Unlocking the drivers of political participation:
A comprehensive review of influential factors

Naruecha Naraphong[1] & Waiphot Kulachai[1]

Corresponding author: naruecha.na@ssru.ac.th

Abstract

Political participation is an essential component of democratic societies, reflecting the extent to which citizens can influence political decision-making processes and hold their leaders accountable. It encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, ranging from conventional forms, such as voting and campaigning, to unconventional forms, such as protests, petitions, and online activism. This literature review examines the multifaceted factors influencing political participation, including socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, education, income, and ethnicity), political attitudes (e.g., political interest, trust, and efficacy), and psychological traits (e.g., personality traits and cognitive engagement).

Furthermore, it explores the role of social capital, including the influence of social networks and civic associations, in facilitating

---

[1]College of Politics and Government, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

participation, as well as the increasing impact of digital media as a new avenue for political engagement. By synthesizing recent research, this review identifies both traditional and emerging drivers of political participation and provides insights into the dynamic and complex interplay between these factors. The findings underscore the importance of considering a wide array of influences that shape political behavior, which is critical for developing strategies to enhance civic engagement and strengthen democratic governance. This comprehensive understanding has significant implications for policymakers, educators, and civil society actors aiming to foster a more active and inclusive citizenry.

Keywords: Digital media; Political attitudes; Social Capital;

Socio-demographic Characteristics

Introduction

Political participation is a fundamental component of democratic governance, representing the various ways through which citizens express their preferences, influence political decision-making, and hold leaders accountable. It encompasses a wide array of activities, ranging from conventional forms, such as voting, campaigning, and engaging with political representatives, to unconventional forms, such as protests, petition signing, boycotts, and online activism. These activities reflect different methods by which individuals can directly or indirectly influence political outcomes and contribute to the democratic process (Dalton, 2017).

The significance of political participation lies in its role in fostering democratic legitimacy and ensuring that government actions reflect the will of the people. High levels of political participation are associated with greater responsiveness of elected officials to public demands, the accountability of political leaders, and the inclusivity of diverse voices in political decision-making (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 2015). Through participation, citizens can express their support for policies, advocate for change, and challenge injustices. This process not only strengthens democratic institutions but also contributes to social cohesion and public trust in government (Brady, 2018).

However, political participation is not uniform across all segments of society. Factors such as socio-demographic characteristics, political attitudes, psychological traits, social capital, and access to digital media play crucial roles in determining the extent and nature of an individual's engagement in political activities. Socio-demographic characteristics, including age, gender, education, income, and ethnicity, significantly influence the likelihood of participation and the forms it takes. For example, older individuals are more likely to engage in conventional activities such as voting, while younger people increasingly turn to digital platforms for political expression and activism (Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018). Similarly, women and men may experience different opportunities and barriers to participation due to historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Political attitudes, such as interest in politics, perceived political efficacy, and trust in political institutions, also critically shape participation. Individuals with a high level of political interest are more likely to engage in political activities, as they are more informed, motivated, and feel a stronger sense of civic duty (Marien, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2010). Political efficacy, or the belief that one's actions can influence political outcomes, is another key determinant; those who feel empowered to make a difference are more likely to participate (Karp & Banducci, 2008). Conversely, low levels of trust in political institutions may either discourage participation or drive citizens

towards protest activities and alternative forms of engagement (Hooghe & Marien, 2013).

Psychological traits, including personality characteristics such as openness to experience and conscientiousness, have also been found to affect political behavior. Individuals who are more open to new experiences are generally more politically active, particularly in non-traditional forms of participation, such as protests or digital activism (Vecchione et al., 2014). Moreover, psychological factors like cognitive engagement and emotional reactions to political events can shape how and when individuals choose to engage in political processes (Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015).

Social capital, defined as the networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate collective action, plays a critical role in political participation. Individuals embedded in robust social networks, such as community groups, religious organizations, and civic associations, are more likely to participate in political activities due to the social support, information, and encouragement they receive from their networks (Putnam, 2000). Trust in others and a sense of social responsibility further enhance the willingness to engage in political life, promoting a culture of civic engagement and collective action (Uslaner, 2018).

The advent of digital media has added a new dimension to political participation, transforming the ways in which citizens engage with politics. Digital platforms, such as social media, blogs, and online petitions, have

created new opportunities for political expression, lowering the barriers to entry for political participation and enabling rapid communication and mobilization across large groups (Loader & Mercea, 2011). Digital media allows for more dynamic and interactive forms of engagement, where citizens can quickly organize, share information, and participate in political discussions without the constraints of time and space (Boulianne, 2015). However, these platforms also present challenges, such as the spread of misinformation, the creation of echo chambers, and the polarization of public opinion, all of which can impact participation in complex ways (Sunstein, 2018; Guess, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2018).

This review aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of these diverse factors influencing political participation, recognizing the dynamic and interconnected nature of these influences. By examining socio-demographic variables, political attitudes, psychological traits, social capital, and the role of digital media, this review will explore the multiple pathways through which individuals become politically active. Understanding these factors is crucial not only for fostering a more inclusive political culture but also for developing strategies to encourage broader and more equitable participation across all segments of society.

