

**2020-2021**

# **YOUTH STUDY**

**THAILAND**

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STIFTUNG**

## ABSTRACT

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The lives of young Thais have changed considerably in recent years as a result of political division and pandemic disruptions. This study's major purpose is to comprehend the perspectives of Thai young adults. The key findings of the study show that young people seem to be increasingly divided. A family's economic background and residence can be significant drivers of demographic divisions. As a result of discrepancies in access to knowledge and opportunity, there are differences in aspirations, confidence, attitudes, behaviours, and political orientation. The findings of the study lend to the notion that many young Thais believe the Thai political system does not work for them. Despite their distrust of political institutions and politicians, respondents remain enthusiastic about voting and continue to believe in the legislative process and political parties.

## IMPRINT

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is the oldest political foundation in Germany. The foundation is named after Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected president of Germany. FES is committed to the advancement of both socio-political and economic development in the spirit of social democracy, through civic education, research, and international cooperation.

This publication is a part of the FES International Youth Studies. FES has conducted numerous Youth Studies around the globe with a focus on Southern and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Middle East and Northern Africa. The Youth Study Thailand is the first study conducted in the Asia-Pacific Region. The International Youth Studies are a flagship project of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in its endeavour to research, shape and strengthen the democracy of the future. It strives to contribute to the discourse on how young generations see the development of their societies as well as their personal future in a time of national and global transformation. The representative studies combine qualitative and quantitative elements of research in close partnership with the regional teams aiming a high standard in research and a sensitive handling of juvenile attitudes and expectations.

A dedicated Advisory Board (Thailand: Daniela Lamby, University of Mainz) supports the methodological and conceptual design of the Youth Studies. The Board consists of permanent and associated members and provides essential expertise for the overall project.

## About this study

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The data for this publication were gathered by face-to-face individual questionnaires administered to 1463 young individuals aged 14 to 35 in December 2020. The study's findings have laid the groundwork for understanding how young people articulate individual resources and structural opportunities for political engagement, their visions of Thailand and the future of democracy, and, most importantly, how the gap between youth from different localities, family wealth, and levels of education can be addressed and, if possible, bridged.

## About the Authors

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# FOREWORD

In addition to voting, surveys are another reliable way to monitor popular sentiment. The voices of young Thais, particularly those from outside of Bangkok and in remote locations, are too frequently lacking in public opinion surveys due to expense and interest. The lack of voices from among these constituencies sends a message that we don't value their role as active young citizen and members of our community.

This youth survey research is a nationally representative survey of 1,463 young people aged 14 to 35 from all throughout Thailand. The aim is to provide current data on what young Thai are thinking, feeling, and hoping, for the benefit of political actors, NGOs, decision, and policy makers. They are speaking to us through this survey, to those who must listen to them and address their very real worries and goals.

According to the survey, the majority of young people are actively interested in education, confident in their capacity to succeed in their academic and career endeavors and participate in a variety of activities. A lot of young individuals have hope for the future and their own life.

The findings also demonstrate that young people are facing a plethora of challenges and numerous obstacles. It is crucial that they have access to platforms and opportunities that will allow them to voice their opinions and influence public discourse. They may resort to informal tactics like youth protests because they seem unable to have their opinions heard through formal channels.

This survey was planned and commissioned by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Thailand. Ms. Vesna Rodić has provided significant conceptual assistance, while Prof Daniela Lamby, University of Mainz and member of the Advisory Board for the FES youth studies, and Alexey Yusupov, youth studies coordinator at the FES Headquarters in Germany, have provided helpful expertise and comments. Isabelle Urumath and Karen Emmons did a fantastic job with the final report's editing and graphic arrangement.

I want to extend a special thank you to the team of dedicated and effective interviewers that made this youth survey a success. Last but not least, I'd want to express my gratitude to all the young people who took part in the youth survey and made your opinions heard.

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**2020-2021**

# **YOUTH STUDY THAILAND**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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The 2020–2021 youth survey, Thai Youths: Perspectives and Hopes, was designed to inform all socioeconomic sectors, bureaucratic agencies, political organizations and the public at large that are interested in young people’s outlook. This report collates the results and conclusions of the survey with 1,463 young people aged 14–35. The youth in this study were born between 1987 and 2008 and thus represent a combination of Generation Y and Generation Z.

