

The Issue Of Governance In The Form Of Authoritarianism And Traditional Society In The Southern Border Provinces Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the issues in the southern Border Provinces Thailand by exploring historical backgrounds and societal power dynamics, identifying factors contributing to conflicts and violence, and examining the roles of political institutions and governance in peace efforts. Using qualitative methods, including observation and in-depth interviews with 36 participants such as government officials, politicians, religious leaders, and local residents, data analysis was conducted through relationship mapping and key content analysis. Findings reveal that the region's conflicts stem from social issues related to marriage, religion, ethnic and religious segregation, limited education and job opportunities, acceptance of political violence, human rights violations, and inequality. These problems are rooted in past social control and mobilization, along with current political and societal influences. Effective solutions require active political and governance roles in promoting peace through socio-economic development, fostering mutual understanding, and reinforcing local history that aligns with the region's society and culture.

Keywords: Southern Border Provinces Thailand, Governance Issues, Social Structure, Authoritarianism

Introduction

The issues in Thailand's southern Border Provinces Thailand do not only impact the three affected provinces; they have broader implications for all Thai people and Thai society. The severity of these issues extends across political, economic, and social dimensions. The root causes of these conflicts are interconnected and interrelated (Center for Conflict Studies and Cultural Diversity, 2010: 4-5). Territorial expansion to control fertile land in the region and connections with central powers aiming to secure regional interests have fueled conflicts within the political system. Imbalanced historical education and inconsistent law enforcement have further deepened these issues, affecting the overall understanding and cohesion within Thai society (Bubori Yeema, 2012: 112-115). Historically, the southern Border Provinces Thailand served as a hub for trade and cultural exchange between nations. However, territorial expansion and competition over natural resources disrupted this centrality, leading to social and political conflicts, social stratification, and an imbalanced understanding of history and society. Law enforcement often lacks adequate fairness and consistency (Charan Maluleem, 2010: 25-27).

In recent times, the importance of preserving cultural diversity and accepting differences within society has gained recognition. The peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Indians has become essential for creating a harmonious and prosperous society. Celebrations and shared participation in cultural and religious ceremonies demonstrate mutual respect and genuine understanding within a society that values cultural diversity (Navapol Kaewsuwan, 2023: 83-96). Belief in various events and participation in rituals exemplify unity and shared humanity within this community. Thus, preserving cultural diversity and balanced coexistence remains a critical mission for building a harmonious and prosperous society now and in the future (Thitinan Pongsudhirak, 2003: 64-65). A united country values cultural diversity. Muslims and Indians show their shared beliefs through joint celebrations, such

as the observance of Muharram. They hold ceremonies at the same sites and sing memorial songs honoring families who endured suffering. This demonstrates respect and peace through shared existence among all ethnicities and religions in society (Numan Hayimase, 2022: 27-40). Respect for cultural diversity and non-invasive acceptance is crucial for a connected society that is uniquely recognized both domestically and internationally, enabling balanced and sustainable prosperity across all social spheres (Thanes Aponsuwan, 2006: 14-22).

Learning about cultural diversity in society is thus a vital benefit that enables people to live together peacefully. However, in Thailand's southern border regions, historical narratives often differ between the people and the government. Such differences create a comprehensive view of the historical situation in that region, emphasizing the importance of truth-telling to foster understanding and cooperation in society (Veerasak Kruethep, 2013: 102). The objectives of this research encompass examining the issues in the southern border within the context of history and social authoritarianism, the factors contributing to conflict and violence, and the approaches for resolving these issues to maintain peace in the area. Collaboration from all sectors of society is essential to address these issues and build lasting peace and justice.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the issues faced by the southern Border Provinces Thailand within the historical context and authoritarianism of traditional society.
2. To study the factors contributing to conflict and violence in the southern Border Provinces Thailand.
3. To explore solutions for conflict resolution and the roles of political and administrative institutions in maintaining peace in the southern Border Provinces Thailand.

Methodology

This research is qualitative, employing participant observation, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews with the following details:

1. Key Informants for In-Depth Interviews: A total of 36 individuals are selected, as follows:

- Three senior central executives at the ministry level,
- Fifteen provincial-level administrators (five from each of three selected provinces),
- Six religious leaders,
- Six local politicians, and
- Six residents in the area.