Moreover, as political landscapes evolve with technological advancements and shifting socio-political dynamics, it becomes increasingly important to explore how these changes affect traditional and

emerging forms of participation. Future research must continue to examine the interactions among these various factors and their implications for democratic governance, particularly in light of the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital age. By doing so, scholars and policymakers can better understand the barriers to political engagement and develop more effective interventions to promote active and informed citizenship.

Understanding what drives individuals to engage in political activities is essential for promoting democratic principles and ensuring a vibrant political culture. This literature review, therefore, focuses on identifying and discussing the key factors influencing political participation, emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach that considers both traditional and contemporary influences on political behavior. By synthesizing recent evidence from a wide range of studies, this review aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between these factors and their implications for democratic engagement in the modern era.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, education, income, and ethnicity, significantly influence levels of political participation. These factors shape not only the likelihood that individuals

will participate in political activities but also the forms that such participation might take.

Age and Political Participation

Age is a crucial determinant of political participation, with different age groups showing varying patterns of engagement. Older individuals are generally more likely to participate in traditional forms of political activities, such as voting and attending political meetings. This trend can be attributed to several factors: older citizens often have more stable life circumstances, greater political experience, and a stronger sense of civic duty, all of which encourage participation (Smets & van Ham, 2013). Research also suggests that older adults may be more affected by policies on healthcare, pensions, and social security, which motivates them to vote in higher numbers compared to younger age groups (Goerres, 2007). Conversely, younger individuals are more inclined toward less conventional forms of political participation, such as digital activism, protests, and social media campaigns. These forms of engagement are often perceived as more accessible, flexible, and immediate, allowing young people to participate without the formal constraints typically associated with traditional political activities (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). However, despite their affinity for alternative forms of engagement, studies show that younger people often exhibit lower turnout rates in elections compared to older cohorts

(Bhatti & Hansen, 2012). Factors contributing to this trend include a lack of trust in traditional political institutions, feelings of disenfranchisement, and lower levels of political knowledge and experience (Sloam, 2016).

Gender and Political Participation

Gender also plays a significant role in shaping political participation. Historically, women have been less likely than men to engage in many forms of political activity, especially in formal and institutional contexts, due to long-standing societal norms and gender roles that have limited their access to political resources and opportunities (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). However, recent studies indicate that the gender gap in political participation has been narrowing, particularly in societies with higher levels of gender equality and empowerment (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2017). Women's political participation is often influenced by a range of factors, including education, employment, and family responsibilities. For example, women with higher education levels are more likely to engage in political activities, as education enhances their awareness of political issues, their sense of efficacy, and their access to political networks (Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 2001). Moreover, the presence of female role models in political offices can positively affect women's political participation by challenging traditional stereotypes and encouraging other women to engage in politics (Barnes & Burchard, 2013). However, barriers remain,

particularly in regions where cultural and structural constraints still limit women's opportunities to participate fully in political life (Paxton, Kunovich, & Hughes, 2007).

Education and Political Participation

Education is one of the strongest predictors of political participation. Individuals with higher levels of education are consistently more likely to engage in various political activities, including voting, campaigning, and participating in community organizations (Persson, 2015). Education equips individuals with the cognitive skills necessary to understand political processes and issues, enhances their sense of political efficacy, and increases their exposure to diverse viewpoints and networks that encourage participation (Gallego, 2010). Moreover, education is linked to other resources, such as higher income and occupational status, which further facilitate political engagement. Research suggests that more educated individuals are better at navigating political systems, more adept at obtaining and processing political information, and more likely to feel that their participation can make a difference (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996). Additionally, schools and universities often serve as critical environments for fostering civic skills and democratic values, which are essential for active political participation (Campbell, 2006).

Income and Political Participation

Income, closely tied to education, also plays a crucial role in determining political participation. Individuals with higher income levels tend to have more resources—such as time, money, and social capital—that can be leveraged to engage in political activities (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995). Economic stability enables individuals to participate in costly or time-consuming activities, such as volunteering for political campaigns or joining political organizations. Higher-income individuals are also more likely to contribute financially to political causes, attend political events, and engage in more direct forms of political action (Leighley & Nagler, 2013). On the other hand, those with lower incomes often face barriers to participation, such as a lack of time due to multiple jobs or economic insecurity, which makes them less likely to vote or engage in other forms of political activities (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2012). Economic inequality can thus create significant disparities in political participation, with wealthier citizens having greater influence over political outcomes than their less affluent counterparts (Solt, 2008).

Ethnicity and Political Participation

Ethnicity also plays a critical role in political participation, particularly in multicultural societies. Ethnic minorities often face unique challenges to participation, including socio-economic disadvantages,

discrimination, and political alienation (Garcia-Castanon, 2018). Research indicates that these groups may be less likely to participate in conventional political activities, such as voting, due to barriers such as lower levels of education, language difficulties, and reduced access to resources (Lien, 1994). However, ethnic identity can also serve as a powerful motivator for political participation, especially when ethnic groups are mobilized around shared concerns or grievances. For instance, minority communities often engage in collective action, such as protests or advocacy, to address issues of discrimination, civil rights, and social justice (McClain et al., 2009). Social networks within ethnic communities provide solidarity, resources, and motivation for political participation, particularly in movements advocating for rights and representation (Dawson, 1994). Furthermore, studies show that ethnic minorities are more likely to participate in political activities when they perceive that their political interests are being addressed or threatened (Masuoka & Junn, 2013).

