Article

Beyond the ballot: Factors shaping political participation among university students in Bangkok

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Abstract: This study explores the determinants of political participation among Thai youth, focusing on the roles of political interest, knowledge, and efficacy. Employing stratified random sampling, data were collected from 191 university students in Bangkok. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via Smart PLS was utilized to test hypotheses regarding the direct and mediating effects of political interest and knowledge on participation, highlighting the mediating role of political efficacy. The findings indicate that political efficacy significantly enhances participation, while political interest boosts knowledge significantly but does not directly influence efficacy. Furthermore, political knowledge positively affects efficacy but not participation directly. Notably, the indirect effects of political interest on participation through efficacy alone are insignificant, but the pathways from interest to participation through both knowledge and efficacy, and from knowledge to participation through efficacy, are significant. These results elucidate the complex interactions between political interest, knowledge, and efficacy in shaping the political engagement of Thai youth.

Keywords: political efficacy; political interest; political participation; Thailand; youth

1. Introduction

Political engagement among youth is a cornerstone of a thriving democratic society. In Thailand, understanding the factors that drive political participation among young people is crucial for fostering an informed and active citizenry. The topic of "Unlocking Political Engagement: How Interest, Knowledge, and Efficacy Drive Thai Youth Participation" aims to delve into the intricate dynamics that influence political behavior among Thai youth. Previous research has identified political interest, knowledge, and efficacy as pivotal determinants of political participation (Prior, 2010; Verba et al., 1995). Political interest serves as the motivational foundation, encouraging individuals to seek information and engage in political discussions, which subsequently enhances their political knowledge (Wolfsfeld et al., 2016). This knowledge not only empowers them to understand complex political landscapes but also bolsters their sense of political efficacy—the belief in their ability to influence political processes (Reichert, 2016).

Political efficacy, in turn, is a critical mediator that transforms political knowledge and interest into active participation (Jung et al., 2011). High political efficacy positively influences active involvement in public deliberation, with social networks playing a moderating role (Pei et al., 2018). Studies have shown that youth with higher political efficacy are more likely to engage in various forms of political activities, from voting to participating in protests and civic organizations (Levy and

Akiva, 2019; Maurissen, 2018; Pavlopoulos et al., 2020). Despite the established importance of these factors, there is a scarcity of research focusing specifically on the Thai context, where cultural, social, and educational dynamics may uniquely shape political engagement.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining how political interest, knowledge, and efficacy collectively drive political participation among Thai youth. Utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via Smart PLS, this research will analyze data collected from university students in Bangkok, providing insights into the direct and mediating effects of these variables. By unlocking the pathways that lead to increased political engagement, this study seeks to inform strategies for enhancing democratic participation and political education among Thai youth, ultimately contributing to a more vibrant and participatory democratic society in Thailand.

2. Literature review

2.1. Political interest and political participation

Political interest is a fundamental concept in political science, often seen as a critical driver of political behavior and participation. Scholars have provided various perspectives on its definition and significance. Verba et al. (1995) describe political interest as the extent to which individuals pay attention to politics and consider political matters significant in their lives, arguing that it motivates individuals to acquire information and participate in political activities. Prior (2010) views political interest as a stable personal trait reflecting the importance individuals place on politics, which remains consistent over a person's lifetime and significantly influences political knowledge and participation. Hooghe and Marien (2013) see political interest as a cognitive orientation towards politics, encompassing curiosity and attentiveness to political issues, and serving as a mediator linking socio-demographic variables to political engagement. Levy and Akiva (2019) emphasize political interest as a central component of political engagement among adolescents, crucial for fostering future political participation and efficacy. Miller et al. (2022) define it as an individual's predisposition to engage with political matters, influenced by contextual factors like election campaigns and political polarization. Finally, Guo (2022) highlights political interest as the propensity to engage with political content through various media, driving political news consumption and participation in discussions, both online and offline.

Political interest is a significant predictor of political participation. Previous studies have shown that individuals with higher political interest are more likely to engage in political activities. Political interest motivates individuals to seek out information, engage in discussions, and ultimately participate in political processes. Research by Verba et al. (1995) established political interest as a crucial determinant of political participation. They argued that politically interested individuals are more likely to possess the necessary resources, skills, and psychological engagement to participate in political activities. Similarly, Prior (2010) highlighted that political interest fosters a desire to stay informed about political matters, which, in turn, enhances participation rates. Recent studies have continued to support these findings. Miller et al. (2022) explored how variations in political contexts affect political

interest, emphasizing its role in predicting political participation. Levy and Akiva (2019) found that political interest significantly predicts adolescents' expected future political participation, with political efficacy amplifying this effect. Saud (2020) demonstrated that youth with higher political interest and knowledge are more likely to engage in political activities in Pakistan. Moreover, political interest's role in enhancing political participation was further supported by Guo (2022), who found that political interest increases participation through both online and offline communication channels. These findings suggest that fostering political interest is vital for increasing political engagement among youth.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Political interest positively influences political participation among Thai youth.