2. Research Tool: A semi-structured interview guide with pre-determined questions.

3. Data Collection Method: In-depth interviews and focus group discussions, supplemented by participant and non-participant observations. Data will be gathered in three selected communities across three provinces. The researcher will periodically visit these areas, while research assistants will reside in the communities continuously.

4. Data Collection Process: Formal invitations will be issued to key informants to arrange dates and times for interviews. Additionally, invitations will be sent to participants selected for the focus groups, with each group consisting of five members across three groups.

5. Data Analysis: Qualitative data analysis will be conducted by integrating information obtained from in-depth interviews, observation notes, and recorded documents. This data will be coded, categorized, and analyzed to develop emerging theories from the research (Suthachai Prasitrat sin & Kannika Sukkasem, 2004: 114-118).

Research Framework

Conflict Resolution and the Role of Political Institutions in Maintaining Peace in Southern Thailand: The framework emphasizes fostering mutual understanding among parties, supporting community-based employment and income initiatives, creating negotiation and peace-building spaces, promoting reliable education and information, enhancing trust in local governance, and developing conflict resolution tools. Key considerations include historical, social, economic, and political factors, as depicted in Figure 1.

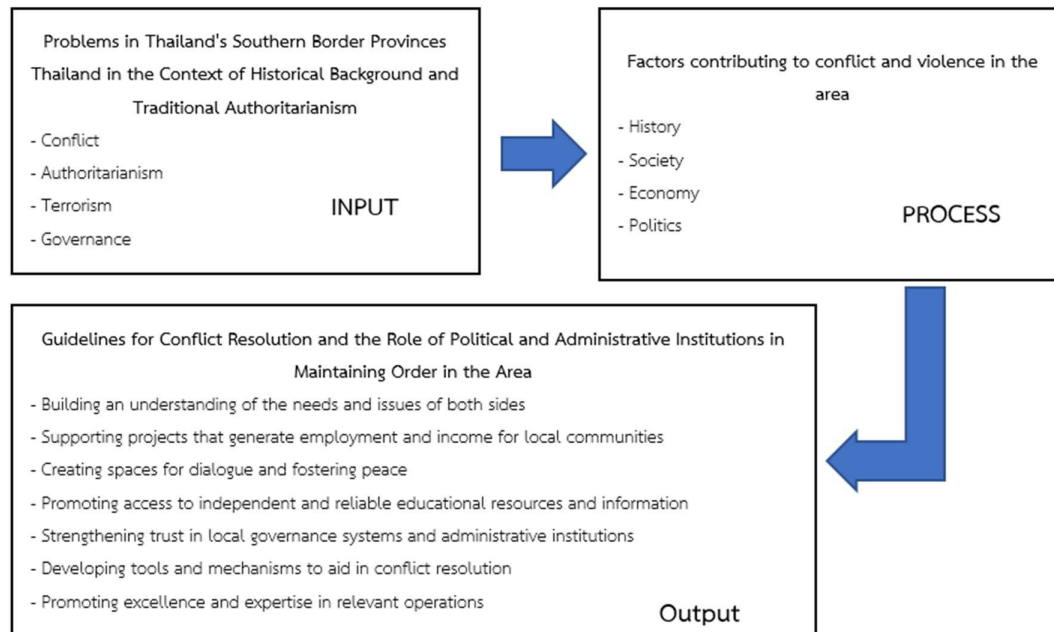


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Source: Researcher

Research Findings

1. To study the underlying issues in Thailand's southern Border Provinces Thailand within the context of historical background and traditional authoritarianism, key points were derived from in-depth interview responses. The findings reveal that Thailand's southern Border Provinces Thailand possess a complex history and face various political, social, and security challenges, especially within the context of authoritarianism and inter-group conflicts. The main issues identified include: (1) longstanding conflicts between ethnic groups in the southern border areas, with insurgent groups resisting government control and using violence to resolve conflicts, affecting both regional development and national stability; (2) authoritarianism as a contributing factor that complicates peacebuilding efforts, with issues of segregation, struggles for survival, local power, and resource competition impacting community growth in this region; (3) terrorism and unrest often resulting from assemblies of anti-government groups, which may be linked to political terrorism, ethnic separatism, and trade competition; and (4) governance and conflict resolution challenges in the southern border area due to complex factors such as political divisions within the government, social dynamics, and internal conflicts among anti-government groups. Effective resolution requires initiatives focused on community development, mutual understanding, and coordinated efforts between the government and southern communities to foster sustainable peace and prosperity in this region (Duanghathai Booncharoenkij, Prakeerati Satsut, Rakchart Suwann, 2019: 150-178). Thus, the problems in Thailand's southern Border Provinces Thailand stem from a deep-rooted historical legacy and dominant authoritarianism within traditional society. Social and political issues have arisen from unequal access to resources and imbalanced development between the northern and southern regions. Continued intergroup conflict and cultural divisions have led to ongoing strife, and the absence of formal resolutions could result in long-term instability, impacting both local and national progress. Due to the continued vulnerability of the southern Border Provinces Thailand, stringent attention is needed to create an environment conducive to sustained social and economic development in this area.