In conclusion, socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, income, and ethnicity are fundamental in shaping patterns of political participation. While these factors often interact in complex ways, understanding their influence is crucial for developing strategies to foster more inclusive political engagement across diverse populations.

Political Attitudes and Psychological Factors

Political attitudes and psychological factors, such as political interest, efficacy, and trust, are critical determinants of political participation. These factors influence how individuals perceive politics, their role within the political system, and their likelihood of engaging in various political activities. Understanding these psychological drivers is crucial for explaining variations in political behavior across different contexts and demographics.

Political Interest

Political interest refers to the degree of attention and engagement an individual exhibits toward political issues, events, and processes. It is one of the most robust predictors of political participation. Research consistently shows that individuals with a high level of political interest are more likely to vote, participate in political discussions, engage in campaigns, attend political meetings, and be active on digital platforms like social media (Prior, 2018). Political interest acts as a motivational force, encouraging people to seek out political information, develop informed opinions, and express their views through various channels (Marien, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2010). Political interest is not static; it develops and evolves throughout an individual's life. Early socialization processes play a significant role in fostering political interest. For example, family discussions about politics, exposure to news media, and civic education in schools can

significantly impact a young person's level of political interest (Neundorf, Niemi, & Smets, 2016). Additionally, political events and experiences, such as witnessing social movements or crises, can either heighten or diminish political interest. For instance, political scandals may provoke interest by creating a sense of urgency and awareness of the stakes involved in political decisions, whereas a prolonged period of political stability may lead to complacency and reduced interest (Blais & St-Vincent, 2011). Political interest is also shaped by socio-economic factors. Higher levels of education often correlate with greater political interest because educated individuals are more likely to encounter political content and engage in discussions about public affairs (Rubenson et al., 2004). Similarly, socio-economic stability provides the resources and time necessary for individuals to focus on political matters, thereby enhancing political interest (Delli Carpini, 2000). Conversely, marginalized groups may exhibit lower levels of political interest due to feelings of exclusion or a lack of representation in the political sphere (Gallego, 2010).

Political Efficacy

Political efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to influence political processes and outcomes. It comprises two components: internal political efficacy, or the belief in one's competence to understand and participate in politics, and external political efficacy, or the belief that

political institutions and actors are responsive to citizen input (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). Both forms of efficacy are crucial for encouraging political participation. Individuals who feel politically efficacious are more likely to perceive their involvement as meaningful, which in turn increases their likelihood of engaging in activities such as voting, campaigning, or attending protests (Campbell, 2013). Political efficacy is not an inherent trait but can be developed or diminished over time. Positive experiences, such as successful advocacy efforts, being listened to by elected officials, or participating in well-run elections, can enhance a sense of efficacy. Political education, particularly that which emphasizes civic skills and knowledge, can also boost efficacy by helping individuals navigate complex political systems and understand how they can effect change (Finkel, 2003). Additionally, interactions with democratic institutions that are transparent and responsive can foster greater feelings of external efficacy (Craig et al., 2005). Conversely, low levels of political efficacy are often linked to political apathy and withdrawal. If individuals perceive that their efforts will not bring about change or that political institutions are corrupt and unresponsive, they are less likely to participate. For example, studies have shown that political efficacy tends to decline in contexts characterized by corruption, autocratic rule, or frequent political crises, where citizens feel that their voices are ignored or suppressed (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003). This lack of efficacy can lead to feelings of disillusionment and detachment from the political

process, reducing both the quantity and quality of political engagement (Miller, 2020).

Political Trust

Political trust, defined as the confidence in political institutions, leaders, and processes, is another crucial determinant of political participation. High levels of political trust can foster conventional forms of participation, such as voting, by reinforcing the belief that the political system is fair, functional, and worth engaging with (Citrin & Stoker, 2018). Trust in political institutions can enhance citizens' willingness to comply with laws, support government policies, and participate in electoral processes (Levi & Stoker, 2000). However, declining trust in political institutions has been observed in many democracies worldwide, and its impact on participation is complex. Low political trust may lead to disengagement from institutionalized political processes, such as voting, where individuals perceive that political leaders are corrupt or indifferent to their concerns (Dalton, 2004). For instance, research has shown that political trust is strongly correlated with voter turnout; individuals who trust their government are more likely to participate in elections (Hooghe & Marien, 2013). Interestingly, low political trust does not always result in total political withdrawal; it can also motivate individuals to engage in non-conventional forms of participation, such as protests, boycotts, or grassroots organizing

(Zmerli & Hooghe, 2017). When formal channels are perceived as ineffective, citizens may turn to alternative means of expression to make their voices heard. For example, studies have found that lower levels of trust in traditional political institutions are associated with increased support for and involvement in protest activities (Marien & Hooghe, 2011). Moreover, recent studies have highlighted the dual nature of political trust. While trust in government institutions may decline, trust in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, and grassroots initiatives can remain high and continue to drive political engagement (Hooghe & Marien, 2018). This pattern suggests that while citizens may lose faith in formal political structures, they may still seek other avenues to influence policy and social change. Trust in community-based organizations and informal networks can thus play a crucial role in sustaining democratic engagement, particularly in contexts where government trust is low (Newton, 2006).

