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# **Political Education:**

**The Role of Political Parties  
in Educating Civil Society on Politics**

*Mahidol University*

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# **Political Education: The Role of Political Parties in Educating Civil Society on Politics**

Punchada Sirivunnabood

*Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Mahidol University*

*Corresponding author: punchada.sir@mahidol.ac.th*

## **Abstract**

This study uses extensive field research to compare and contrast the political education that political parties provide for their members and people. The researcher focuses on two political parties: the Democrat Party and the Puea Fah Din Party based on four important reasons: 1) both parties have constantly played significant roles in Thai politics for a long period of time; 2) both parties have apparent organization and internal structure; 3) both parties have the accurate number of party members as well as party branches in the past years; and 4) both parties have organized more or less political education for their party members and the public. The research result reveals that due to the differences in the objectives of party formation, political ideology, political participation and the strategy to recruit members, the two parties experience distinctive procedures to conduct political education for their members and public in general. While the Puea Fah Din Party was founded and has been working with the Asoke Community as a means to represent Asoke in politics rather than winning the elections, the Democrat Party was founded by political elites and aims to win the elections. As a result, the Puea Fah Din Party conduct activities on political education in order to strengthen party's ideology among members. The Democrat Party, on the other hand, organize political activities to education people in general about party's policy with a hope to win the elections.

**Keywords:** Political Party; Political Ideology; Asoke; Political Education; Thailand

## **Introduction**

This research aims to compare and contrast the provision of political education between the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party in terms of approaches and effectiveness of political education provision for party members and the public. The researcher studied these two political parties owing to the four important reasons which are (1) both parties have played significant roles in Thai politics for a long period of time. Although Puea Fah Din Party was established in 2000, but it is a small party which has been prolonged growing alongside Thailand unlike other small political parties that tended to be dissolved after the election. Moreover, Puea Fah Din Party has played a significant role in political activities, especially during the political crises in Thailand; (2) Both parties had established apparent organizational management and internal structures. In other words, they had offices, staffs, party branches, and within the party branches, there were authentic party branch executives, staff and offices unlike other small political parties that established party branches, but in some areas, their offices and staff are not existed; (3) Both parties have a stable amount of party members throughout the past eight years.; (4) Both parties have provided more or less political education for their party members and general people. This research, therefore, had formulated four important objectives as follows:

1. To compare and contrast the current situation of the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party on how to provide political education for their party members, party supporters, and the public in general.

2. To study the effectiveness of political education programs provided by the two political parties for the public.

3. To examine the role of political education for party members towards the establishment of party affiliation.

4. To explore the relationship between political education provided by the parties and how that political education stimulate party members, party supporters, and people to participate in politics.

## **Review Literature**

### **General Knowledge about Political Education and Political Parties**

#### ***Political Education***

“Political education” is often perceived as a part of political socialization in the field of education and political science. It is a crucial element for developing and strengthening democratic societies as well as a prerequisite tool for the political parties’ accomplishment. In the area of education, according to Kenneth Prewitt, the Carnegie Professor of Public Affairs and Vice-President for Global Centers, Columbia University, programs of political education are served as the foundation of instilling the values appropriate for the citizens (1971). On the other hand, political scientists refer it to a framework of the government’s activities aimed for mobilizing the tasks of nation-building and public inclusion, including the political parties’ activities (Olaniyi, 2001). That is to say, political education influences and shapes people politically as active members of a social and political system (KASYP, n.d.). Westheimer and Kahne (2004) stated in their study called “Educating the “Good” Citizen: Political Choices and Pedagogical Goals” that political education focuses on learning how the democratic system of government works, aims at teaching how interest groups pursue their goals, and analyzes power processes in political, economic and other institutions. In this research, the concept of political education is, hence, defined as a weapon of political integration that connects national citizens in general with the political parties. The distinction between political education and citizenship education is that the latter comprises both political and moral education. However, it is often concluded that political education is relevant to voter education, electoral election, and citizenship education.

Different from political education, “voter education” refers to activities designed for assisting the election administration to deliver a free, fair, efficient and cost-effective election. It provides the basic voter information like background attitudes, behavior, and knowledge among the citizens in order to vote properly and recognize the importance of

participating in elections, especially in comply with basic human rights and voting rights, the role, responsibilities and rights of voters, the relationship between elections and democracy, and the conditions necessary for democratic elections. This also includes the education on a peaceful election, acceptance of the results, and tolerance of competition and opposition (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2012). Other basic voter information comprises of “the date, time, and place of voting, the type of election, identification necessary to establish eligibility, registration requirements, and mechanisms for voting”. These constitute basic facts about the election and do not require the explanation of concepts (Ibid). Voter education is also crucial for political parties because it aims to promote electoral accountability in which voters are encouraged to use campaigns as favorable circumstances to voice their demands to candidates. For example, voter education activities could include meetings where voters question candidates, and radio or TV shows where studio audiences and phone callers can send in their inquiries to the candidates (Charney, 2003).

“Electoral education” is sometimes referred to voter education, but actually it is a broader term which involves not only current eligible voters, but also future citizens in the education that covers all the aspects of elections. Similar to voter education, electoral education focuses on voter’s motivation and preparation to the full participation in elections. Its programs aim to point out more complicated types of information about voter and electoral processes, for instance, how votes translate into seats; this kind of question cannot be answered just by looking at a statement of facts, but need learners’ insightful exploration and analysis. However, electoral education demands more lead time for practical exercises rather than just voter information, and should be launched on an in-progress basis (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2006).

“Civic education” is even more extended term compared to voter education and electoral education because it is more continual and practiced in a longer run. In other words, it is not tied to the electoral cycle only. Civic education, which is sometimes called “citizenship education”, covers

more extensive concepts constructing a democratic society. This includes the relevant roles and responsibilities of citizens, government, political and special interests, the mass media, and the business and non-profit sectors, and the importance of periodic and competitive elections. There are three core components of civic education which emphasize citizen awareness and citizen participation: civic knowledge, civic disposition or values, and civic skills. All of these elements help people acquire knowledge and skills necessary for becoming informed, competent citizens. Unlike voter education and electoral education, civic education is not necessarily carried out by the election authority (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2006).