2.2. Political interest and political efficacy

Political efficacy, defined as the belief in one's ability to influence political processes, is closely linked to political interest. Robison (2017) found that political interest can be stimulated by social rewards, which in turn significantly enhance political efficacy even among individuals with initially low efficacy levels. This suggests that political interest can increase individuals' perceived political competence by encouraging them to engage with political content. Arens and Watermann (2017) conducted a longitudinal study showing that adolescents with higher political interest demonstrated increased political efficacy over time. This indicates that fostering political interest during adolescence can have long-term benefits for political self-perceptions and engagement. Wolak (2018) emphasized that citizens feel more efficacious when they perceive political opportunities and when their concerns are addressed by political institutions. This connection underscores the role of political interest in enhancing feelings of political empowerment and efficacy. Levy and Akiva (2019) further supported this relationship by showing that political interest and efficacy are strong predictors of political participation among adolescents. Their findings suggest that fostering political interest can significantly boost political efficacy, thereby enhancing political engagement. Maurissen (2018) examined the impact of educational strategies on political efficacy, finding that political interest mediates the relationship between civic education and political efficacy. This implies that political interest is a critical factor in developing political efficacy through educational interventions, highlighting its importance in educational settings. Additionally, Šerek et al. (2017) found that participatory experiences boost political interest, which subsequently enhances political efficacy. Their longitudinal data indicated that political participation could reciprocally influence political interest and efficacy, suggesting a dynamic interplay between these factors. Overall, these studies collectively underscore the significant role of political interest in enhancing political efficacy and promoting political engagement.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Political interest positively influences political efficacy among Thai youth.

2.3. Political interest and political knowledge

Political interest is a crucial factor influencing political knowledge, as individuals with higher political interest are more likely to seek out political information and thereby increase their knowledge. Lecheler and Vreese (2017) demonstrated that political interest and knowledge are both predictors and outcomes of news media exposure, with interested individuals more likely to consume political news, thus increasing their knowledge. Weeks et al. (2021) found that incidental online exposure to political news significantly boosts political knowledge, particularly among those with initially low political interest. Keeling (2023) noted that traditional measures of political knowledge often favor topics of interest to men, but when measured inclusively, the gender gap narrows, highlighting the context-dependent nature of political interest and knowledge. Rapeli (2022) supported this by showing that political interest reliably predicts political knowledge in surveys. Hoffman (2019) emphasized that political knowledge should encompass various types of information, with higher political interest leading to broader political knowledge. Burnett and McCubbins (2018) found that political knowledge is similar to other types of knowledge, suggesting that those interested in politics are knowledgeable in other domains as well. These findings underscore the critical role of political interest in fostering political knowledge, as it encourages engagement with political content and drives the acquisition of political knowledge.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Political interest positively influences political knowledge among Thai youth.

2.4. Political knowledge and political efficacy

Political knowledge and political efficacy are closely intertwined, with political knowledge often enhancing individuals' sense of political efficacy. Reichert (2016) demonstrated that political knowledge increases internal political efficacy, which subsequently boosts political participation. Similarly, Arens and Watermann (2017) found that adolescents with higher political knowledge displayed increased political efficacy over time. Wolak (2018) noted that individuals feel more politically efficacious when they are informed about political processes and when their concerns are addressed by political institutions. Reynolds (2022) highlighted that high-impact educational practices that increase political knowledge also boost political efficacy, showing the role of education in fostering political empowerment. Haenschen et al. (2022) found that knowledge of political scandals significantly influences political efficacy, emphasizing the importance of being informed. Farman et al. (2018) introduced the concept of epistemic political efficacy, showing that the belief in one's ability to discover political truths is a strong predictor of political information-seeking behavior. These studies collectively illustrate that political knowledge empowers individuals by enhancing their political efficacy, thereby fostering greater political engagement.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Political knowledge positively influences political efficacy among Thai youth.

