

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF THE HMONG IN THAILAND



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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that the Hmong in Thailand are now integrating more into mainstream Thai society, we still have little information or knowledge about their political participation. This has been the case because Hmong political participation has not been an issue of research or concern for most researchers. Hence the first objective of this thesis is to assess to what extent the Hmong in Thailand are currently participating in the political process. It specifically assesses to what extent they (1) vote; (2) discuss and/or pay attention to politics or current events; (3) contact their representatives; (4) are members of political parties or interest groups; and (5) are candidates for political offices. Secondly, this thesis analyzes whether and how (1) education, (2) discrimination and (3) income correlate to Hmong political participation.

This study uses documentary research, interview, focus group, and questionnaires. The data is collected from 54 participants from two Hmong villages in northern Thailand and at the Night Bazaar in the city of Chiang Mai.

From the empirical findings it is found that (1) 46 out of 54 participants (85%) in this study voted in the April 2nd 2006 general election; (2) 72% discuss and/or pay attention to politics or current events; (3) 18% contact their representatives; (4) 30% are members of political parties, of which 68% are members of Thai Rak Thai and 25% are Democrats; and (5) 13% of the participants have been candidates for political offices. Thus, a clear pattern of Hmong political participation has been elucidated from this research: 'the more active the level of political participation, the less likely Hmong participate there and vice versa.' For instance, 85% have voted, whereas only 13% have been candidates for political offices.

The analysis argues 'the more active the level of political participation, the less likely Hmong participate there and vice versa' is not overall positively correlated to education, discrimination, or income. For regardless of their educational level, of whether they feel they have been discriminated against, or of their income, the participants participate in the political process relatively at the same pace. However, this does not insinuate that these factors have no impact upon their political participation at the larger, societal level.

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