The attitudes and opinions of young people will shape Thailand for the next few decades. Therefore, this study looked at how youth in Thailand spend their leisure time and then examined their assessment of their personal prospects and the country’s future, the education system and the job market. It explored their readiness and willingness to participate in political activities. And it analysed their political orientation and outlook.

What emerged from the wide-ranging survey is cause for optimism as well as concern. It is apparent that young Thais’ expectations, values and beliefs on certain social norms and political values are changing from those of previous young generations due to the influence of globalization, social media and the recent global pandemic. The overwhelming finding of this study is that young people are increasingly sharply divided. The largest obvious divide is the significance between those who have and those who do not have, which is strongly linked to the socioeconomic context and family finances. Family’s economic background and place of residence can be the primary factors contributing to demographic

division. The root of this difference in access to knowledge and opportunity has led to disparate aspirations, confidence, attitudes, behaviours and political orientation.

Nearly one fifth of the young people surveyed said they have no books of their own. The greatest number of owned books are primarily textbooks. The digitalization of Thai youth is apparent, with most respondents having internet access nearly all the time. The most popular social networks, in order, are Facebook, Line, Instagram and then Twitter.

The study's findings confirm a presumption that many young people feel that the Thai political system is not working for them. The high-income stratum is too comfortable to actively engage in political activities. It is the middle-ranged income and the fragile lowest spectrum who have been most engaged in pushing for change.

The survey results indicate that many young people harbour deep-seated cynicism towards politicians and tend not to trust political institutions, especially the prime minister, the coalition government and the Senate. Despite the low level of trust in political institutions and politicians, the respondents expressed high enthusiasm towards voting and still hold faith in the parliamentary process and political parties. They perceive voting as the most effective form of participation. Remarkably, the young respondents cited their interest in supporting democracy as a political system.

The following summarizes the findings discussed throughout the report.

## FINDINGS

1. Most of the young respondents have internet access nearly all the time or almost every day, while 0.8% of them do not have any access to the internet.
2. The young respondents perceive the prospects for the country as stagnant, while they hold a more optimistic expectation of their personal future. The level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction that respondents felt with Thai politics was obviously affected by their family's financial situation. The poorest respondents tended to report lower levels of satisfaction than respondents in better and most favourable financial conditions.
3. There is much more of a positive outlook for personal future among young people in Bangkok and vicinity than in the urban and the rural areas, and the lowest level of optimism was reported in the central region.
4. The two things the Thai youth respondents fear the most or are most concerned about are increasing poverty in society and having no opportunity to make progress in their life.
5. Around 10% of the young respondents have a "very strong" desire to move to another country for more than one year. Improvement in their living standard, finding a higher salary and better employment possibilities are the primary reasons.
6. Nearly half of the young respondents are interested in Thai political affairs.
7. About 10% of the respondents have political views and beliefs that do not align with their parents' views.
8. More poor than affluent respondents, more urban than rural respondents and more male than female respondents have disparities in political views in the family.
9. As much as 85% of the young respondents will vote in the next parliamentary

- general elections if eligible.
10. More young people from middle-income and lowest-income households were politically engaged in the youth movements of 2020–2021 than those from the well-to-do families.
  11. Respondents have an overwhelmingly negative assessment of all political and public institutions. Fewer than half of the respondents acknowledge “full trust” in the country’s political institutions.
  12. As much as 70% of the young respondents associate themselves with democratic viewpoints.
  13. Most of the young respondents think their voices are not represented enough at the political level.
  14. The young generation puts more faith in political parties but not in the hands of a strong leader.
  15. The young people favour non-violent conflict resolution but are afraid and anticipate that conflicts and violence are highly possible and might not be avoidable.
  16. The young people characterized eight democratic core principles—freedom, security, equality, employment, economic welfare, human rights, rule of law and democracy—as not well preserved nor valued in Thailand.