### ***Political Educators***

Generally, higher education institutions worldwide are known to be where political ideologies are shaped and embedded. Students are taught to be politically educated and active, and have influenced politics within their universities and in their countries altogether. Therefore, teachers must be politically skillful and knowledgeable for socializing their students politically (Boaduo, 2013). Factors affecting political education and socialization in higher education institutions are curriculum, media, peer influence and lecturers. Political education in higher education is formally transmitted through the official curriculum, especially in primary and secondary schools where civics or government is taught as a part of social studies subject (Boaduo, 2013).

Another major political educator, particularly in the field of voter education, is the election officials from the national election authority. Normally, election officials will assign staff to organize and run voter education and information programs in place of the election authority. Accordingly, there will be staff appointed with the specific function, for example, media relations, election official and poll worker training, and human relations management. Furthermore, there will be the commissioners and executive officers who will play a public communications role. Communications and the development of an education program will influence the perceptions, attitudes, and

knowledge of voters (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2012).

Above all, political parties cannot avoid dedicating themselves to the political education and training of their members in order to deal with modern mass democracies, including everyday social changes and developments. The parties necessarily equip themselves with consistent knowledge and skills for preparing their representatives and members to face with new challenges and speculate their responsibility within and beyond the party (KASYP, n.d.).

In brief, political education activities can take place through any formal institutions such as schools, universities, mass media or membership in groups and organizations to encourage and foster the citizens to participate attentively in political and social realms (KASYP, n.d.). This is because political and voter education is a costly activity if it is solely provided by the election management authority. Usually, the election management authority will pick ways to introduce regulations, incentives, and information that only they can offer (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2012).

### ***Political Parties***

A “political party” is defined as an organization which is willing to promote the national interest based on their popular preferences or particular principles in which all members agreed, and contests for the control of the chief policy by making offices of government (Rose, 1976; Harris, 1979). Nonetheless, it should be noted that the ultimate intention of a political party is not always to serve for the national interest but sectional interest by controlling political power after winning the elections (Olaniyi, 2001). This is because democratic political parties compete and seek to win elections in order to take control of government institutions. They offer a diversity of public policy proposals and options for governance which are shaped by citizens’ preferences through their choices of candidates and policies. On the other hand, they can toughen national political institutions when presenting these policies at elections and mobilize citizens in the name of the national interest (National Democratic Institute, 2008).

Moreover, political parties are a vital element of representative democracy. Since democratic political parties compete and pursue their goal to win elections in order to administer government institutions. They propose alternative public policies which are constructed based on citizens' preferences as well as offer numerous options for governance, for example, a broad range of alternative candidates and policies. In other words, parties can ensure that "elections are true expressions of the popular will" (National Democratic Institute, 2008). Moreover, they can strengthen national political institutions and mobilize citizens toward the vision of the national interest. More importantly, while political parties can emerge without democracy, democracy cannot become successful without political parties (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2012).

In brief, "political education within the political party" is also specifically defined as the activities organized by a political party with the purpose of keeping the electorates know about their civic responsibilities and party programs elaborately in this research (Olaniyi, 2001). Political parties also offer a range of non-political benefits as well, for instance, social activities, recognition and status for people and groups, and a sense of security, connectedness, and power (Johnston, 1949). Good political parties must have codes of conduct, basic disclosure requirements, financial audits, autonomous disciplinary committees, training and ethical education activities, monitoring and evaluation procedures, and term limits for party leaders to strengthen internal democracy, accountability, and transparency in their party structures and decision-making processes (Thornton, 2001).

### ***Functions of Political Parties***

Based on the study entitled "Political Parties: Functions and Organization in Democratic Societies" written by Wilhelm Hofmeister and Karsten Grabow (2011), political parties must embrace a series of functions in order to engage in the political system successfully and to bring the reinforcement of democracy as described below.

The first function is so-called 'function of political decision-making'. Political parties express public expectations and demands or interests of the society to the political realm. The second function is 'function of

selection'. Political parties have high potential in recruiting political personnel and nurturing them to be politicians by selecting and presenting them as electoral candidates. The third function is the 'political integration'. Political parties integrate different ideas or concerns of general public into a political project, and campaign them in order to check the feedback from the majority. The fourth function is called 'function of socialization and participation'. Political parties link the citizens and the political system together. They also raise public participation in the politics. The fifth function is 'function of exercising political power'. Political parties organize the government by participating in elections in order to occupy political positions, especially in representative democracies in which government authorities generally emerge from these parties. The last function is 'function of legitimating'. Political parties promote the legitimacy of the political system by fortifying the political order in the citizens' sensibility. The third, fourth, and sixth functions are parts of political education. Moreover, opposition parties are also specifically responsible for criticizing the government, controlling it, and harboring constructive choices. They play the role of an alternative government as well as the role of a government in waiting simultaneously. These functions are important for democratic societies because the citizens need representatives to voice their disagreement against the government and safeguard their interests.

When considering their political programs explicitly, there are two functions clearly arisen from them: first, the articulation of public interests, and second, the orientation and influence of the citizens' opinions. Apart from basic functions of party programs such as identifying the parties and guiding principles and ideas of the parties in order to differentiate themselves from the others, some political parties have special programs that define their political visions regarding certain political issues and/or policies, for example, economic policies or energy policies. These programs can increase the participation of representatives and citizens who are interested in those fields, strengthen the relationship between the party and representatives from those sectors, and augment the understanding

toward those issues among the members. Another special program is the electoral program which contains proposals and demands in regard to the future activities that parties may promote after winning the elections. Political programs are also designed to prepare political work within the parties as well as political functions in the parliament such as political rhetoric, media control, membership promotion, and party financing (Hofmeister and Grabow, 2011). These programs are constituted to political education.

In another research entitled “The Change of Function of Political Parties at the Turn of Millennium”, Simon (2003) studies the functions of political parties which include political education provision. In relation to political education, there are two main functions of political parties such as political mobilization and political participation, and representative function. First, political parties involve people into public life through political mobilization aiming for the decline in social tensions and the increase of votes from the group structure they have built up. In other words, political parties’ goal is to form and influence the political events ensuring political democracy and competence within them. Second, there are two main methods of political participation which are active participation and passive participation. Active participation is provided through the concrete party activities, leader election, demonstrations, and political debates while passive participation is a political activity organized by citizens aiming to influence the decision-making in leader selection and party activities. The clearest political participation related to party politics is voting.

