



THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL POLITICIANS' COMPETENCY AFFECTING THE PERFORMANCE EFFICIENCY OF LOCAL POLITICIANS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

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Abstract

This research aimed to study public perceptions of the competency of local politicians in southern Thailand, assess opinions on their performance efficiency, examine the relationship between perceived competency and satisfaction with performance outcomes, and propose approaches for competency development among local politicians. This study employed a quantitative research method, using a structured questionnaire divided into three parts: general demographic data, perception of political competency, and performance evaluation. Data were collected from 400 respondents residing in the southern region. **The findings revealed that** the perceived competency of local politicians was at a moderate level overall. Leadership was rated highest, while transparency and ethics received the lowest scores. The perceived performance efficiency of local politicians was also at a moderate level, with responsiveness to public issues and budget management scoring the highest, whereas overall satisfaction with





performance received the lowest score. A comparison of mean values indicated a positive trend: respondents who perceived high political competency also tended to rate performance more positively than others. Although the differences were not substantial, the trend suggested a positive association between perceived competency and satisfaction with political performance. The study recommends enhancing leadership qualities, developing communication skills, promoting transparency, and strengthening collaboration with community stakeholders to improve the quality of local politicians in line with public expectations in the southern region.

Keywords: Local politicians; Competency; Performance efficiency; Local governance

Introduction

Local administration is a key mechanism for the development and improvement of people's quality of life at the community level, particularly within the context of decentralization that emphasizes public participation in decision-making, policy formulation, and monitoring of government operations at the local level. Local politicians therefore play a critical role as leaders and representatives of the people in terms of administration, development, and collaboration with various agencies (Winai, 2023).

The development of local politicians' competency is therefore essential, especially in complex societies characterized by cultural diversity and ongoing administrative challenges, such as in the southern region of Thailand. This area faces significant issues in terms of economy, social stability, security, and disparities in development (Phra Sakonwat, 2023). The ability of local politicians to analyze situations, formulate responsive policies, and effectively manage cooperation with local stakeholders is crucial to driving sustainable local development. According to the study by Patayut (2020), local politicians who possess strong leadership, integrity, transparency, and the ability to work as a team are more likely to earn the trust of the public and encourage genuine civic participation in local development. Conversely, a lack of competency in administration and collaboration can result in policy failure and a loss of public confidence.





Moreover, citizen participation and engagement of stakeholders in local development processes can only be realized when political leaders possess not only administrative and communication skills but also the ability to motivate and inspire. In societies with cultural and ideological diversity, open governance and collaborative approaches become essential qualities of effective and credible local politicians (Wat Mahasawat, 2023). Nevertheless, in practice, there are still limitations regarding the knowledge, understanding, and necessary skills required for local political roles—particularly in working effectively with government agencies and the public. There is also a lack of continuous and context-specific competency development programs. Additionally, existing research remains limited in examining the relationship between the competency of local politicians and the efficiency of their work in the specific context of southern Thailand.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the public's perception of the competency of local politicians in the southern region, assess public opinions regarding their performance efficiency, and examine the relationship between perceived competency and satisfaction with performance outcomes. It also seeks to propose recommendations for the development of local politicians' competency to ensure quality leadership that truly responds to the needs of local communities.

Research Objectives

1. To study public perceptions of the competency of local politicians in southern Thailand.
2. To assess public opinions regarding the performance efficiency of local politicians in southern Thailand.
3. To examine the relationship between perceived competency of local politicians and the level of public satisfaction with their performance.
4. To propose recommendations for developing the competency of local politicians in southern Thailand.





Research Methodology

Research Design: This study employed a quantitative research approach using survey methodology. Data were collected from a sample group through relevant documents and related research to analyze and synthesize the development of personnel potential in Subdistrict Administrative Organizations (SAOs) and its impact on citizen satisfaction with service delivery in the eastern region.

Population and Sample: The population in this study consisted of individuals aged 18 years and above residing in southern Thailand, totaling 9,442,142 people (Department of Provincial Administration, 2023). The sample was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure coverage and representation across regions. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula (Yamane, 1973), with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 0.05, resulting in a total of 400 respondents.

Research Instruments: The main research instrument was a questionnaire, which was divided into three parts:

Part 1: General demographic information – including four items: gender, age, educational level, and occupation.

Part 2: Public perception of local politicians' competency – assessed across six dimensions: knowledge and understanding of roles and responsibilities, leadership, transparency and ethics, communication and accessibility, collaboration with agencies and communities, and problem-solving and development planning.

Part 3: Performance efficiency of local politicians – assessed across five dimensions: responsiveness to issues and public needs, project and policy implementation, budget and resource management, public participation, and overall satisfaction with performance.