In summary, political attitudes and psychological factors such as political interest, efficacy, and trust significantly shape how individuals engage in political life. These factors influence not only whether individuals choose to participate but also the types of participation they find meaningful and effective. Understanding these attitudes is vital for developing policies and strategies to foster greater political engagement and to address the underlying causes of political apathy and disengagement.

Social Capital and Network Effects

Social capital, defined as the networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate collective action, plays a critical role in influencing political participation. Social capital is built through connections between individuals and groups, enabling coordinated actions that benefit the community as a whole. According to Putnam (2000), social capital encompasses both bonding capital, which strengthens ties within homogeneous groups (such as families and close friends), and bridging capital, which connects diverse groups and individuals across different social cleavages. Both forms of social capital are important for fostering political participation, as they provide networks through which information is shared, resources are pooled, and collective action is organized.

Individuals embedded in strong social networks are more likely to be politically active due to several mechanisms. Firstly, these networks provide increased exposure to political information, as people within a network are likely to discuss current events, share news, and disseminate information about political issues, candidates, and events (Kwak et al., 2005). Secondly, social networks create environments where peer pressure and social norms encourage participation. For example, if a person is surrounded by politically active peers, they are more likely to perceive political participation as a normative behavior and feel compelled to engage themselves (Sinclair, 2012). Finally, social networks are critical for

mobilization efforts; organizations such as civic groups, religious organizations, and community associations often play a direct role in encouraging their members to vote, attend rallies, or participate in protests (McClurg, 2003).

Participation in civic organizations, religious groups, and community activities provides individuals with opportunities to develop civic skills and build social capital, which enhances their capacity and willingness to engage in political activities (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). These groups often serve as training grounds for political engagement, offering individuals the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to participate in political life. For example, people who participate in voluntary organizations are more likely to develop public speaking skills, organizational abilities, and a sense of civic duty, all of which are associated with higher levels of political participation (Brady et al., 1995).

Furthermore, social network effects emphasize the role of social context in shaping political engagement. Research suggests that an individual's political behavior is often influenced by the political activities of their peers. For instance, a study by Nickerson (2008) found that individuals are more likely to vote if they live in households where other members are also voting. This social influence is particularly pronounced in closely-knit communities where social norms strongly dictate behavior (Bond et al.,

2012). In addition, social capital can provide the emotional and moral support necessary for sustained engagement in political activities, particularly in contexts where individuals may face social or political risks for participating (Diani, 2004).

The Role of Digital Media

The advent of digital media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of political participation by creating new avenues for engagement and activism. Digital platforms, such as social media networks, blogs, and online petitions, provide accessible spaces for political discourse and action, reaching audiences that might not otherwise engage in traditional political activities (Bimber, 2003). The rise of digital media has democratized information dissemination, allowing citizens to quickly share political content, coordinate activities, and mobilize others without the constraints of time, distance, or financial resources.

Research indicates that digital media can lower barriers to entry for political participation by providing accessible information and facilitating communication and mobilization (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). Digital tools allow users to engage in political discussions, express opinions, and share content with a wider audience, often at little to no cost. For instance, studies have shown that social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook can serve as catalysts for political mobilization, as they enable rapid

dissemination of information, coordination of protests, and formation of virtual communities around shared causes (Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018). These platforms also offer opportunities for political expression and activism, particularly for younger generations who may be less inclined to engage through conventional channels (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014).

However, digital media also presents challenges, such as the potential for echo chambers, polarization, and misinformation, which can distort public discourse and political engagement. Echo chambers occur when individuals surround themselves with like-minded people and information, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs and reducing exposure to diverse perspectives (Sunstein, 2001). This can lead to increased political polarization, where opposing political groups become more ideologically extreme and less willing to engage in constructive dialogue (Garrett, 2009). Moreover, the spread of misinformation and "fake news" can undermine trust in political institutions and processes, making it difficult for citizens to make informed political decisions (Guess et al., 2018).

The impact of digital media on political participation is complex and varies depending on factors such as digital literacy, access, and political context. For instance, while digital platforms can be effective tools for engagement, their impact is moderated by the user's ability to critically assess information, navigate digital spaces, and engage in meaningful discussions (Lutz et al., 2020). Additionally, the effectiveness of digital

media in promoting political participation can be influenced by political and regulatory contexts, such as government censorship, digital surveillance, and access restrictions (Tufekci, 2017).

Intersectional and Contextual Influences

While individual factors such as socio-demographic characteristics, political attitudes, and social capital are critical, political participation is also shaped by intersectional and contextual influences. Intersectionality theory, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), highlights how overlapping social identities (e.g., race, class, gender) impact political behavior differently across groups. This perspective suggests that an individual's political engagement cannot be understood in isolation from their multiple, intersecting identities and the broader social, economic, and political contexts in which they are situated.