According to another research entitled “Political Parties and Political Issues in Thailand” written by Preecha Hongkraitert (2524), there are seven functions of political parties which are (1) function of political education, (2) function of selection, (3) function of interparty coordination, (4) function of political integration, (5) function of the opposition, (6) function of centralization, and (7) function of leadership. The functions are described in detail as follows.

First, one of the main functions of political parties is to provide

political education. In the democratic system, political parties must provide political education for the citizens because to govern a country needs collaboration from every citizen not just a group or a class of citizens. There are many forms of political education activities such as policy announcements by political parties in the field of economics, politics, education, national security, and other social issues, promotion via mass media (i.e. newspapers, radio, televisions, journal, and publications), direct access to citizens (i.e. public discussions, speeches, forums), and so on. Moreover, political parties must provide political knowledge in the democratic system accurately and rightfully, for example, encourage political consciousness and political participation by encouraging the citizens to vote for political parties that promote their preferable policies instead of voting for an individual as well as to observe the electoral environment and report whenever the vote fraud is found.

Second, another function is called 'function of selection' in which political parties are responsible for recruiting high potential persons as members of the House of Representative. In the democratic system, the qualities of the members of the House of Representative are very important because they are the citizens' representatives who will protect the public interest as well as other stakeholders in accordance to the intention of the voters as much as possible. Therefore, members of the House of Representative must dedicate to the public interest and be responsible for the common wealth. They must have certain capabilities and experiences in terms of being a good representative of the entire population. As a result, it is difficult to find such a person who has all of these qualities. Political parties are the best filtering agencies who can select the members of the House of Representative with full resources. On the election days, citizens should make their decisions based on the policies of each political party that benefit them the most instead of considering the candidates individually. In order to do so, they must trust in political parties who have carefully and thoroughly selected the members of the House of Representative.

The third function is 'interparty coordination'. Political parties play a significant role in terms of coordinating other powerful parties and

stakeholders. In general, the pressure groups and benefit groups are the influential figures for the government in terms of public policy. For instance, there are the universal strike by the labor union and demonstrations by farmers and students in order to make some demands on the government or governmental officers. Simultaneously, the employers may not agree to accept the demands in order to protect their self-interests. Consequently, political parties coordinate these benefit groups by proposing the labor law which is fair for both sides (as well as other groups). If the proposed labor law is ineffective, there will be the modifications and amendments. The interest-based coordination between benefit groups can be considered as the political relaxation.

The fourth function is 'political integration'. Political parties are the power hub in terms of politics since they are the center of benefit groups and citizens who are active in the field of politics, economics, and social issues in order to seek for the governmental positions and implement their policies to govern the country. Political parties, hence, gather the resources to build the negotiation power, demand, and integrate the ideas of individuals and groups into the governance. Even though the political parties are not elected, they can give some advice and make some suggestions to the government in order to benefit the public.

Fifth, political parties also play an important role as opposition parties. In the democratic system, political parties, whose only few members are elected and cannot set up a government, must act as the opposition parties. Opposition parties are important for the democratic system because they are the 'mirror' for the government by reflecting what the government lacks or what the government should do to benefit the citizens who are the owner of the country. Opposition parties will criticize, oppose, or deter the government from overusing their power or damage the country and become the 'dictator of the majority'. Nevertheless, if the government rules the country effectively, the other parties should support them. In addition, opposition parties are responsible for controlling the government to perform according to the policies they have proposed to the parliament. In England, the opposition party is praised and respected

at the same level as the party who acts as the government, and is called 'Her Majesty's Opposition Party' while the party who acts as the government is called 'His Majesty's Government'. In other words, the prime minister is 'the first gentleman' and the leader of the opposition party is 'the second gentleman'. Both sides are ready to shift their positions. In other words, if the government fails in terms of governance, the opposition party is ready to be the government and the prime minister becomes the opposition party's leader while the opposition party's leader becomes the prime minister.

Sixth, another function is to centralize powerful parties and political party members. As political parties are the center of individuals from a variety of occupational groups, there is the high exposure to the conflicts between ideas. Hence, political parties are act as the 'stage' for their members as well as their groups to express their opinions and feelings in order to make a peaceful agreement before bringing up the issues to discuss in the parliament. Therefore, political parties are the center of cooperating and establishing mutual understanding between their members as well as between parties and parties, parties and the government, and the government and the citizens.

Seventh, political parties are responsible for nurturing political leaders. In a democratic country, political parties are the institution who fosters the political leaders as professional politicians who are capable and ready to be the political leaders in different levels effectively such as prime ministers, ministers, Bangkok governors, mayors, councilors, and so on. The other institutions who are not political parties like bureaucratic agencies should not have as many qualities to nurture political leaders as political parties. This is because the qualities of political leaders are different from the qualities of administrative leaders. In other words, governmental officers or administrators are law, regulation, and protocol enforcement officers in which the political sector are the one who set them up while political leaders are the one who implement the policies by prioritizing the public interest from the political party's point of view. Thus, politicians must understand how to 'negotiate' for political interests

of the citizens, coordinate, and build the peace between different groups by designing the policies cautiously. If they become the government, they must implement these policies and the governmental officers who are the administrators must support them. Therefore, in the democratic system, political parties are the most appropriate training institution for fostering political leaders.

Political parties are not only competing in elections. One of their major functions is to provide political education to their members as well as general people. This research, therefore, aims to analyze political education that those two political parties, Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party, have provided to people since their inception.

## **Methods**

This research is a qualitative study exploring the relevant literatures and interviews of the participants engaging in political parties' activities. As such, the researchers have studied the relevant literatures both in English and in Thai such as books, academic articles, journal articles, newspapers, and previous studies in order to use the information for comparative study and as the guideline for additional interviews with the informants who had engaged in the two parties' political activities.

After studying the relevant literatures, the researchers have conducted the interviews with personnel and participants engaging in the activities organized by the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party, for example, party administrators, politicians, party personnel, party's branch personnel, scholars in the fields of politics and political party system from diverse universities, and personnel from non-governmental organizations related to the research topics, in order to receive correct and accurate information which is conformed to the primarily studied relevant literatures.