2.5. Political knowledge and political participation

Political knowledge plays a significant role in enhancing political participation, as individuals who are more informed about political processes are better equipped to engage in political activities. Grobshäuser and Weisseno (2020) found that political knowledge positively affects adolescents' willingness to participate in politics in the future, indicating that knowledge can inspire future political engagement. Reichert (2016) demonstrated that political knowledge enhances internal political efficacy, which indirectly increases political participation, showing that knowledge can empower individuals to feel capable of making political changes. Wang (2015) observed that political knowledge's impact on participation varies by electoral systems and types of elections, suggesting that different political contexts influence how knowledge translates into action. Wolfsfeld et al. (2016) argued that individuals with richer political information repertoires, combining digital and traditional media, tend to have higher levels of political knowledge, efficacy, and participation, highlighting the importance of diverse information sources. Jo et al. (2017) found that greater political knowledge motivates voter turnout, indicating that informed citizens are more likely to vote. These findings collectively underscore the critical role of political knowledge in fostering active political participation and highlight the importance of educational and informational interventions in promoting democratic engagement.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Political knowledge positively influences political participation among Thai youth.

2.6. Political efficacy as a mediator between political interest and political

Political efficacy plays a crucial mediating role between political interest and political participation, as established by several recent studies. Maurissen (2018) found that political efficacy mediates the relationship between citizenship education and expected political participation among Belgian adolescents, highlighting how educational strategies that enhance political interest also boost political efficacy, thereby increasing participation. Reichert (2016) demonstrated that internal political efficacy translates political knowledge into political participation, indicating that political efficacy serves as a bridge between knowledge and action. Bobkowski and Rosenthal (2021) explored the concept of journalism civic self-efficacy, showing that this form of political efficacy partially mediates the relationship between political interest and future political participation among high school journalism students. Chen et al. (2019) proposed online political efficacy as a mechanism linking social media use to political participation, finding that this form of efficacy significantly mediates the relationship between digital engagement and political participation. Zhu et al. (2018) also supported the mediating role of political efficacy and interest, showing that these factors mediate the effects of civic experiences on adolescents' expected political participation in legal protests across several Asian societies. These findings collectively underscore the importance of political efficacy as a mediator that transforms political interest into active political participation.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Political efficacy mediates the relationship between political interest and political participation among Thai youth.

2.7. Political knowledge and political efficacy as mediator between political interest and political participation

Political knowledge and political efficacy together serve as mediators between political interest and political participation, highlighting the complex interplay of these variables. Maurissen (2018) demonstrated that political efficacy and political interest mediate the relationship between citizenship education and political participation, suggesting that enhanced political knowledge and efficacy from education lead to greater political engagement. Reichert (2016) provided evidence that political knowledge increases internal political efficacy, which subsequently boosts political participation, indicating a pathway from knowledge through efficacy to engagement. Wolfsfeld et al. (2016) found that richer political information repertoires, combining digital and traditional media, are associated with higher political knowledge and efficacy, which in turn increase political participation. Bobkowski and Rosenthal (2021) identified that journalism civic self-efficacy mediates the relationship between political interest and future political participation, emphasizing the role of efficacy in converting interest into action. Zhu et al. (2018) also highlighted that political efficacy and interest mediate the effects of civic experiences on adolescents' expected participation in legal protests, indicating the significant mediating roles of knowledge and efficacy in fostering political action. These studies collectively illustrate how political knowledge and efficacy transform political interest into active participation, emphasizing the importance of both knowledge acquisition and efficacy development in encouraging political engagement.

Hypothesis 7 (H7): Political knowledge and political efficacy jointly mediate the relationship between political interest and political participation among Thai youth.

2.8. Political efficacy as a mediator between political knowledge and political participation

Political efficacy serves as a crucial mediator between political knowledge and political participation, highlighting the significant role it plays in translating knowledge into action. Reichert (2016) demonstrated that political knowledge increases internal political efficacy, which subsequently boosts political participation. This pathway from knowledge through efficacy to participation underscores the importance of feeling competent and empowered in the political domain. Similarly, Wolfsfeld et al. (2016) found that individuals with richer political information repertoires have higher levels of political knowledge and efficacy, leading to greater political participation. This study emphasizes the interplay between information, efficacy, and participation in a media-rich environment. Maurissen (2018) also supported this mediating role by showing that political efficacy and interest mediate the relationship between citizenship education and political participation among Belgian adolescents, suggesting that educational interventions can enhance political engagement through increased efficacy. Bobkowski and Rosenthal (2021) identified that journalism civic self-efficacy mediates the relationship between political interest and future political participation among high school students, indicating that specific forms of efficacy can channel interest into active participation. Zhu et al. (2018) further highlighted the mediating role of political efficacy and interest in the context

of civic experiences and expected political participation in legal protests across several Asian societies, reinforcing the critical role of efficacy in fostering political action. These findings collectively illustrate that political efficacy is essential for converting political knowledge into meaningful participation, thereby fostering a more engaged and informed citizenry.

Hypothesis 8 (H8): Political efficacy mediates the relationship between political knowledge and political participation among Thai youth.