For example, research shows that women of color often experience different forms and degrees of political participation compared to white women or men of color, shaped by their unique experiences of both racial and gender discrimination (Collins, 2000). These intersectional identities can influence both the barriers to and motivations for political engagement. Marginalized groups may be more likely to participate in protest movements and grassroots organizing as a response to systemic inequalities that affect them on multiple fronts (Bedolla, 2007).

Contextual factors, such as the political system, electoral laws, and socio-political environment, also significantly impact levels of political participation. For instance, political systems with proportional representation tend to have higher voter turnout rates compared to majoritarian systems. Proportional representation systems often offer more opportunities for smaller parties and diverse voices, making individuals feel that their votes are more likely to make a difference (Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998). Electoral laws, such as compulsory voting, voter registration rules, and access to polling stations, also play a significant role in determining voter turnout and participation rates (Lijphart, 1997).

Moreover, the socio-political environment, including factors like political stability, civil liberties, and public trust in institutions, can significantly shape political participation. In contexts where political repression is high, citizens may be less likely to engage in open political participation due to fears of persecution or retaliation (Carothers & Youngs, 2015). Conversely, in democratic contexts where civil liberties are protected, and public trust in political institutions is strong, citizens may feel more empowered to participate actively in political life (Norris, 2011).

In summary, understanding political participation requires considering not only individual-level factors such as social capital and digital media access but also broader intersectional and contextual influences. These factors interact in complex ways to shape political engagement,

underscoring the importance of a comprehensive approach to studying and promoting inclusive political participation.

Conceptual Framework for Future Research on Political Participation

The conceptual framework for understanding political participation integrates various dimensions, such as socio-demographic characteristics, political attitudes, psychological factors, social capital, digital media, and intersectional and contextual influences, to capture the complex interplay of these factors in shaping political engagement. Socio-demographic factors like age, gender, education, income, and ethnicity serve as foundational determinants, influencing individuals' capacity, motivation, and opportunities for participation, with younger individuals leaning toward digital activism and older individuals favoring traditional forms like voting. Political attitudes, including interest, efficacy, and trust, play crucial roles in shaping engagement levels; higher political interest and efficacy correlate with increased participation, while trust in political institutions affects whether citizens engage in conventional or protest activities. Social capital, encompassing networks, norms, and trust, facilitates participation by providing exposure to political information, peer influence, and platforms for civic engagement, while digital media lowers barriers to entry but also introduces challenges like misinformation and echo chambers. Intersectional identities and contextual factors, such as political systems,

electoral laws, and socio-political environments, further shape participation by creating unique experiences and challenges across different demographic groups, underscoring the need for a comprehensive approach to understanding political behavior in diverse contexts (see Figure 1).
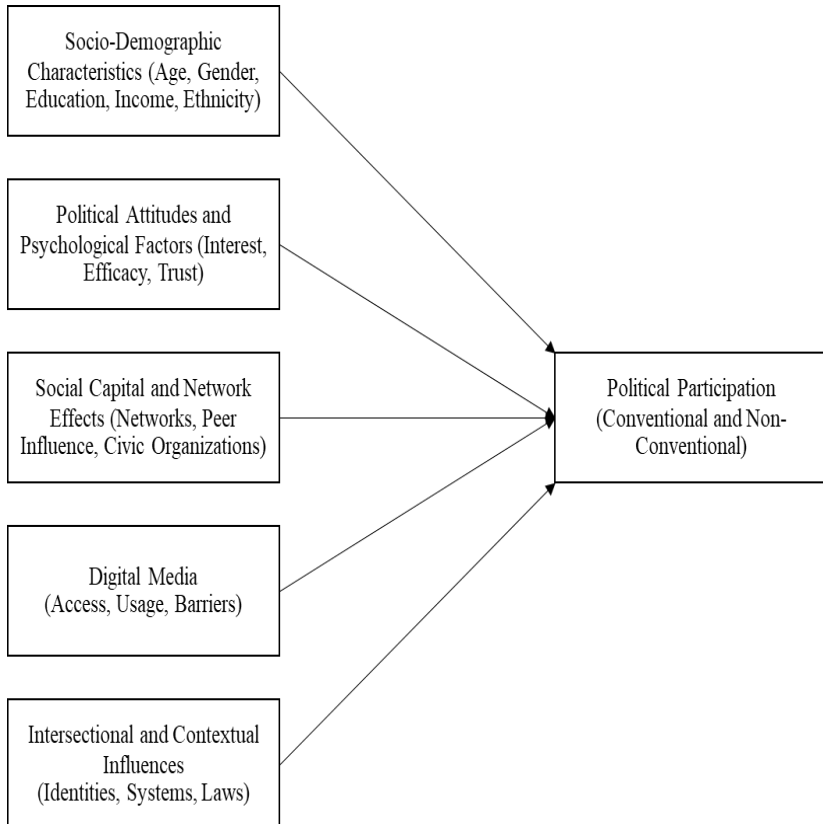

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Implications for the Thai Context

The conceptual framework for understanding political participation offers several important implications for the Thai context. Given Thailand's diverse demographic landscape, complex political history, and rapid digital transformation, this framework can guide strategies to enhance political engagement and inclusivity across different segments of society.