Parts 2 and 3 used a 5-point Likert scale with the following rating criteria:

Most satisfied = 5

Very satisfied = 4

Neutral = 3

Needs improvement = 2





Not satisfied at all = 1

Data Interpretation: For this study, the interpretation of questionnaire results was based on mean scores. The classification of score intervals followed the approach of Best (1977), with each class interval set at 0.8. The interpretation levels were as follows:

Mean score of 4.21 – 5.00 = Very High

Mean score of 3.41 – 4.20 = High

Mean score of 2.61 – 3.40 = Moderate

Mean score of 1.81 – 2.60 = Low

Mean score of 1.00 – 1.80 = Very Low

Statistical analysis: General Information: The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution and percentage.

Results

General Information of the Respondents

From the total of 400 completed questionnaires, it was found that the respondents represented diverse demographic characteristics based on four key variables: gender, age, education level, and occupation. The results can be summarized as follows:

Gender: The majority of respondents were female, totaling 240 individuals or 60.0%, while male respondents numbered 160, accounting for 40.0%. This indicates a significantly higher proportion of female participants in the sample.

Age: Most respondents were aged between 26–35 years, with 120 people or 30.0%. The next largest group was aged 36–45 years, comprising 105 people or 26.2%, followed by those aged 46–55 years at 85 people or 21.2%. Respondents aged 18–25 years and those 56 years and older were equal in number, at 45 people each, or 11.2%. These results show that the majority of





respondents were working-age adults who are active in the community and have experience related to local political activities.

Education Level: Most respondents held a bachelor's degree, totaling 130 people or 32.5%. This was followed by 95 individuals (23.8%) with a high school diploma or equivalent, and 70 individuals (17.5%) with a vocational certificate (Por Wor Chor/Por Wor Sor). Respondents with education beyond the bachelor’s degree numbered 65 (16.2%), and those with education below high school level accounted for 40 individuals (10.0%). This suggests that most respondents had a medium to high level of education, which likely contributes to a greater understanding of political and local administrative issues.

Occupation: The majority of respondents were private company employees, totaling 125 individuals or 31.2%. This was followed by 90 individuals (22.5%) who were entrepreneurs or self-employed, and 80 individuals (20.0%) who were farmers. Government officials or state enterprise employees accounted for 60 people or 15.0%, while 45 respondents (11.2%) indicated other occupations.

Table 1: Summary of General Information of the Respondents

Variable	Number (Persons)	Percentage (%)
1. Gender		
Male	160	40.0
Female	240	60.0
2. Age (years)		
18 - 25	45	11.2
26 - 35	120	30.0
36 - 45	105	26.2
46 - 55	85	21.2
56+	45	11.2
3. Education Level		
Below high school	40	10.0
High school or equivalent	95	23.8
Vocational certificate / Diploma	70	17.5
Bachelor’s degree	130	32.5



Above bachelor's degree	65	16.2
4. Occupation		
Farmer	80	20.0
Private company employee	125	31.2
Government officer / State enterprise employee	60	15.0
Trader / Business owner	90	22.5
Others	45	11.2

Public Perception of the Competency of Local Politicians in Southern Thailand

Table 2: presents a summary of the public's perception of the competency of local politicians in southern Thailand across various dimensions.

Item	Mean±SD	Interpretation
Knowledge and Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities	2.89±0.11	Moderate
Leadership	2.99±0.19	Moderate
Transparency and Ethics	2.73±0.09	Moderate
Communication and Public Accessibility	2.82±0.08	Moderate
Collaboration with Agencies or Communities	2.77±0.03	Moderate
Problem-Solving and Development Planning	2.77±0.03	Moderate
Overall	2.83±0.14	Moderate

According to the assessment of public perception regarding the competency of local politicians in southern Thailand, the overall mean score across all dimensions was 2.83, with a standard deviation of 0.14, indicating that the public generally perceives local politicians' competency at a moderate level.





This suggests that the population has not yet recognized or acknowledged local politicians as having particularly high competency. While the scores varied slightly across individual dimensions, the overall result still reflects a mid-range level of perception.

When examining individual dimensions, the highest average score was found in the leadership dimension, with a mean of 2.99 and a standard deviation of 0.19, showing that citizens view local politicians as having a reasonable level of leadership, decision-making, and coordination ability. The second-highest score was in knowledge and understanding of roles and responsibilities, with a mean of 2.89, also at a moderate level.