2.9. Political knowledge as a mediator between political interest and political participation

Political knowledge serves as an essential mediator between political interest and political participation, illustrating how informed citizens are more likely to engage actively in political processes. Maurissen (2018) found that political efficacy and political knowledge mediate the relationship between citizenship education and political participation among Belgian adolescents, indicating that increased political knowledge resulting from educational strategies can enhance political engagement. Reichert (2016) demonstrated that political knowledge enhances internal political efficacy, which then increases political participation, suggesting a sequential mediation where knowledge boosts efficacy, leading to greater engagement. Wolfsfeld et al. (2016) observed that individuals with richer political information repertoires—combining digital and traditional media—have higher political knowledge and efficacy, translating into greater political participation. Kim et al. (2020) further supported this by integrating political knowledge and bridging social capital within the social cognitive theory framework, showing that political knowledge and efficacy mediate the effects of social media use on political participation. These findings underscore the importance of political knowledge in transforming political interest into active participation, highlighting the need for educational and informational interventions to foster an informed and engaged citizenry.

Hypothesis 9 (H9): Political knowledge mediates the relationship between political interest and political participation among Thai youth.

2.10. Political efficacy as a mediator between political knowledge and political participation

Political efficacy plays a vital role in mediating the relationship between political knowledge and political participation, effectively translating knowledge into actionable political behavior. Reichert (2016) provided evidence that political knowledge enhances internal political efficacy, which in turn significantly increases political participation. This mediation pathway underscores the importance of efficacy in empowering knowledgeable individuals to engage more actively in politics. Similarly, Wolfsfeld et al. (2016) demonstrated that richer political information repertoires, which encompass both digital and traditional media, lead to higher political knowledge and efficacy, thereby fostering greater political participation. Maurissen (2018) highlighted that political efficacy and interest mediate the relationship between citizenship education and political participation among Belgian adolescents, suggesting that educational interventions that increase political

knowledge also boost efficacy and, consequently, participation. Oh and Lim (2017) emphasized the role of political efficacy in linking participation in administrative processes with broader political participation, showing that efficacy is crucial for transforming administrative engagement into political action. These findings collectively illustrate that political efficacy is essential for converting political knowledge into meaningful participation, highlighting the need for strategies that enhance both knowledge and efficacy to promote active civic engagement.

Hypothesis 10 (H10): Political efficacy mediates the relationship between political knowledge and political participation among Thai youth.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Participants

The characteristics of the participants in this study, who were university students in Bangkok, Thailand, provide a comprehensive overview of the demographic composition of the sample. The total number of participants was 191, with a significant gender disparity: 148 males, 34 females, and 9 individuals identifying as LGBTQIA+. The academic standing of the participants varied, with 65 first-year students, 55 second-year students, 20 third-year students, and 51 fourth-year students. A high level of political engagement is evident, as 181 participants reported having participated in the previous general election, compared to only 10 who did not. The average age of the participants was 24.576 years. This demographic snapshot reflects a predominantly male, politically active, and diverse group in terms of both academic level and gender identity, providing a robust foundation for analyzing political interest, knowledge, efficacy, and participation within this cohort.

3.2. Measures

The measures utilized in this study were designed to capture various dimensions of political interest, political knowledge, political efficacy, and political participation among university students in Bangkok, Thailand. Each construct was assessed using a series of statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 indicated strong agreement. These measures were developed specifically for this study to ensure relevance and appropriateness for the target population.

Political interest (PI): This construct was assessed using five items that measured the respondents' engagement with political news, their perceived importance of political participation, interest in political discussions, efforts to research political policies, and sense of responsibility to vote. Example items included, "I regularly follow political news" and "I feel it is important for citizens to participate in politics".

Political knowledge (PK): Political knowledge was measured using five items that evaluated the respondents' understanding of the political system, knowledge of the roles and powers of key political positions, awareness of current political issues, ability to identify key political policies, and understanding of the societal and economic impacts of political decisions. Example items included, "I can explain the

principles of the political system in my country" and "I know and understand the roles and powers of key political positions in the country".

Political efficacy (PE): This construct was measured using five items that assessed the respondents' perceptions of their influence on political processes, belief in the potential for political activities to effect change, perception of politicians' responsiveness, confidence in understanding political issues, and the perceived importance and impact of their vote. Example items included, "I feel that I have influence over the political processes in my country" and "I believe that participating in political activities can bring about change".

Political participation (PP): Political participation was assessed using two sets of five items each, evaluating both attitudinal and behavioral aspects of participation. The first set focused on attitudinal engagement, such as the perceived importance of voting and belief in political involvement's impact. The second set measured actual behaviors, such as attending political rallies, signing petitions, donating to political campaigns, participating in political discussions, and voting or volunteering in elections. Example items included, "I participate in rallies or marches related to political issues" and "I have volunteered or donated money to political parties or candidates".