First, addressing socio-demographic barriers is essential to promoting political participation in Thailand. The country's demographic diversity, including its mix of urban and rural populations, ethnic minorities, and varying socio-economic statuses, creates unique challenges and opportunities for political engagement. For example, rural areas often face greater barriers due to lower levels of education, economic inequality, and limited access to political information. Targeted civic education programs in rural and underserved communities, such as those delivered through schools, local government offices, and community centers, could help increase political awareness and engagement. Additionally, policies aimed at reducing economic inequality, such as improving access to quality education and social services, would empower citizens by providing the resources and stability needed to participate in political processes.

Enhancing political efficacy and trust is also crucial in the Thai context. Given the country's history of political instability and fluctuating public trust in political institutions, efforts to increase transparency,

accountability, and responsiveness can build trust and encourage participation. Measures such as strengthening anti-corruption frameworks, improving access to public information, and creating channels for citizen feedback and involvement in governance processes would foster a sense of trust and efficacy. Promoting positive engagement experiences, such as participatory budgeting initiatives and public consultations, can also enhance political efficacy by showing citizens that their involvement can lead to tangible outcomes.

Social capital and networks are vital for fostering political participation in Thailand. The country's rich cultural traditions and strong community networks provide a solid foundation for building social capital. Supporting local organizations, such as civic groups, religious institutions, and community associations, can help leverage these networks to promote political engagement. Encouraging peer-to-peer engagement through community-based campaigns or local political discussion groups can create a multiplier effect, fostering broader political participation across diverse communities.

Digital media plays an increasingly important role in political participation in Thailand, especially among younger generations. Digital platforms provide new avenues for political expression and activism, but challenges such as misinformation and limited digital literacy must be addressed. Implementing digital literacy programs in schools and

communities can help citizens critically evaluate political information, recognize credible sources, and engage more meaningfully in online political discussions. Additionally, fostering constructive digital engagement through moderated online forums, virtual town halls, and social media campaigns can help reach younger demographics and encourage their participation in political life.

Recognizing intersectional and contextual challenges is crucial for fostering inclusive political participation in Thailand. Overlapping identities, such as ethnicity, gender, and class, affect political engagement differently across groups. Tailored strategies should be developed to address the specific barriers faced by marginalized communities, ensuring all citizens have equal opportunities to participate in political processes. Furthermore, adapting to Thailand's dynamic political environment—characterized by frequent government changes and political unrest—requires efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, protect civil liberties, and promote a culture of tolerance and inclusivity, creating a stable environment where citizens feel safe and motivated to engage politically.

Applying the conceptual framework to Thailand highlights the need for several policy and institutional reforms. Reforms to electoral laws, such as simplifying voter registration processes, expanding access to polling stations, and implementing proportional representation, could help increase voter turnout and ensure that all voices are represented. Policies that

promote inclusivity in political processes, such as quotas for women or ethnic minorities in local and national legislatures, could foster more representative governance and encourage broader political participation.

In conclusion, the conceptual framework provides a comprehensive approach to understanding political participation in Thailand. By addressing socio-demographic barriers, enhancing political efficacy and trust, leveraging social capital, utilizing digital media effectively, and recognizing intersectional and contextual challenges, Thailand can create a more inclusive political environment. These efforts will help increase political participation among diverse populations and strengthen democratic governance and social cohesion in the country. This framework offers a roadmap for future research and policy initiatives to foster greater political engagement across all segments of Thai society, ensuring all citizens have the opportunity to participate fully in their country's political life.

Conclusion

This article has provided a comprehensive review of the various factors influencing political participation, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that integrates multiple dimensions, including socio-demographic characteristics, political attitudes, psychological factors, social capital, digital media, and intersectional and contextual influences. The analysis

reveals that political participation is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by a complex interplay of individual attributes, social networks, media environments, and broader political contexts. Socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, education, income, and ethnicity fundamentally determine individuals' capacity and motivation to engage in political activities, while political attitudes like interest, efficacy, and trust significantly impact their likelihood of participation. Social capital and digital media act as crucial mediators that can either facilitate or hinder political engagement depending on their nature and context. Moreover, intersectional identities and contextual influences further modulate the effects of these factors, highlighting the importance of a nuanced understanding of political behavior across different groups and settings. Based on the findings of this article, several recommendations can be made to promote more inclusive political participation. First, targeted civic education programs should be developed to address socio-demographic barriers, particularly in underserved communities, to enhance political knowledge, skills, and efficacy. These programs should be tailored to different age groups, genders, and ethnicities, recognizing the unique challenges each faces in the political arena. Second, efforts should be made to strengthen social capital by supporting local organizations, civic groups, and community associations that foster engagement and build networks of trust and reciprocity. Third, digital literacy initiatives should be implemented to help citizens navigate

the challenges of the digital media landscape, particularly regarding misinformation and echo chambers, and to encourage constructive online political discourse. Fourth, policies should be designed to address intersectional and contextual barriers to participation, such as reforms to electoral laws and the implementation of quotas to ensure diverse representation in political institutions. Finally, enhancing transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in governance can help build political trust, thereby encouraging greater engagement in both conventional and non-conventional forms of participation. By adopting these strategies, policymakers, educators, and civil society actors can work together to create a more vibrant, inclusive, and participatory political culture.