The lowest average score was in the dimension of transparency and ethics, with a mean of 2.73 and a standard deviation of 0.09. Although still classified as moderate, this indicates public concern or a lack of confidence in the ethical standards, transparency, and accountability of local politicians. The communication and accessibility dimension received a mean score of 2.82, while both collaboration with agencies or communities and problem-solving and development planning shared an equal mean score of 2.77, with a notably low standard deviation of 0.03, suggesting consistent responses among participants in these aspects.

Performance Efficiency of Local Politicians in Southern Thailand

Table 3: presents a summary of the performance efficiency levels of local politicians in southern Thailand, categorized by individual dimensions.

Item	Mean±SD	Interpretation
Responsiveness to Public Issues and Needs	2.83±0.04	Moderate
Project and Policy Implementation	2.80±0.08	Moderate
Budget and Resource Management	2.83±0.09	Moderate
Public Participation	2.82±0.08	Moderate





Overall Satisfaction with Performance	2.79±0.02	Moderate
Overall	2.81±0.07	Moderate

Based on the assessment of public opinions regarding the performance efficiency of local politicians in southern Thailand, evaluated across five key dimensions—namely responsiveness to public issues and needs, project and policy implementation, budget and resource management, public participation, and overall satisfaction with performance—it was found that the mean scores for each dimension were consistently at a moderate level.

The highest average scores were recorded for responsiveness to public issues and needs and budget and resource management, both with a mean score of 2.83, with standard deviations of 0.04 and 0.09, respectively. Meanwhile, the dimension of project and policy implementation had a mean score of 2.80, and public participation had a mean score of 2.82, both remaining within the moderate range as well.

The Relationship Between Public Perception of Local Politicians’ Competency and Satisfaction with Performance Outcomes

To examine the relationship between public perception of local politicians' competency and the level of satisfaction with performance outcomes in southern Thailand, the researcher conducted a cross-tabulation analysis between groups classified by levels of perceived competency (Table 4) and groups classified by levels of satisfaction (Table 5), in order to explore the descriptive trend of their relationship.

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of Perceived Competency and Satisfaction Levels

Perceived Competency Group	Low Satisfaction	Moderate Satisfaction	High Satisfaction	Total
Low	58	54	37	149





Moderate	48	55	38	141
High	40	38	32	110
Total	146	147	107	400

Table 5: Comparison of Mean Satisfaction Scores by Perceived Competency Group

Perceived Competency Group	Number of Respondents	Mean Satisfaction Score
Low	149	2.75
Moderate	141	2.85
High	110	2.87

From the distribution of responses collected from 400 participants, the following trends were observed:

Among respondents who perceived the competency of local politicians as “low,” the largest portion (58 individuals, or 39% of the low competency group) reported “low” satisfaction. This suggests that when perceived competency is low, satisfaction tends to be rated low as well.

Conversely, among those who perceived politicians' competency as “high,” 32 individuals (or 29% of the high competency group) rated their satisfaction as “high.” Although not the majority, this still indicates a positive directional trend.

Interestingly, for the group with a “moderate” perception of competency, the satisfaction ratings were more evenly distributed across all levels (ranging from 48 to 55 individuals), suggesting that satisfaction may not depend solely on perceived competency and that other factors may influence the outcome.

In addition, when comparing the mean satisfaction scores for each perceived competency group:

The group with low perceived competency had a mean satisfaction score of 2.75.



The moderate group reported a slightly higher mean of 2.85.

The group with high perceived competency had the highest mean satisfaction score of 2.87.

Although the differences in mean scores among the groups are relatively small, the findings still reflect a positive association between perceived competency and public satisfaction to a certain extent.

Discussions

General Information of Respondents

The general information of the respondents revealed that most participants were female, aged between 26 and 45 years, holding a bachelor's degree, and working in the private sector or self-employed. These characteristics indicate that the respondents largely represent the working-age population who actively contribute to local economies and are more likely to be aware of the performance of local politicians. This may be due to their dual roles as both service recipients and community participants involved in local projects and activities.

Public Perception of the Competency of Local Politicians in Southern Thailand

The results showed that public perception of local politicians' competency in southern Thailand was at a moderate level across all dimensions. The highest average score was in the leadership dimension (mean = 2.99), reflecting a level of public confidence in local politicians' ability to lead and manage effectively. Other aspects, such as knowledge and understanding of responsibilities, and communication and accessibility, were also perceived positively at a moderate level.

However, the lowest mean score was observed in the dimension of transparency and ethics (mean = 2.73), suggesting public concerns regarding honesty, accountability, and fairness in local governance. This finding is consistent with national trends indicating challenges in local good governance,





and highlights that citizen place significant value on the internal integrity of leaders beyond just their public image.