These measures underwent pilot testing to confirm their clarity and reliability prior to full implementation, yielding high Cronbach's Alpha values for each construct (political interest (PI) = 0.929; political knowledge (PK) = 0.952; political efficacy (PE) = 0.911; political participation (PP) = 0.945). Utilizing a Likert scale allowed for the precise measurement of respondents' attitudes and behaviors, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the relationships between political interest, knowledge, efficacy, and participation. The data obtained provided a solid basis for testing the hypotheses and deriving significant insights into political engagement within the study's population.

3.3. Data collection

Data collection for this research was conducted using a structured questionnaire administered to university students in Bangkok, Thailand. The questionnaire was carefully designed to gather detailed information on political interest, political knowledge, political efficacy, and political participation, utilizing validated measures from previous studies. It included a combination of closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to quantify the respondents' levels of engagement and perceptions across these dimensions. Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire was piloted with a small subset of students to ensure the clarity and reliability of the items. Data collection occurred over two months, employing both online and face-to-face methods to maximize reach and participation rates. The online survey was distributed via university email lists and social media platforms, while face-to-face surveys were conducted in classrooms and common areas to ensure thorough coverage. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses to encourage honest and accurate reporting. The collected data were then compiled and entered into a statistical software program for analysis, with all entries meticulously double-checked for accuracy and completeness. This rigorous data collection process

provided a robust dataset for analyzing the interrelationships among political interest, knowledge, efficacy, and participation.

3.4. Data analysis

The data analysis for this research was performed using Smart PLS 4.0, a tool particularly suitable for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This approach is ideal for exploratory research involving intricate models with numerous constructs. The analysis began with specifying the theoretical model, which included the constructs of political interest, political knowledge, political efficacy, and political participation, each measured using multiple indicators derived from validated survey items. The measurement model's reliability and validity were assessed by examining indicator loadings, composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extracted (AVE). Indicators with loadings above 0.7 were retained, and constructs were considered reliable and valid if they had CR and Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.7 and AVE values over 0.5 (Hair et al., 2016; Nascimento and Macedo, 2016). Next, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships, employing bootstrapping with 5000 resamples to assess the significance of path coefficients. The evaluation included analyzing the direct effects of political interest on political knowledge, efficacy, and participation, along with the mediating roles of knowledge and efficacy. The model's predictive power was determined through R^2 values for endogenous constructs, effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). The results revealed significant pathways and mediating effects, supporting the theoretical framework and providing strong evidence for the hypotheses. This research enhances the understanding of political behavior among university students in Bangkok, Thailand (Hair, Sarstedt et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2017).

3.5. Ethical considerations

This research adhered to stringent ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and respect of all participants. Informed consent was obtained, with participants fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. Data were anonymized and securely stored to maintain confidentiality. The survey was designed to be inclusive and non-invasive, avoiding any discomfort or distress. All data were handled with care, ensuring integrity and unbiased reporting of findings. Additionally, any potential conflicts of interest were transparently disclosed, upholding the highest standards of ethical research practice.

4. Results

4.1. Assessment of the Smart PLS SEM outer model

Evaluating the outer model in Smart PLS Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is crucial for ensuring reliable and valid measurements of constructs (Hair et al., 2017). This evaluation involves several key components: Indicator reliability, with item loadings ideally 0.7 or higher indicating sufficient reliability; Construct reliability, assessed through metrics like Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), where

values above 0.7 signify acceptable internal consistency; Convergent validity, verified by an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.5 or higher, demonstrating that the construct explains a significant portion of the variance in its indicators; Discriminant validity, ensuring constructs are distinct, assessed via the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, with HTMT values ideally below 0.9; Cross loadings, where indicators should load more strongly on their own construct than on others; And collinearity assessment through variance inflation factor (VIF) values, which should not exceed 5 to avoid collinearity issues (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2009; Henseler et al., 2015; Nunnally, 1978). These steps collectively ensure the measurement model's integrity, setting a robust foundation for analyzing the structural relationships within the SEM.

Table 1. Measurement model assessments.

Item	Loadings	VIF	α	C.R.	AVE
Political interest (PI)			0.928	0.930	0.722
PI1	0.902	2.750			
PI2	0.842	3.889			
PI3	0.857	3.965			
PI4	0.857	3.409			
PI5	0.787	2.962			
Political knowledge (PK)			0.952	0.953	0.799
PK1	0.890	4.331			
PK2	0.857	4.391			
PK3	0.875	4.813			
PK4	0.940	3.889			
PK5	0.904	4.305			
Political efficacy (PE)			0.911	0.924	0.676
PE1	0.907	2.746			
PE2	0.681	2.687			
PE3	0.830	2.577			
PE4	0.955	3.977			
PE5	0.702	2.552			
Political participation (PP)			0.943	0.943	0.763
PP1	0.861	5.833			
PP2	0.893	5.219			
PP3	0.853	6.344			
PP4	0.819	8.447			
PP5	0.937	1.818			

Table 1 presents the measurement model assessment, which underscores the reliability and validity of the constructs under examination: political interest (PI), political knowledge (PK), political efficacy (PE), and political participation (PP). The factor loadings for the items range from 0.681 to 0.955, indicating strong and statistically significant associations between the items and their respective constructs.