## **Research Findings**

**Objective 1: To compare and contrast the current situation of the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party on how to provide political education for their party members, party supporters, and**

**the public in general.****The research results on the comparative study of the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party's political education programs for party members, party supporters, and the public:**

The results of this research show that the differences in the purpose of party establishment, duration of political activity operation, internal structure, political ideology of the party, and objectives of the political operation of the two parties led to the differences in the programs of political education and political activity operations for party members, party supporters, and the public. The researcher had analyzed the aforementioned points based on the key issues as follows.

**1) Party Policies toward the formation of political education programs:** the Democrat Party has not identified clear approaches for the provision of political education for the public in their Party Regulations, but organized their political activities based on the party policy for elections. Therefore, the provision of political education, for party members and the public, of the Democrat Party was operated along with other political activity arrangements, especially the activities that Election Commission of Thailand arranged such as party conventions, party general assemblies, or extraordinary general meetings of party branches. A lot of party members or party branch members had to participate in the aforementioned activities as they were great opportunities to provide political education to their party members at the same time. The activities of the political educational program mostly were speeches on stage principally concerning major political issues at the moment presenting by the popular and famous members in the House of Representatives or politicians of the party to provide knowledge or share ideas regarding important political issues. Nonetheless, the Democrat Party still organized activities that involved other forms of the provision of political education, but the party did not arrange those activities along with the aforementioned annual activities, for example, the Democrat Party assembly emphasizing the formulation of recommendations for implementing election policies of the party while informing their members and the public about the

approaches and direction of the party policies. Moreover, the Democrat Party also had other activities focusing on the young generation so called the Yong Democrat Program. These activities had been continuously popularized among young people in many geographic areas in Thailand. The information of this program will be discussed in the following section.

On the other hand, the Puea Fah Din Party experiences different political activity arrangements and political education programs for party members. The party does not organize political activities and education based on the party policy for elections. Instead, the party has clearly indicated in the Section 4, Article 23 in their Party Regulations that the party must provide political education for their members and the public in general for better understanding among party members and the public which will strengthen constitutional monarchy in the parliament system. Therefore, the party had defined their six major approaches for the development of political education for party members and the public as follows:

“(1) Provide the personnel who are expert in each profession discipline to train party members and the public.

(2) Collect and distribute political, economic and social information to raise awareness among party member and the public by increasing their political participation.

(3) Promote and support the gathering of local communities to acquire knowledge about the rights and local resource preservation as well as foster political ideologies and rights among them.

(4) Promote the integration of profession disciplines for the regularly exchange and sharing of political ideas and knowledge between party personnel.

(5) Broadcast political knowledge or political activities via mass media.

(6) Encourage party members and the public to attend political debates and lectures.”

The regulations described above show the clear vision of the Puea Fah Din Party that aims to provide political education for the public. Moreover,

the party had implemented the aforesaid approaches for providing political knowledge to their members and the public. Therefore, all activities that the party had arranged were embedded with political knowledge, but they were not organized alongside with major activities required by the Election Commission of Thailand unlike the Democrat Party. Since Puea Fah Din Party was supported by Asoke Communities in many provinces so they could continuously organize the activities together with the cooperation of the Asoke Communities in every area. Furthermore, the majority of Asoke Community members were also Peua Fah Din Party members so that those members always participated in the party activities on every occasion.

**2) The Organization of Activities Providing Education for Young People** In addition to the provision of political education for party members and the public, both parties also had policies regarding the political education programs for young people. However, the differences in political ideologies, party structures, and policies between the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party led to the different approaches and processes of their political education provision for young people.

In terms of providing political education for young people, the Democrat Party had organized Young Democrat Program that emphasized the establishment of political education camps for young people who were interested in politics. The activity was often held for 3-5 days depending on the areas. The project's operations involved the members of the House of Representatives or the party politicians to discuss or give a speech on interesting political issues for young people participating in the project as well as organize field trips to important political sites such as the parliament, government house, courts, and so on.

The Young Democrat Program was not organized only in Bangkok, but also in other areas of the country where the party branches supported this program in order to give opportunities to young people in different areas to learn more about politics and the party. More importantly, this program also allow the young generation participating in the program to meet the Democrat politicians and famous parliamentarians. This program

could also be an approach to recruiting new political generation of the party that would strengthen the party organization in the future.

Puea Fah Din Party's approaches of the provision of political education for young people is different from the Democrat Party. Strictly speaking, the party had provided political education to young generation since they were little up until they entered their 20 job bases that Asoke Communities had founded. Puea Fah Din Party provided political education by deepening the knowledge while working in the job bases of Asoke Communities in each province. Due to the close bonds between Asoke Communities and the party, most of the young people in the party lived in and studied at Asoke schools, so there was no difficulty in fostering merit-based political education of Asoke Community among the young people. The schools in Asoke Communities provided political knowledge to students in the mornings by letting them watching Bunniyom TV and news from other general channels and listening to Samana Bodhiraksa's teachings in the evenings toward live broadcasts on TVs or at his place. Therefore, when any political event occurred, young generation in the Puea Fah Din Party and Asoke Community quickly understood what was happening and were ready to participate in political activities with other party members on every occasion. In some areas, the young people in the Puea Fah Din Party and Asoke Community helped the party members to campaign during election periods. This means that most of them understood the political context of the country better than common young people in other societies in Thailand due to their steady acknowledgement and study of political issues, unlike other young people who participated in or learned politics from time to time or when there were political activities with their favorite political parties only.

**3) Approaches of Political Education Provision for Party Members and the Public** The provisions of political education for party members and the public offered by the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party were different. The Democrat Party provided political education to the public and organized political activities as required by the Election Commission of Thailand and Party Policies at the same time, especially

during the election periods. Due to the budget limit, the Democrat Party organized the activities to provide political education for the public and party members only when they had general assemblies, party branch meetings or seminars at provincial level as required by the Political Activity Regulations of the Election Commission of Thailand. The political education activities were mostly political speeches or discussions with the participants. However, the Democrat Party also organized other activities such as the Democrat Party assemblies, Blue Night balls, coffeehouse forums, and so on. These activities had different objectives; the Democrat Party assemblies were arranged to collecting public comments about the problems in the country and apply the information to implement election and governance; the Blue Night balls were arranged for funding the party's enhancement, election running, and other party activities; coffeehouse forums were the places for party branches in each area to give opportunities to party members and the public who supported the party to share and exchange their politic ideas (however, the coffeehouse forums were no longer organized at the moment). The activities that were organized besides the activities required by the regulations of the Election Commission of Thailand usually received supporting funds from the members of the House of Representatives and local politicians. There were also the political education activities, including the sharing and exchange of political ideas between the party representatives and the participants.