References

Anderson, C. J., & Tverdova, Y. V. (2003). Corruption, political allegiances, and attitudes toward government in contemporary democracies. *American Journal of Political Science, 47*(1), 91-109.

Barnes, T. D., & Burchard, S. M. (2013). "Engendering" politics: The impact of descriptive representation on women's political engagement in sub-Saharan Africa. *Comparative Political Studies, 46*(7), 767-790.

Bedolla, L. G. (2007). Intersections of inequality: Understanding marginalization and privilege in the post-civil rights era. *Politics & Gender, 3(*2), 232-238.

Bhatti, Y., & Hansen, K. M. (2012). The effect of generation and age on turnout to the European Parliament: How turnout will continue to decline in the future. *Electoral Studies, 31*(2), 262-272.

Bimber, B. (2003). *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power*. Cambridge University Press.

Blais, A., & Dobrzynska, A. (1998). Turnout in electoral democracies. *European Journal of Political Research, 33*(2), 239-261.

Blais, A., & St-Vincent, S. L. (2011). Personality traits, political attitudes and the propensity to vote. *European Journal of Political Research, 50*(3), 395-417.

Bond, R. M., et al. (2012). A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization. *Nature, 489*(7415), 295-298.

Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. Information, *Communication & Society, 18*(5), 524-538.

Brady, H. E. (2018). The evolving study of political participation. *Annual Review of Political Science, 26,* 1-20.

Brady, H. E., Verba, S., & Schlozman, K. L. (1995). Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation. *American Political Science Review, 89(*2), 271-294.

Burns, N., Schlozman, K. L., & Verba, S. (2001). *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation*. Harvard University Press.

Campbell, A. L. (2013). *How Policies Make Citizens: Senior Political Activism and the American Welfare State*. Princeton University Press.

Campbell, D. E. (2006). *Why We Vote: How Schools and Communities Shape Our Civic Life.* Princeton University Press.

Carothers, T., & Youngs, R. (2015). *The complexities of global protest.* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Citrin, J., & Stoker, L. (2018). Political trust in a cynical age. *Annual Review of Political Science, 21,* 49-70.

Coffé, H., & Bolzendahl, C. (2017). Gender gaps in political participation: From empowerment to backlash. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy, 38*(3), 265-283.

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge.

Craig, S. C., Niemi, R. G., & Silver, G. E. (2005). Political efficacy and trust: A report on the NES pilot study items. *Political Behavior, 27*(2), 239-265.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.

Dalton, R. J. (2004). *Democratic challenges, democratic choices: The erosion of political support in advanced industrial democracies*. Oxford University Press.

Dawson, M. C. (1994). *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics*. Princeton University Press.

Delli Carpini, M. X. (2000). Gen.com: Youth, civic engagement, and the new information environment. *Political Communication, 17*(4), 341-349.

Diani, M. (2004). Networks and participation. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (pp. 339-359). Blackwell Publishing.

Finkel, S. E. (2003). Can democracy be taught? *Journal of Democracy, 14(*4), 137-151.

Gallego, A. (2010). Understanding unequal turnout: Education and voting in comparative perspective. *Electoral Studies, 29*(2), 239-248.

Garcia-Castanon, M. (2018). Ethnic identity and political participation. *American Political Science Review, 112*(3), 643-657.

Garrett, R. K. (2009). Echo chambers online? Politically motivated selective exposure among Internet news users. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 14(*2), 265-285.

Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement, and political participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 17*(3), 319-336.

Goerres, A. (2007). Why are older people more likely to vote? The impact of ageing on electoral turnout across Europe. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 9(*1), 90-121.

Guess, A., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2018). Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2016 US election. *Nature Human Behaviour, 2*(9), 793-796.

Guess, A., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2018). *Selective exposure to misinformation: Evidence from the consumption of fake news during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign.* European Research Council.

Hooghe, M., & Marien, S. (2013). A comparative analysis of the relation between political trust and forms of political participation in Europe. *European Societies, 15*(1), 131-152.

Hooghe, M., & Marien, S. (2018). How to reach members of ethnic minorities? Understanding external efficacy among ethnic minority groups. *Political Psychology, 39*(3), 407-424.

Huddy, L., Mason, L., & Aarøe, L. (2015). Expressive partisanship: Campaign involvement, political emotion, and partisan identity. *American Political Science Review, 109*(1), 1-17.

Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2003). *Rising tide: Gender equality and cultural change around the world.* Cambridge University Press.

Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2016). *Gender equality and cultural change around the world.* Cambridge University Press.

Karp, J. A., & Banducci, S. A. (2008). Political efficacy and participation in twenty-seven democracies: How electoral systems shape political behavior. *British Journal of Political Science, 38*(2), 311-334.

Kwak, N., Williams, A. E., Wang, X., & Lee, H. (2005). Talking politics and engaging politics: An examination of the interactive relationships between structural features of political talk and discussion engagement. *Communication Research, 32*(1), 87-111.

Leighley, J. E., & Nagler, J. (2013). *Who Votes Now?: Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States.* Princeton University Press.

Levi, M., & Stoker, L. (2000). Political trust and trustworthiness. *Annual Review of Political Science, 3*(1), 475-507.