These high loadings reflect the adequacy of the items in representing their underlying latent variables. The internal consistency of the constructs is further evidenced by Cronbach's alpha values, which are well above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, specifically 0.928 for PI, 0.952 for PK, 0.911 for PE, and 0.943 for PP. These values, alongside the composite reliability (C.R.) values of 0.930, 0.953, 0.924, and 0.943 for PI, PK, PE, and PP, respectively, confirm the constructs' high internal consistency and suggest that the items within each construct consistently measure the same underlying concept. Moreover, the average variance extracted (AVE) values for each construct are 0.722 for PI, 0.799 for PK, 0.676 for PE, and 0.763 for PP, all of which exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50. This indicates that a substantial portion of the variance in the items is accounted for by their respective constructs, thereby supporting the convergent validity of the measurement model. However, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values, particularly for items within the political participation (PP) construct, such as PP1 (VIF = 5.833) and PP4 (VIF = 8.447), suggest potential multicollinearity issues. Multicollinearity may indicate that these items are excessively correlated, which could distort the estimation of the construct's effects and compromise the interpretability of the model. These findings highlight the robustness of the measurement model while also suggesting the need for further refinement, particularly concerning the potential multicollinearity within the PP construct. Addressing these issues may involve re-evaluating or possibly revising some of the items to ensure that the constructs are measured with optimal precision and clarity.

Table 2. Cross loadings.

	PI	PK	PE	PP
PI1	0.902	0.768	0.628	0.556
PI2	0.842	0.712	0.593	0.392
PI3	0.857	0.746	0.576	0.545
PI4	0.857	0.716	0.614	0.574
PI5	0.787	0.652	0.571	0.353
PK1	0.758	0.890	0.675	0.590
PK2	0.737	0.857	0.674	0.528
PK3	0.791	0.875	0.679	0.502
PK4	0.736	0.940	0.741	0.674
PK5	0.766	0.904	0.730	0.552
PE1	0.571	0.703	0.907	0.677
PE2	0.539	0.555	0.681	0.456
PE3	0.532	0.578	0.830	0.676
PE4	0.665	0.751	0.955	0.687
PE5	0.586	0.619	0.702	0.421
PP1	0.463	0.537	0.627	0.861
PP2	0.518	0.587	0.636	0.893
PP3	0.467	0.516	0.628	0.853
PP4	0.457	0.548	0.578	0.819
PP5	0.589	0.598	0.676	0.937

Table 2 presents a matrix of loading values for items (PI1-PI5, PK1-PK5, PE1-PE5, PP1-PP5) associated with four latent constructs (PI, PK, PE, PP) within a structural equation model. Each entry in the table illustrates the correlation between individual items and the constructs, offering crucial insights into the reliability of items and the validity of constructs. Items predominantly exhibit higher loadings on their respective constructs (e.g., PI1 on PI at 0.902 and PK4 on PK at 0.940) than on others, underscoring strong item reliability and proper alignment with the hypothesized constructs (Hair et al., 2019). Furthermore, the relatively lower cross-loadings, such as PI1 on PP at 0.556, bolster the discriminant validity by demonstrating that each construct uniquely captures distinct facets not interchangeable with others (Henseler et al., 2015). This pattern of pronounced internal and modest cross-loadings supports the structural integrity of the constructs within the model, which is essential for conducting substantive theoretical and empirical analysis. Rigorous statistical assessments, as shown in the table, are vital for confirming the psychometric properties of the measures employed, ensuring they precisely reflect the intended theoretical constructs.

Table 3 presents discriminant validity calculations essential for verifying the distinctiveness of latent constructs within a structural equation model. Average variance extracted (AVE) values, displayed along the diagonal, such as 0.822 for the first construct (PE), exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.5, suggesting strong convergent validity and substantial shared variance among the construct's indicators compared to the variance due to measurement error (Hair et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values, like 0.706 between PE and PI, remain below the critical value of 0.85, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity, as constructs are sufficiently distinct from one another (Henseler et al., 2015). These statistical metrics collectively affirm the reliability and validity of the measurement model employed in the research, underpinning the robustness of the constructs within the theoretical framework.