On the other hand, the political education activities of the Peua Fah Din Party provided for the public were not organized in the similar way as in the Democrat Party's, but they constantly organized the activities to provide merit-based political education to their party members. Such activities were embedded with merit-based principles toward Asoke Community's job bases. While working in each job base, they had to sacrifice and train themselves to deal with problems that might occur in each job base, for example, there would some conflicts between members in some job bases and the leaders of each job base must train themselves to solve these problems. During their training in each job base, the workers had to share their outputs to the others without considering about

compensations or self-interests. For instance, the earnings from their work must be distributed and shared to the members of Asoke Communities and the public for free; such practice taught them to genuinely devote themselves to the public in the same way as politics which is the genuine public service. Therefore, the training at the job bases based on meritist approaches could help the party members of the Puea Fah Din Party to truly learn how to dedicate themselves to the public when they work in the field of politics in the future.

Aside from the job bases, Peua Fah Din Party also provided political education to the members through the teachings of Samana Photirak and the party and Asoke Community's news and media channels in different areas. Puea Fah Din Party and Asoke Community members must listen to the teachings of Samana Bodhiraksa in the evenings. Some members may not reside in the area where Samana Bodhiraksa resided, but they still can watch Bunniyom TV or listen to the radio to follow up the teachings. Since Santi Asoke Community and Puea Fah Din Party had the same idea that religion and politics must go together and cannot be separated, Samana Bodhiraksa had added political issues, especially about the political situations and the involvement of Asoke Community in the political events, in his teachings. For example, in 2013, Puea Fah Din Party members had gathered under the name of "Dharma Army" to protest against the government as Samana Bodhiraksa and the leaders of the Asoke Communities all agreed that the government was leading the country to the political and economic collapse. Therefore, Samana Bodhiraksa and other Buddhist monks were cooperated with the Asoke Community and Puea Fah Din Party members. Samana Bodhiraksa motivated Puea Fah Din Party and Asoke Community members to participate in political mob with their merit-based ideology.

**4) Political Concepts and Context in terms of Political Education Provision for the Public.** The Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party had different concepts of the provision of political education for the public. Due to the fact that the Democrat Party did not have clear political ideology, the content of knowledge that the Democrat Party instructed the public

during the political education activities for the public was mostly related to the contemporary political situations as well as the party policies used in election campaigns and political and administrative mistakes in the past of rival parties. This can be frequently noticed by the speeches of the members in the House of Representatives and politicians of the Democrat Party when they were on stage in many areas. Nevertheless, the context of the Democrat Party's provision of political education for young people may be different from the provision of education for their party members and the public. This was because the party provided the political education for young people by emphasizing the nurturing of political participation in the private sector and creation of a high-qualified political development without corruption for the latter generations.

The approaches of Puea Fah Din Party's political education provision for the public were different from the Democrat Party. The content of knowledge that Puea Fah Din Party provided to the public and their party members mostly emphasized merit-based principles due to the fact that Puea Fah Din Party was an organization which was established and supported by Asoke Community and respected Samana Bodhiraksa, one of the leaders of the party. Therefore, they had applied meritism which is the principle of Asoke Community to basic principle of Puea Fah Din Party.

The provision of political education for their party members and the public, no matter it is the learning from job bases, the party policies or community media, was always embedded with meritism. Meritism is the basic idea and practice of the party members which influences the practice of the party members to be different from other political parties. In other words, Puea Fa Din Party did not desire the government positions or a victory during an election, but they aimed to make good deeds through meritism in order to gain acknowledgement and trust from the public to govern the country. Puea Fah Din Party members did not fight for a position in the government, but took a political position when the public invited them to work for the country. Hence, in every preceding election, Puea Fah Din Party only sent the members to run the election just to follow the regulations of the Election Law in which every party must send in their

members to run the election. They did not seek for political power toward the election unlike other parties.

**5) The Provision of Political Education and the Sense of Membership** For the Democrat Party, due to the fact that their provision of political education was principally related to the political direction in different periods of time and interested a lot of party members and the public who supported the party, their presentations of political issues constantly gained attention from the party supporters. However, such content may not increase the sense of membership among the party members because after the elections or political events that party member were interested ended, most of the members and party supporters tended to stop participating in other party's activities. This is different from Puea Fah Din Party; since the party was one of Asoke Community organizations, so meritism was embedded in the provision of political education for Puea Fah Din Party members. Moreover, the faith in Asoke Community leaders and the teachings of Samana Bodhiraksa, which often involved political issues, also promoted the sense of membership among the party members. Therefore, the party members continuously participated in the activities of the party, especially when the party protested against the government or governmental policies.

**6) The Budget for Organizing Political Education Activities for Party Members and the Public** The main sources of revenues of the Democrat party derived from donations and financial support from the Political Party Development Fund. The aforementioned revenues were used for organizing political activities of the party. However, the Political Party Development Fund allocated the budget to political parties to organize political activities as required by the Political Party Development Fund Declaration. The political parties had to organize the projects by using the received budget, write a report, and return the leftover of funds back to the Fund after the end of the projects. Besides from these two sources of revenues mentioned above, the political activities organized by the Democrat Party, especially the activities organized in different provinces, were supported by the members of the House of Representatives

or local politicians. Although the party had allocated some budget for organizing activities to party branches, the budget was not adequate. Therefore, the members in the House of Representatives must take responsibility in financing political education activities.

Most of the political education activities financially supported by local members of the House of Representatives were the activities that the party members in the House of Representatives arranged for getting votes and expanding their stronghold in their local areas alongside with the party. Sometimes, the activities were organized along with the party branch assemblies in each province in order to save the budget. Except during the election periods, the political education activities for the public and other political activities in general were organized aside from local party assemblies.