2. To identify the factors contributing to conflict and violence in the southern Border Provinces Thailand, key insights were gathered from in-depth interviews. The findings show that the conflict and violence in Thailand's southern border region are influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including: (1) historical factors, where long-standing dissatisfaction with centralized governance, perceptions of injustice, and issues such as the free sale of weapons in the area have fueled unrest; (2) social factors, with conflicts largely rooted in ethnic, religious, and local power struggles, exacerbated by cultural and religious differences as well as efforts to intimidate and defeat opposing groups; (3) economic factors, where conflicts manifest in the competition for control over natural resources, quick wealth acquisition, and ownership battles; and (4) political factors, where conflicts arise from the struggle for authority, influence, and regional political conditions (Assawasiri Laphee, 2019: 73-86). Thus, resolving these issues requires collaboration between the government and other stakeholders to develop suitable measures for building social and economic resilience in the area. Key approaches include strengthening local governance, ensuring the rights and freedoms of citizens, building a fair and transparent political process, and promoting a peaceful and prosperous environment.

3. To explore conflict resolution approaches and the role of political and administrative institutions in maintaining peace in the southern Border Provinces Thailand, in-depth interview responses were analyzed to highlight major themes. The findings suggest that conflict resolution in Thailand's southern border areas is complex and requires a multifaceted approach. Strategies for maintaining peace include: (1) fostering an understanding of the needs and issues on both sides and building trust among key parties, such as the government, neutral parties, or influential groups; (2) supporting community-based income-generating projects to improve opportunities for individuals in conflict-affected areas; (3) creating spaces for dialogue and promoting peaceful negotiation among opposing groups to resolve disputes respectfully, without violence; (4) supporting independent and credible access to information to enhance understanding of complex situations; (5) building confidence in transparent and fair local governance and administrative institutions; (6) developing tools and mechanisms for consistent and equitable conflict resolution; and (7) encouraging excellence and expertise in security and human rights protection operations (Ismaae Sani, Ibrahim Dolae, Faisal Alhadi, 2023: 115-130). Effective management that emphasizes transparency, understanding, and trust among different parties will be crucial to achieving long-term peace in Thailand's southern border areas. Addressing both economic issues—such as fostering regional economic development, creating employment opportunities, and enhancing economic liquidity—and social issues—such as promoting understanding and building a shared peace within communities—will also be essential. The role of political and administrative institutions should focus on building mutual trust between the government and local communities, supporting citizen participation in community-related decision-making, and responding effectively to public needs and issues. Additionally, enhancing protection and security strategies, along with fostering cooperation among international organizations and between public and private sectors, will be vital in creating a stable and enduring peace. Therefore, collaboration among the government, community, and private sector is essential in learning from and developing solutions to maintain peace in Thailand's southern border regions.

Discussion of Results

1) The Situation in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces Thailand: In the historical and authoritarian context of traditional society, the issues in Thailand's southern Border Provinces Thailand hold significant importance due to their impacts on the region's long-term stability and prosperity. Research findings indicate that key issues affecting the situation in these provinces include long-standing conflicts among groups in the southern border, often resolved through violence. This has hindered regional prosperity and national stability. Authoritarianism is one factor complicating the path to peace in the southern region. Social division, local power struggles, and competition over natural resources contribute to an environment that impacts community growth in this area. Governance and conflict resolution in the southern border area often exhibit complexity, involving the need for justice, violence control, and political division within the government, social factors, and internal conflicts among anti-government groups, which make problem resolution challenging. Addressing these issues requires initiatives focused on community development, fostering mutual understanding, and enhancing cooperation between the government and groups in the southern border to promote sustainable peace and growth in this region. Solving problems rooted in historical and authoritarian societal structures and fostering a conducive environment for long-

term economic and social development could help reduce conflicts and strengthen community and national prosperity over the long term. This discussion aligns with Supanee Thammaphithak’s (2022: 27-42) research findings on the factors affecting government policy implementation in solving issues in the southern Border Provinces Thailand. Her study found that government policy implementation in the region faces several challenges, including a lack of coherence from policy to practice, unclear delegation of responsibilities, which leads to redundancy and inefficient budget use, a lack of effective resource management systems, unclear personnel recruitment, and project planning that disregards the context and identity of the target groups. Unclear control and evaluation further reduce policy implementation efficiency.