Table 3. Discriminant validity calculations.

|	AVEs Scores				HTMT Scores			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
1-PE	0.822							
2-PI	0.702	0.850			0.706			
3-PK	0.783	0.847	0.894		0.781	0.846		
4-PP	0.721	0.573	0.638	0.874	0.707	0.565	0.634	

Note: Bold values are squared AVE values.

4.2. Evaluation of the Smart PLS SEM structural model

A rigorous examination of the hypothesized relationships within the structural model was conducted using a detailed bootstrapping analysis, a robust statistical technique. This method entails generating random subsamples from the original dataset, a process performed with replacement to thoroughly explore the data's variability. Each subsample is utilized to estimate parameters within a Partial Least Squares (PLS) path model. Repeating this procedure, typically up to 5000 times,

ensures the robustness of the analysis, confirming that the estimates are not mere artifacts of sample-specific anomalies but rather reflective of the underlying data structure. The bootstrapping technique is particularly valuable as it facilitates the derivation of standard errors associated with PLS-Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results. These standard errors are crucial for calculating *t*-values, *p*-values, and confidence intervals, which are essential metrics for statistically assessing the significance of the modeled relationships in PLS-SEM. This rigorous statistical approach provides a solid foundation for making inferences from the model, ensuring that the proposed hypotheses are evaluated with quantitative robustness. The outcomes of the bootstrapping analysis, systematically presented in **Tables 4** and **5** and **Figure 1**, offer both visual and tabular representations of the findings, serving as a cornerstone for the empirical validation of the hypothesized relationships. By leveraging the insights from the bootstrapping analysis, this study advances a statistically grounded examination of the proposed hypotheses, thereby contributing significantly to the understanding of the dynamics explored in the research (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 4. Model fit.

	Saturate model	**Estimated model**
SRMR	0.071	0.071
d_ULS	1.066	1.067
d-G	1.014	1.015
Chi-square	1057.605	1058.040
NFI	0.760	0.760
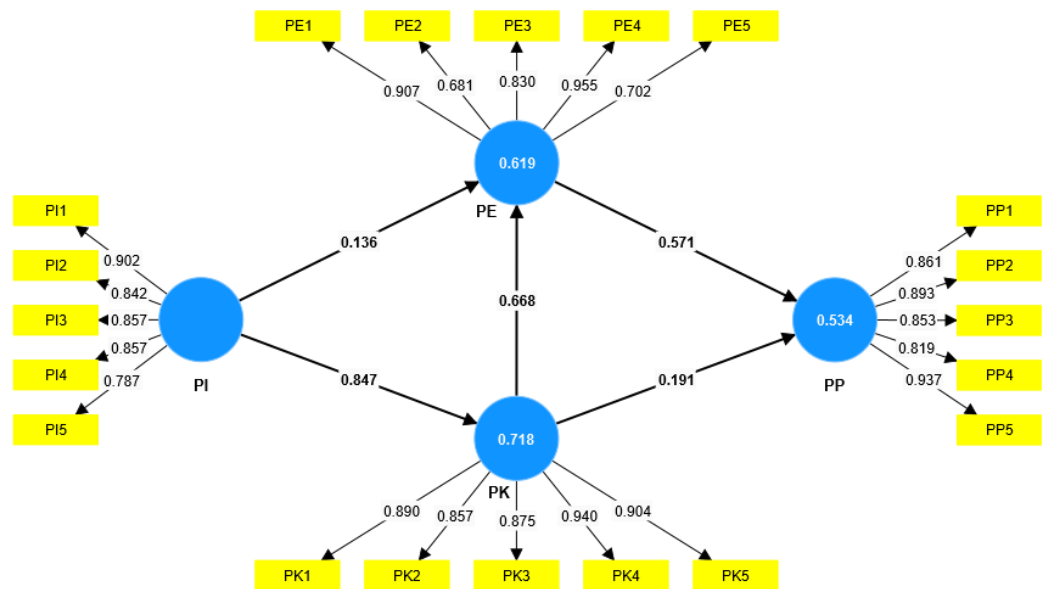
Figure 1. The SEM model.

Table 4 presents the model fit indices for both the saturated and estimated models in a PLS-SEM analysis, showing consistent values across key metrics. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) for both models are 0.071, indicating a good fit as values below 0.08 are considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2021). The discrepancy measures, d_ULS (unweighted least squares discrepancy) and d_G

(geodesic discrepancy), are slightly above 1, suggesting a reasonable fit, with values of 1.066 and 1.067 for d_ULS and 1.014 and 1.015 for d_G, respectively. The chi-square values, 1,057.605 for the saturated model and 1,058.040 for the estimated model, assess the fit between observed and expected covariance matrices, where lower values are better, though large samples often result in significant chi-square values even for well-fitting models (Hair et al., 2021). The normed fit index (NFI) of 0.760 for both models indicate a moderate fit, as values closer to 1 are preferred, with 0.90 being the benchmark for good fit. Collectively, these indices suggest that the models exhibit a reasonably good fit to the data, adhering to established benchmarks for SEM analysis.