For Puea Fah Din Party, the budget for organizing political activities at present mainly relied on the incomes of the party and Asoke Community due to the fact that Puea Fah Din Party did not receive funds from the Political Party Development Fund allocated unlike other political parties. Therefore, the budget for party's operations and activities primarily derived from the selling of Bunniyom products and donations. Puea Fah Din Party members believed that if the party desired to participate in the country's governance and truly wanted to help people, the party must train themselves to survive on their own before starting helping other people; that was why they no longer accepted the financial support from the Fund as discussed above. The activities such as political assemblies, Bunniyom TV broadcasting, establishment of job bases for teaching the members about meritism, provision of political education for young people of the party, and each teaching of Samanas for the public, completely depended on the revenues that Asoke Community earned.

It could be seen from the current situations that even though the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din party had engaged in politics for decades, their political activities, including political education activities for party members, young people, and the public, were greatly different due to the differences in both parties' internal structure, policy-making

concepts, political strongholds, concept of political participation, and approaches of gaining power to govern the country; these factors affected the creation of party affiliation of both parties.

**Objective 2: To study the effectiveness of political education programs provided by the two political parties for the public.**

**The research results illustrate an effectiveness of the political education programs for party members and party supporters between the Democrat Party and Pea Fah Din Party as following important issues:**

**1) The Continuity of Political Education Activities**

Due to the fact that the majority of the political parties did not have sufficient budget for organizing political activities and providing political education for the public, most of the activities providing political education were occasionally organized, especially during the election periods and alongside with political activities as required by the Political Party Act or the Election Commission of Thailand Declarations. The political education activities of the Democrat Party, hence, had some characteristics similar to other parties'. In other words, they organized political education activities for the public along with other activities as required by the Political Party Act or the Election Commission of Thailand Declarations. Therefore, their political education activities were not regularly and continuously organized, and did not truly promote party affiliation or provide political education to the party members. Other than the activities organized along with the main activities, the members in House of Representatives or party politicians may occasionally arrange a meeting or political education session for the party members, but they did not organize this kind of activities annually since they were mainly financed by the members in House of Representatives or party politicians only.

For Pua Fah Din Party, their political education activities for party members and the public were mostly integrated in the job bases or Bunniyom TV's content. Pua Fah Din Party did not have political forum to provide political information to the public like other political parties, except during political gatherings when the party tended to assign Samanas

or key political figures to give a speech on stage to share their political ideas to the public.

The provision of political education for party members toward job bases and Bunniyom media of the Asoke Community was different from other parties. The party members, who were mostly Asoke Community members, usually studied and received political information every day. Therefore, the political concepts promoted by the leaders of the Puea Fah Din Party and Asoke Community were truly absorbed by the party members. According to the interviews with 20 Puea Fah Din Party members, every interviewee had the same direction of political ideas. They believed in the political decision of Samana Bodhiraksa and meritism in which they could lead them to peaceful politics and the politicians would truly serve the public and the country. Furthermore, they also believed that religion and politics cannot be separated and good politics must come from good religious concept.

## **2) Generating New Knowledge for Party Members and the Public who Participated in Political Education Activities**

The provision of political education of both two parties' members mostly was the provision of additional contemporary political information. This could be new knowledge or information that the representatives of the party shared to the members and the public for making political information in various issues become more clear and accurate. For example, the Democrat had organized the forum about the policies that the party would like to present during the election periods and indicating the disadvantages of the rival party policies. To clearly show the disadvantages of the rival parties' policies, the Democrat Party presented the statistical data or the quantitative reports provided by the public sector to the forum attendees to let them consider about these in the future.

Puea Fah Din Party also shared some similar characteristics of information provision with the Democrat Party, but these pieces of information were not completely new but the additional information about major political events to direct the ideas of the party members in the same as the party. In addition, Most of the informed content was related to Asoke

Community's meritism; thus, if any party member or party leader would like to propose any new political concept to Puea Fah Din Party, it must be based on meritism as well.

### **3) The Distribution of the Party's Political Ideologies to Party Members toward Political Education Activities**

During the election periods, the Democrat Party was able to spread the ideas and policies to their party members and party supporters effectively; these people were the important stronghold of the party during the elections. For Puea Fah Din Party, the main ideology of the party was conformed to Asoke Community's meritism, so their all types of political activities such as political education provision, political fundraisings, and so on, were based on meritism.

### **4) The Effectiveness of Different Types of Media Used by the Party to Promote Political Education among Party Members and the Public**

Both the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party had their own media production such as televisions, radios, and publications. These sources of media play significant roles in providing political education to party members and those who were interested in effectively. For the Democrat Party, there were a variety of TV shows broadcasted via Fah Wan Mai Channel and Blue Sky Channel which steadily gained a lot of attention from the party members. Even though the number of viewers was lower than the number before the coup d'état in 2014, Fah Wan Mai Channel still included politics in their content, for example, Columnist Analysis Show, Invisible Hand Show, and common news sessions in the evenings. For the publications, the Democrat Party still issued the monthly journals called the "Blue Compass" which reported the party's political activities and politics-related articles written by the party leaders or politicians. For the radio channels, although they were the most effective media reaching the public in every region, especially in the remote areas, after the coup d'état in 2014, the Democrat Party had to stop the broadcasts via the community radio due to the prohibition of media production by community radio stations. Nonetheless, when they produced the channels

via the community radio, the Democrat Party did not have their own community radio station, but most of the community radio stations who broadcasted political information to promote the party had party members or party supporters managing them, so the party could present important information in different areas.

Puea Fah Din Party also had the party's television channels, radio stations, and publications. Every type of the party's sources of media was very effective in terms of thoroughly providing political information to the party members and the public who were interested. This could be noticed by the news following routines that the party members committed toward the media both inside and outside the country and common understanding among the audience due to the fact that Bunniyom media of Puea Fah Din Party was produced by a job base of Asoke Community in every province. The producers and learners at the job bases were the members of Asoke Community and Puea Fah Din Party. By producing their own show, the other members tended to seriously pay attention to the shows whether they were on TV or radio. This was different from the Democrat party's media by which the producers of their shows were not completely composed of party members; their members did not involve in producing shows or learning how to produce shows unlike the members of Asoke Community. The members of the Democrat Party usually followed news only when the country had serious political issues, for example, when the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) protested against the government.