Performance Efficiency of Local Politicians in Southern Thailand

The overall performance efficiency of local politicians was also assessed at a moderate level (mean = 2.81). The highest-rated dimensions were responsiveness to public needs and budget/resource management (both mean = 2.83), indicating that in certain areas, local politicians were able to allocate resources effectively and respond to community needs. The lowest score was in overall satisfaction (mean = 2.79), suggesting that while individual areas of performance may be acceptable, broader satisfaction with local political leadership remains cautious.

The relatively low standard deviations across all dimensions imply a high level of consensus among respondents. This could suggest shared experiences regarding the performance of local politicians across various areas, possibly influenced by the standardized bureaucratic structures of local administrative organizations nationwide.

Relationship Between Perceived Competency and Satisfaction with Political Performance

Through cross-tabulation and mean comparison, the study found a positive trend between the perceived competency of local politicians and the public's satisfaction with their performance. Citizens who perceived politicians as having high competency tended to express higher satisfaction levels than other groups.

Although inferential statistics were not used in this phase of the analysis, the results suggest that public perceptions of a politician's leadership, capability, and ethics may influence trust and confidence in their performance. This aligns with the findings of Teeranate (2020), who reported a statistically significant relationship between local leadership qualities, ethical governance, and public satisfaction.

Similarly, Phra Sakolwat Jittapanyo (2023) emphasized that local politicians should develop both ethical integrity and administrative competence





to build long-term public trust. These results also support the conclusions of the UNDP (2019), which highlighted the role of capable local leadership in driving sustainable development at the community level.

However, some studies suggest that even when perceived competency is high, lack of tangible results may limit public satisfaction. This indicates that competency alone is not sufficient—clear communication of achievements and meaningful public participation are equally essential for gaining public trust and satisfaction.

Conclusions

The findings revealed that the public in Southern Thailand perceived the competency of local politicians to be at a moderate level. The highest-rated dimension was leadership, followed by knowledge and understanding of responsibilities, and communication and accessibility. In contrast, the dimension with the lowest score was transparency and ethics, reflecting public concerns regarding integrity, accountability, and the ability to scrutinize political activities.

Regarding performance efficiency, the evaluation also indicated a moderate level. The highest-rated aspects were responsiveness to public problems and budget/resource management, while overall satisfaction received the lowest rating. This suggests that although local politicians may be making efforts in specific areas, the public still perceives a lack of tangible or satisfactory outcomes in line with their expectations.

A comparison of the data indicated that respondents who rated the competency of local politicians as high were also more likely to rate their performance higher. This implies that perceptions of competency—such as leadership ability, role clarity, and effective communication—may influence how citizens evaluate political performance, particularly when accompanied by concrete achievements at the local level.

Therefore, the development of local politicians in Southern Thailand should focus on enhancing visionary leadership, strengthening understanding of





political roles, fostering open and transparent communication, and building public trust, especially in the areas of ethics and governance. Moreover, continuous engagement with governmental agencies and local communities is essential to promote acceptance and long-term confidence, ultimately improving the performance outcomes that meet the expectations of the public.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Development

1. **Fostering Visionary Leadership and Accountability:** Local politicians should be systematically trained to strengthen their leadership capacity. This includes the ability to set clear goals, inspire others, and make decisions based on principles of good governance.

2. **Enhancing Communication Skills and Public Engagement:** Local politicians need effective communication skills, including the ability to disseminate information clearly, listen to public opinions, and create inclusive public spaces for meaningful participation.

3. **Promoting Transparency and Ethical Governance:** A transparent administrative system should be established, including mechanisms for monitoring, auditing, and publishing information about budget usage, projects, and local policies, thereby fostering long-term public trust.

4. **Strengthening Collaboration with Local Networks:** Cooperation with government agencies, civil society organizations, and grassroots communities should be encouraged to deepen understanding of local issues and support sustainable, community-driven problem-solving.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. **Adopt Mixed-Methods Approaches:** Future studies should combine quantitative and qualitative methods—such as in-depth interviews or focus groups—to gain a more comprehensive understanding of contextual and underlying factors in each locality.





2. Regional and Organizational Comparisons: Comparative research between regions or types of local government (e.g., municipalities, subdistrict administrations, or special local entities) would provide insights into how administrative forms influence political capacity and performance.

3. Study Civic Mindset and Political Motivation: Future research should examine internal factors such as ethical values, role perception, and political motivation, and how they influence the performance and behavior of local politicians.

4. Evaluate the Tangible Impacts of Policy and Projects: Beyond perceptual assessments, future studies should track and assess concrete outcomes of political action—such as area development projects and budget expenditures—to better reflect real-world effectiveness.



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