0.34** | 0.08 | 0.49 |
| H2b | SA→EF | 0.34** | 0.15 | 0.50 |
| H2c | SA → RE | 0.29 | -0.16 | 0.47 |
| H2d | SA → OP | 0.28** | 0.09 | 0.40 |

| H3a | PR→SA →HO | 0.27** | 0.08 | 0.46 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| H3b | PR → SA →EF | 0.27** | 0.11 | 0.49 |
| H3c | PR → SA →RE | 0.23** | 0.05 | 0.48 |
| H3d | PR → SA →OP | 0.22** | 0.04 | 0.41 |
| **Control Variables** | | **Coefficients** | | |
| Age | AGE→ SA | 0.00 | -0.11 | 0.13 |
| Education | EDU → SA | 0.14** | 0.01 | 0.26 |
| Gender | GEN → SA | -0.02 | -0.13 | 0.11 |

Note: *=p<0.10, **=p<0.05, ***=p<0.01. PR=government policy responses towards COVID-19, SA=Satisfaction on policy responses, HO=Hope, EF=Efficacy, RE=Resilience, and OP=Optimism.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, the association between perceived government policy responses toward the COVID-19 pandemic (PR) and a person's psychological capital, with an additional mediating role of citizen satisfaction on government policy responses were investigated. The scope of this study included people who are Thai citizens18 years or older (as this age group are the target of government policy responses and relief measures) who live in Bangkok, Thailand. The scope of psychological capital under this study focuses on hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. The data was collected from a survey, and all the measures for each variable passed the reliability and validity tests. The results revealed that the perceived government policy responses toward the COVID-19 pandemic played an important role during the pandemic because they could enhance citizen satisfaction with such responses and further improve a person's hope, efficacy, and optimism. The study contributes to the literature by adding empirical evidence to support the role of government policy responses and relief measures, especially when citizens are confronting uncertainty and adversity in both their physical wellbeing and job security. Specifically, government policy responses and relief measures can contribute to a citizen's hope, efficacy, and optimism, which will help people to remain confident, competitive, and perseverant during such crises as the pandemic. In general, the results from this study align with previous literature that investigated the role of organizational responses and government policy responses in other markets and in other crises. Although the evidence from this study shows that the government policy responses do not have significant association with resilience, a citizen's satisfaction does significantly mediate the association between perceived government policy responses and that citizen's resilience. This could imply that a person's resilience during challenging times could be influenced by other factors. Some existing literature found that resilience is dependent on a person's degree of loss orientation (Mao et al., 2020). However, this could be an area for further study—whether the relationship is non-linear or whether the sample size is small relative to the variability in the dataset. More importantly, the mediating role of citizen satisfaction is positively significant for the relationship between perceived government policy responses toward COVID-19 and a person's hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Even though the results of this research are statistically robust, the fact that the analysis is based only on Thai respondents could represent a limitation. Since the survey was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were some constraints in data collection. To be able to consider possible differences by country on perceived policy responses and their interaction with citizen satisfaction and psychological capital, further research could be extended to include individuals in other countries and cultural settings.

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paper.

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