Lien, P. (1994). Ethnicity and political participation: A comparison between Asian and Mexican Americans. *Political Behavior, 16*(2), 237-264.

Lijphart, A. (1997). Unequal participation: Democracy's unresolved dilemma. *American Political Science Review, 91*(1), 1-14.

Loader, B. D., & Mercea, D. (2011). Networking democracy? Social media innovations and participatory politics. Information, *Communication & Society, 14*(6), 757-769.

Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M. A. (2014). The networked young citizen: Social media, political participation, and civic engagement. *New Media & Society, 16*(3), 485-506.

Lutz, C., Hoffmann, C. P., & Meckel, M. (2020). Digital inequalities in political participation: The mediating role of social media literacy. Information, *Communication & Society, 23*(5), 701-719.

Marien, S., & Hooghe, M. (2011). Does political trust matter? An empirical investigation into the relation between political trust and forms of political participation. *European Journal of Political Research, 50*(2), 180-200.

Marien, S., Hooghe, M., & Quintelier, E. (2010). Inequalities in non-institutionalised forms of political participation: A multi-level analysis of 25 countries. *Political Studies, 58*(1), 187-213.

Masuoka, N., & Junn, J. (2013). *The Politics of Belonging: Race, Public Opinion, and Immigration.* University of Chicago Press.

McClain, P. D., Carew, J. D., Walton, E., & Watts, C. S. (2009). Group membership, group identity, and group consciousness: Measures of racial identity in American politics? *Annual Review of Political Science, 12(*1), 471-485.

McClurg, S. D. (2003). Social networks and political participation: The role of social interaction in explaining political participation. *Political Research Quarterly, 56(*4), 449-464.

Miller, J. M. (2020). Political disaffection: Causes and consequences. *Political Psychology, 41*(2), 295-314.

Neundorf, A., Niemi, R. G., & Smets, K. (2016). The compensation effect of civic education on political engagement: How civic education fosters voter turnout among immigrants. *Political Research Quarterly, 69*(3), 612-626.

Newton, K. (2006). Political support: Social capital, civil society, and political and economic performance. *Political Studies, 54*(4), 846-864.

Nickerson, D. W. (2008). Is voting contagious? Evidence from two field experiments. *American Political Science Review, 102*(1), 49-57.

Nie, N. H., Junn, J., & Stehlik-Barry, K. (1996). *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America*. University of Chicago Press.

Niemi, R. G., Craig, S. C., & Mattei, F. (1991). Measuring internal political efficacy in the 1988 National Election Study. *American Political Science Review, 85(*4), 1407-1413.

Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited.* Cambridge University Press.

Paxton, P., Kunovich, S., & Hughes, M. M. (2007). Gender in politics. *Annual Review of Sociology, 33*, 263-284.

Persson, M. (2015). Education and political participation. *British Journal of Political Science, 45(*3), 689-703.

Prior, M. (2018). Civic knowledge and the social media age. *Annual Review of Political Science, 21*, 23-39.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster.

Rubenson, D., Blais, A., Fournier, P., Gidengil, E., & Nevitte, N. (2004). Accounting for the age gap in turnout. *Acta Politica, 39*(4), 407-421.

Schlozman, K. L., Verba, S., & Brady, H. E. (2012). *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy*. Princeton University Press.

Sinclair, B. (2012). *The Social Citizen: Peer Networks and Political Behavior*. University of Chicago Press.

Skocpol, T., & Fiorina, M. P. (1999). *Civic Engagement in American Democracy.* Brookings Institution Press.

Sloam, J. (2016). Diversity and voice: The political participation of young people in the European Union. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 18*(3), 521-537.

Smets, K., & van Ham, C. (2013). The embarrassment of riches? A meta-analysis of individual-level research on voter turnout. *Electoral Studies, 32*(2), 344-359.

Solt, F. (2008). Economic inequality and democratic political engagement. *American Journal of Political Science, 52*(1), 48-60.

Sunstein, C. R. (2001). *Republic.com.* Princeton University Press.

Sunstein, C. R. (2018). *Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media.* Princeton University Press.

Theocharis, Y., & Van Deth, J. W. (2018). *Political participation in a changing world: Conceptual and empirical challenges in the study of citizen engagement*. Routledge.

Theocharis, Y., & Van Deth, J. W. (2018). The continuous expansion of citizen participation: A new taxonomy. *European Political Science Review, 10(*1), 139-163.

Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Yale University Press.

Uslaner, E. M. (2018). *The moral foundations of trust.* Cambridge University Press.

Vecchione, M., Caprara, G. V., Dentale, F., & Schwartz, S. H. (2014). The role of personal values and basic traits in the engagement in politics. *European Journal of Personality, 28*(3), 225-235.

Vecchione, M., Caprara, G. V., Dentale, F., & Schwartz, S. H. (2015). The role of personal values and basic traits in the engagement in politics. *European Journal of Personality, 29*(4), 484-495.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (2015). *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics.* Harvard University Press.

Zmerli, S., & Hooghe, M. (2017). Political trust as a social capital concept: An empirical investigation into the relationship between political trust and civic engagement. *European Journal of Political Research, 56*(3), 546-558.