2) Conflict and Violence in Thailand’s Southern Border Provinces Thailand: The issues of conflict and violence in Thailand’s southern Border Provinces Thailand are influenced by multiple interrelated factors, which collectively contribute to the problem. These factors can be categorized into four main types: historical, social, economic, and political factors. Addressing conflict and violence in the southern border requires collaboration between the government and other groups to develop suitable measures that strengthen social and economic resilience in the region. This includes reinforcing governance, and ensuring that citizens’ rights and freedoms are respected and trusted within these areas, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Factors of Conflict and Violence in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces Thailand.

Historical Factors	The conflicts and violence in this region have deep historical roots, such as dissatisfaction with central governance and perceived injustices in governance systems. Additionally, issues related to the unregulated sale of weapons in the area contribute to the ongoing unrest.
Social Factors	The majority of conflicts are fueled by issues of ethnicity, religion, and territorial claims by local inhabitants. Cultural and religious differences, along with attempts to disrupt and intimidate opposing groups, exacerbate these conflicts.
Economic Factors	Conflicts also emerge from struggles to control natural resources and economic opportunities within the area, as well as disputes over property ownership.

Table 1: Factors of Conflict and Violence in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces Thailand.

Political Factors	<i>Political conflicts arise from competition for power and influence in the region, along with struggles to shape the regional political landscape</i>
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Therefore, solving this issue requires a systematic and critical approach, such as establishing a robust socio-economic foundation. Promoting understanding and awareness of the differences between communities is essential. This discussion aligns with the research article by Sutip Poonsawat, Pornpun Khemkanasai, and Tanapat Temratnakul (2021: 161-186) titled *"Daloh Pondok Jariyat": The Space for Producing Malay-Muslim Identity in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces Thailand Amid Conflict with Current National Education Policies**. It found that the state controls education in the southern border areas, beginning with converting private Islamic schools to emphasize general subjects and Thai language instruction. This aims to instill a Thai identity among Muslims and prevent association with unrest. Despite diverse educational policies, pondoks have preserved their space to foster Islamic identity and support those pursuing Islamic scholarship.

Thus, creating equal opportunities for education and employment, supporting organizations working toward peace and social resilience, and encouraging political participation in decision-making processes can help resolve conflicts by fostering transparent and trustworthy political processes. This approach ultimately aims to achieve peace and prosperity in these regions.

3) Strengthening the strategic systems for protection and security, including fostering participation and trust in conflict resolution processes, remains essential. It is also crucial to support and fortify local societies to ensure lasting stability and peace in Thailand's southern border areas. Cooperation among the government, communities, and the private sector is crucial for learning, developing solutions, and maintaining peace in Thailand's southern border region.

The complexity of resolving conflicts in the southern Border Provinces Thailand calls for strategies that could be applied to maintain peace in the area, as follows: 1) Fostering understanding of the needs and issues of both sides and building mutual trust is essential for initiating conflict resolution. 2) Creating job opportunities and increasing community income can help reduce conflict and foster peace. 3) Establishing spaces for negotiation and promoting peace between groups are critical considerations in resolving disputes. 4) Increasing understanding and awareness of complex situations is essential for addressing conflict. 5) Building confidence in a transparent and fair governance system can strengthen peace in the area. 6) Developing tools and mechanisms for regular and fair conflict resolution is important. 7) Encouraging expertise and excellence in operations related to security maintenance and human rights protection is vital for maintaining peace in the southern border region.