Table 5. Relationship between variables and hypothesis testing.

Relationship	β	Standard Deviation	t-Statistics	p-Value	Hypothesis
PI → PP	0.571	0.127	4.488	0.000	Accepted
PI → PE	0.136	0.156	0.873	0.383	Not accepted
PI → PK	0.847	0.036	23.775	0.000	Accepted
PK→ PE	0.668	0.152	4.405	0.000	Accepted
PK→ PP	0.191	0.144	1.323	0.186	Not accepted
PI → PE → PP	0.078	0.093	0.839	0.401	Not accepted
PI → PK → PE → PP	0.323	0.116	2.775	0.006	Accepted
PK → PE → PP	0.381	0.137	2.778	0.005	Accepted
PI → PK → PP	0.162	0.123	1.320	0.187	Not accepted
PK → PE → PP	0.381	0.137	2.778	0.005	Accepted

Table 5 summarizes the hypothesis testing results for the relationships between political efficacy (PE), political interest (PI), political knowledge (PK), and political participation (PP) within the structural model. Political efficacy significantly impacts political participation ($\beta = 0.571$, $t = 4.488$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher political efficacy leads to greater political participation. Political interest significantly enhances political knowledge ($\beta = 0.847$, $t = 23.775$, $p < 0.001$), but does not directly affect political efficacy ($\beta = 0.136$, $t = 0.873$, $p = 0.383$). Political knowledge significantly boosts political efficacy ($\beta = 0.668$, $t = 4.405$, $p < 0.001$) but does not have a direct significant impact on political participation ($\beta = 0.191$, $t = 1.323$, $p = 0.186$). Additionally, the indirect effect of political interest on political participation through political efficacy is not significant ($\beta = 0.078$, $t = 0.839$, $p = 0.401$). However, the pathway from political interest to political participation through political knowledge and political efficacy is significant ($\beta = 0.323$, $t = 2.775$, $p = 0.006$), as is the pathway from political knowledge to political participation through political efficacy ($\beta = 0.381$, $t = 2.778$, $p = 0.005$). These findings underscore the critical mediating role of political efficacy in translating political knowledge into political participation (Hair et al., 2021).

5. Discussion

The current study's findings provide significant insights into the interplay between political interest, political knowledge, political efficacy, and political participation among Thai youth, aligning with existing literature. Political interest significantly enhances political knowledge, consistent with Lecheler and Vreese (2017) and Weeks et al. (2021), who showed that individuals with higher political interest are more likely to seek out political information, thus increasing their knowledge. The significant impact of political knowledge on political efficacy observed in this study supports Reichert (2016) and Arens and Watermann (2017), who demonstrated that political knowledge increases internal political efficacy, which in turn boosts political participation. The study also confirms that higher political efficacy leads to greater political participation, echoing the findings of Wolak (2018) and Maurissen (2018), who emphasized the role of efficacy in enhancing participation. The mediating roles of political efficacy and knowledge align with Maurissen (2018) and Wolfsfeld et al. (2016), who highlighted the importance of these factors in translating educational inputs and rich political information repertoires into political engagement. Additionally, the significant indirect pathways from political interest to political participation through political knowledge and efficacy support Zhu et al. (2018) and Bobkowski and Rosenthal (2021), who demonstrated that these mediating factors are crucial in converting political interest into active participation. In summary, the study underscores the critical roles of political knowledge and efficacy in mediating the effects of political interest on political participation, highlighting the need for comprehensive educational and informational strategies to foster a politically active and informed youth.

6. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the determinants of political participation among Thai youth, focusing on the critical roles of political interest, political knowledge, and political efficacy. The findings reveal that political efficacy significantly enhances political participation, with political interest boosting political knowledge, which in turn increases political efficacy and participation. While political interest does not directly impact political efficacy, its indirect pathways through knowledge and efficacy are significant. However, the study has limitations, including its reliance on a sample of university students in Bangkok, which may not be representative of the broader Thai youth population, and its cross-sectional design, which limits causal inferences. Future research should include more diverse samples and employ longitudinal designs to better capture dynamic interactions. Additionally, incorporating objective measures of political participation and nuanced indicators of knowledge and efficacy would be beneficial. Practical recommendations include designing educational and informational interventions to foster political interest and knowledge, thereby enhancing political efficacy and engagement among youth. These strategies are essential for developing a politically active and informed youth population, ultimately strengthening democratic participation in Thailand.

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