In terms of the community radio, Puea Fah Din Party had hosted some channels via radio, too. The community radio is a part of Bunniyom's job bases that the members of Asoke Community and Puea Fah Din Party managed together. Its programs presented various political issues to the audience and continuously gained attention from the members. However, after the coup d'état in 2014, Puea Fah Din Party had to cease the community radio's operations as well.

**Objective 3: To examine the role of political education for party members towards the establishment of party affiliation.**

**The research results showed that the provision of political education offered by the two parties to their current party members stimulated party affiliation at different levels.**

Most of the Democrat Party members believed in the party, but did not have close bonds with the party when compared with Puea Fah Din Party because the Democrat Party did not have a clear political ideology. Most of the political ideologies gaining attention from the party members and the public usually related to contemporary political issues at that time, or some party policies proposing to the public may attract some groups of party supporters; these ideologies and policies continuously interested those who had faith in the party or the Democrat Party's fan club. This could be seen from the seminar speeches during the election periods when the party members from different provinces were invited or the political education sessions for the party members organized along with the assemblies required by the Political Party Act. The content presented to the party members and activity participants was mostly related to current political situations or attacked the policies and weaknesses of the rival parties. It was rarely composed of the presentations of political concepts or ideologies formulated by the party from the past to present. Thus, the majority of the Democrat Party members did not understand the true history of the party as well as the evolution of the party's political ideology from the past to present; this affected the party's political operations and their members' political participation a lot.

In terms of political education provision, Puea Fah Din Party was enormously different from the Democrat Party. This was because Puea Fah Din Party was an organization of Asoke Community and most of the Puea Fah Din Party members were also Asoke people, so most of the party members did have the party affiliation toward the party. Moreover, Puea Fah Din Party's political education provision was also embedded with meritism which was applied to the party's political concepts and ideologies; therefore, the community members understood the party's political ideologies very well. Asoke people comprehended meritism very well since their way of living was based on the ideology, the current members

of the party believed in the party and understood the party's history and ideology. The sense of membership encouraged the party members to willingly engage in the party's political activities, especially when there were political gatherings or protests against the government's policies or laws that the party considered as dangers for the Thai society. These factors showed the strength of this small political party when compared it to other newborn political parties or small political parties in Thailand.

**The research results showed that the provision of political education to new party members, particularly the young people, of both parties stimulated party affiliation at the same level.**

Both the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party had the idea of providing political knowledge to the youth, but their approaches were different. A reason for this was that the Democrat Party organized the political education activities for youth in the form of Young Democrat Group only from time to time by emphasizing the relationship between young people and the party, party's politicians, and party's personnel. Therefore, young people who participated in the project often had a chance to exchange their knowledge with the real practitioners and get hands in the real political operations. Sometimes, after the end of the project, some of the young people also continued working as the assistants of the members in the House of Representatives under the Democrat Party. This was the foundation of the party's next generations.

In terms of Puea Fah Din Party, political education was provided regularly as a part of schooling for students in Asoke Community schools. They learned about the party's political ideology toward the job bases and Boonniyom media. Nonetheless, such knowledge may not emphasize the actual political situations but the merit-based political concepts. The youth did not have a chance to genuinely engage in political operations, so it was difficult for them to understand the real political activities. Moreover, Puea Fah Din Party did not have any member in the House of Representatives under its name, so they did not have personnel to exchange political ideas with the young people who were interested in politics. Therefore, if the youth were not interested in politics and there was the lack of political

expert to share and exchange political knowledge with them, when these young people graduated, they would no longer have interests in politics or the party's political role. This would be difficult for the party to create new generations to continue the party's operations and obstruct the development of Puea Fah Din Party in the future.

**Objective 4: To explore the relationship between political education provided by the party and how that political education stimulate party members, party supporters, and people in general to participate in politics.**

**The research results showed that the parties' provision of political education for the party members and party supporters increased the target groups' interests in politics and escalated their political participation.**

According to the research results, political education provision of the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party increased the party members and supporters' participation in politics, especially the key political issues that the parties gave importance to. This could be noticed from the political participation of Puea Fah Din Party members when they were protesting against the numerous governments' policies or the unjust governments in their perspective. During each protest, Puea Fah Din Party members from all over the country were willing to participate in the political situations in unity. To illustrate, in 2011, Puea Fah Din Party members and spiritual relatives of Asoke Communities from every area came to protest against the government in the name of "Dharma Army". Most of the protesters decided to join in the demonstration after receiving news and information from Bunniyom TV and the teachings of Samana Bodhiraksa about the current political situations; there were hence a lot of the protestors.

Similarly, the Democrat Party also provided political knowledge and news to the party members and supporters to increase their political participation. During the political conflict in 2013, the government had tried to introduce the Amnesty Bill to the People's Committee to change Thailand's system into true constitutional monarchy. The People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) led by Suthep Thaugsuban, a

former member of the House of Representatives under the name of the Democrat Party, had gathered to protest against the government. The Democrat Party became a part of the protest since a lot of their members in the House of Representatives joined in the protest. This influenced the party members and supporters to engage in the protest. In addition, the party also broadcasted political issues via the party's media. According to the survey, there was the higher rating of Blue Sky Channel during the protest compared to many public channels. This showed that the Democrat Party's political education provision supported the party members and supporters' political participation in the same way as Puea Fah Din Party.

**The research results on the question of “did political parties’ political education provision increase the voting base of the parties?” are shown below.**

According to the study, the provision of political education for party members and supporters may have influenced them to participate in politics alongside with the party, but it did not motivate them to vote for the parties during the election periods, especially in the areas where the parties did not have strongholds. For example, during the 2011 election, the number of voters who voted for the parties in many provinces was lower than the number of both parties' members. Table 1 demonstrates the comparative data between the number of party members and number of votes the Democrat Party gained in North-eastern region. This shows that even though the party had organized political education activities, they did not significantly increase the votes for the party.