The role of fair and transparent political institutions and governance is paramount in building trust and shared understanding between the government and the public. Supporting public participation in decisions impacting their communities aligns with the research article by Sitthichai Waiyaphut and Natthaphon Khandchai (2015: 1-15), which found that policies and actions for addressing issues in Thailand's southern Border Provinces Thailand lack clarity, cohesion, and goal orientation. There is distrust toward Islamic beliefs and a lack of cooperation in problem-solving. They recommend addressing these issues through accessible and development-driven approaches for security and peace in local governance in the southern border areas. Establishing a responsive approach to the needs and issues of the people in these regions is crucial for sustainable conflict resolution in various respects.

Policy Recommendations

1. Support for Equal Education and Employment Projects: Supporting projects that focus on providing equal educational and employment opportunities for communities in Thailand's southern Border Provinces Thailand can increase income opportunities and reduce conflict. Examples include vocational training programs, skill development educational projects, and initiatives promoting local entrepreneurship within the community.

2. Support for Neutral and Transparent Organizations: Promoting the establishment of neutral and transparent organizations in governance, conflict resolution, and the facilitation of citizen participation in political decision-making processes is essential.

3. Development of Strategic Plans Focused on Human Rights and Safety: Developing strategic plans to prevent human rights violations and to create safety measures in the southern Border Provinces Thailand is crucial. This may include increasing the number and expertise of security personnel in the region and implementing specialized training programs to ensure diligence in the duties of law enforcement and security personnel.

Practical Recommendations

1. Building Understanding and Trust Among Key Parties: Begin by establishing spaces for dialogue and negotiation among conflicting parties, allowing both sides the opportunity to express their views and understand the issues and needs of the other side.

2. Creating Employment Opportunities for Local Communities: Promoting economic development in the southern Border Provinces Thailand is essential, such as building infrastructure that fosters income generation and sustainable job creation.

3. Establishing Safe Spaces for Negotiation and Peace-Building: Develop safe and reliable spaces for discussions on needs and issues among various parties to help resolve conflicts and foster peace in the southern Border Provinces Thailand.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Further Study on the Political Structure in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces Thailand: Analyze political factors that may influence conflict and violence. Research on political fragmentation and the display of power in this region can help deepen understanding of the factors that contribute to conflict and violence in the southern Border Provinces Thailand.

2. Study of Existing Measures and Programs for Social and Economic Strengthening: Examine the impact of current measures and programs designed to strengthen social and economic conditions in the southern Border Provinces Thailand on conflict and violence.

3. Research on Effective Conflict Resolution and Violence Mitigation Methods: Investigate processes and

methods for effectively addressing conflict and violence in the southern Border Provinces Thailand, including joint efforts between the government and social groups in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Such insights could inform the development of effective policies and measures for future applications.

Knowledge Gained from the Research

Research on the conflicts and the role of political and administrative institutions in maintaining peace in Thailand's southern border areas has identified key factors contributing to these issues. Among them are the complex and varied historical backgrounds of this region, such as the history of social conflicts and the use of violence as a tool to resolve disputes. Authoritarianism, which may stem from competition for political success or economic exchanges, instability in governance, and imbalanced administration, are also contributing factors. Additionally, political elements, both domestic and international, impact conflict and violence in this area. Government intervention, affected by the broader political climate within and outside the country, has influenced administrative practices in the southern border region, leading to conflict and violence within local communities. Efforts to sustain peace in these areas should therefore focus on fostering understanding and trust among different parties. This can be achieved by supporting projects that create jobs and income for the local communities, establishing platforms for dialogue, and promoting peace-building initiatives. Supporting education and access to independent, reliable information is crucial in strengthening trust in the governance system and administrative institutions. Furthermore, tools and mechanisms that effectively address issues should be developed, along with the promotion of excellence and expertise in relevant operations, to help reduce conflict and violence in Thailand's southern border regions in the future. This concept is illustrated in Figure 2.

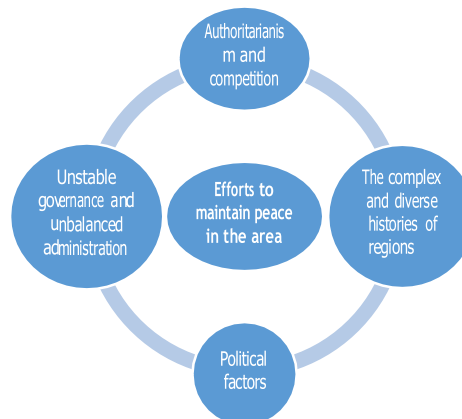


Figure 2: New Knowledge, Source, Researcher

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