**Table 1** The Comparison between the Number of the Democrat Party Members and the Number of Votes in the Party-list System during the 2011 Election

Provinces	Number of Party Members	Election Results in the Party-list System
Kalasin	153,720	68,699
Khon Kaen	137,521	112,922
Nakhon Phanom	33,381	18,027
Maha Sarakham	150,771	53,373
Mukdahan	61,942	12,657
Roi Et	159,040	56,655
Nong Khai	45,569	23,921
Nong Bua Lam Phu	9,930	20,561
Amnat Charoen	80,250	75,469

Source: The Election Commission of Thailand (2012)

For Puea Fah Din Party, even though there were 16,467 party members, the 2011 election results in the Party-list system showed that they received only 12,823 votes. This shows that the party's merit-based political education provision was accepted by the party members, but it did not increase the stronghold of the party during the election periods.

### Conclusion

Due to the fact that the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party had differences in the establishment's objectives, party's structure, political concepts and ideologies, political participation's objectives, and the origins of party members. Therefore, their direction of political education provision was different in many aspects such as the characteristics of political education activities organized by the parties and presented to the party members and the public, the patterns of communication with the public to provide political knowledge and the party's information, and the sources of revenues used for organizing political education activities. This resulted in the differences in the effectiveness of political education activities of the two parties. Since the Democrat Party did not a permanent stronghold, unlike Puea Fah Din Party who had Asoke Communities as their stronghold,

the Democrat Party's political education provision must be interesting enough to attract the party members and the public to listen and participate in their party activities. In contrast, Puea Fah Din Party had the stronghold composed of Asoke Communities, party members, party executives who were also the members of Asoke Communities and believed in meritism, and Samana Bodhiraksa who was the leader of the communities. So, the merit-based political education provision obviously attracted the attention of the party members and increased the political participation among them effectively.

### **Recommendations**

According to the study of the political education provision for the Democrat Party and Puea Fah Din Party for their party members, the two parties' direction and patterns of political education provision were different. Since Puea Fah Din Party had a stronghold composed of Asoke Community members and adopted the Asoke Community's principle to apply with the party's political ideology, there was the close bond between the party members who believed in meritism of Asoke Community and the party. The merit-based political education provision of Puea Fah Din Party was continuously accepted and supported by their party members.

The provision of political education of the Democrat Party was different from Puea Fah Din Party because the party did not have a community-based stronghold unlike Puea Fah Din Party. Moreover, the educational content of the Democrat Party was mainly based on the major political issues in each period of time or the political policies that the party proposed during the election periods, not a clear political ideology. So, even though the political education activities may have interested the party members and supporters, they did not increase party affiliation in the same way as Puea Fah Din Party.

According to the study, the researchers had summarized the recommendations for developing political education provision of Thai political parties, particularly Puea Fah Din Party and the Democrat Party, as well as the Election Commission of Thailand as follows.

### **Recommendations for Political Parties**

1) Political parties should organize regular political education activities. The content of knowledge provided for the public must stimulate party affiliation, not only involves the political issues that could interest the public once in a while. If political parties can formulate the main principles of the party which is the foundation of its political ideology and develop it as the party's political ideology, it is possible to apply such principles to the development of political education content and approaches. This could also promote political participation among the party members and genuinely unify them with the party. Simultaneously, the parties can also increase the number of their stronghold and members by recruiting those who have similar political ideologies to the party.

2) Political education provision for youth is also highly important for the development of political parties as well as the development of Thai politics in general. Currently, very few Thai kids are interested in the country's politics, so political parties should encourage and provided political knowledge to the young people, especially those who are interested in their party activities.

In terms of providing political education to the youth, political parties should collect new knowledge for young people and should not emphasize the content attacking the rival parties but creative content. This will encourage the new generations to enter the field of politics and develop the politics in practical way. For instance, political parties may teach them about the developed countries' governance systems to help them learn from good examples and apply their knowledge in the future.

3) Political education provision for youth should not be limited to memorizing textbooks or listening to guest speakers or key political figures only, but rather involve the kids to participate in political education activities of the parties and genuinely train in the field of politics, for example, assist the members of the House of Representatives, support the election campaigns, visit important political sites to observe the real political operational processes, and so on. These practices could help the young people to decide whether they would like to work in the field of

politics or not.

4) Political parties' fundraisings for self-funding political activities are very important. Political parties should not only rely on the supporting funds from the Political Party Development Fund or the party's politicians. As mentioned before, the supporting funds from the Political Party Development Fund may be not sufficient for organizing political activities regularly. If political parties do not have adequate budget to organize such activities, they may have to depend on the supporting funds from the party's politicians; this may affect the objectives of political education provision for the party members and the public because they may be intervened by the investors. Therefore, political parties should generate revenues to organize political education activities by themselves, for example, sell the party's products, organize different kinds of parties to raise funds, organize donation sessions, and so on. The genuine political education provision offered by political parties can truly enhance the political knowledge of the citizens in accordance with the parties' principles.

#### **Recommendations for the Election Commission of Thailand**

1) The Election Commission of Thailand is a key agency playing a significant role in developing political parties. Hence, in order to develop political parties, especially small political parties, and reform political parties, the Election Commission of Thailand should organize workshops to provide education to political parties in terms of political education provision for the public, in order to give opportunities to the newborn political parties to develop themselves and gain genuine party members who have the same vision as the parties.

2) Due to the fact that the budget given by the Election Commission of Thailand to support political parties may be insufficient for organizing political education activities for the public and most of the budget tends to be used for administrating the party branches or organizing party meetings as required by the Election Commission of Thailand, the Election Commission of Thailand should organize workshops to educate the political parties about revenues-generating activities for self-funding and

becoming independent from the political parties' supporting funds from the Political Party Development Fund. Presently, political parties (small political parties in particular) often propose the projects to request for the budget from the Political Party Development Fund by focusing on the seminars between party members rather than fundraisings. The Election Commission of Thailand should organize workshops to educate the parties to form such activities in order to be able to fund themselves in the future.

3) The Election Commission of Thailand should organize workshops for party branches and party members to propose projects to organize political activities in which the party members and party branch members can accurately write a project proposal in order to request for the budget from their party in the future. At present, the Election Commission of Thailand has regularly organized educational activities for party branches and party members, but most of the content of knowledge is related to general political issues such as the patterns of election and the development of political parties. However, the activities organized for the party branches still lack the knowledge about management and operations required by internal organization laws. Thus, in order to strengthen the performance of party branches, increase the effectiveness of the political activities, and gain sufficient supporting funds, the Election Commission of Thailand should organize workshops to educate party branches in the aforementioned areas.

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