Bridging the divide between young people and the political elites requires a new approach that recognizes young people’s legitimate concerns about formal institutions and the diverse ways in which young generations want to organize politically. Additionally, it is necessary for political figures and organizations to be aware of young people’s concerns. An entry point for meaningful collaboration between young people and political institutions should be provided.

A more complex and disturbing picture from the survey findings is that inequalities endure among young people and, in certain respects, have worsened. The social hierarchy of young people means that a large and essentially invisible cluster of them are socially excluded, struggling on their own to survive on scarce resources.

To lessen the gap of the youth divide, a basic recommendation from the survey analysis is to go beyond the usual investment in education and training for the impoverished cluster of young persons and encourage Thai society to be open-minded and acknowledge young people’s ideas for solutions. The policies that are based on obsolete and false suppositions about youth should be revised to target the real needs of those who risk being neglected.

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**1**

# **INTRODUCTION**

In this study, representatives of Generations Y and Z are referred to as young people, aged 14–35 years and thus born between 1987 and 2008 across Thailand. They participated in a youth survey questionnaire (that included an interview) in December 2020.

As of January 2021, these young people numbered around 19,697,476,<sup>1</sup> accounting for 29.6% of the population. In the coming decades, the number of young people might not increase considerably if the national fertility rate continues to decline. The proportion of young people began declining 30 years ago. Thailand experienced this transition, with the fertility rate currently at about 1.5 births per woman, which is about 30% under the population replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman.

Population momentum is continuing to grow, although the population is expected to decline after 2028.<sup>2</sup> The change in the age structure and the ageing of the population has important labour market implications. The ratio of workers in employment to those in retirement has been declining. In 2020, there were 3.6 workers per one older person, and it is projected that in 2040, there will only be 1.8 workers in the labour market per one older person. In this scenario, the old-age dependency ratio in 2040 is expected to be 56.2 per 100 workers.

The young Thais who will shape the next few decades are confronting major burdens. Problems such as the ageing society, technological disruption, the generation divide and environmental deterioration will fall to them for solutions that older generations have been unable to resolve. At a time when inequality is growing, even before being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, young people remain disproportionately affected by socioeconomic instability and confronted with countless challenges, such as broken families, mental health difficulties, limited access to (online) education, limited employment opportunities and an insecure political landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> National Statistical Office, "Population Registration Statistics, 'Population by Age' (2021). Available at <https://stat.bora.dopa.go.th/stat/statnew/statMONTH/statmonth/#/displayData>.

<sup>2</sup> Thailand Population, World Population Review (2021). Available at <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/thailand-population>.

The 2020–2021 political events showed that young Thais took the leading role in political demonstrations. They expressed frustration with political leaders and institutions that they deemed to be suppressive, exploitive, incompetent, unresponsive, corrupt and unreachable. We have witnessed the rise of creative and non-traditional forms of collective, public and political engagement. It is indisputable that the voices of the young Thais are on the rise and amplified by social media. They are formidable actors who are bringing forth change and accelerating the participation process. The profiles of the youth movements' protestors and activists have been widely explored elsewhere to capture their expectations, preferences and actual experiences. Although there is agreement that the forms, repertoires and patterns of young people's behaviour and social engagement are changing and expanding, their beliefs, expectations, hopes, pains and despair remain complex stories to tell.

The vision of young people based on grown-up touchstones, modelled on the type of conventional relationship forged by previous generations, discounts the youth today as equal citizens. It has almost become a cliché among the conventional media and conservative influencers that the ideas of young people's social and political expression and the youth movements across the country are under greater attack than at any other time. While advocates for young people's participation recognize youth as a force for social and political change, they run the risk of exaggerating the outstanding and vibrant characteristics of young people while neglecting the more complex and troubled individuals.

This study was designed to delve into youth characteristics, with an exploratory and critical perspective to turn the spotlight on young people nationwide and to capture their diverse features and perceptions, such as residential area, family's well-being, the books they own or read, their vision of the future, career aspirations, social disposition, political values and political engagement. One of the major thrusts was to explore the divisions within the young generations. To combat exclusion and avoid overstretched interpretations and generalizations, it is necessary to explore generational gaps, which is a difference of opinions between one generation and another regarding beliefs, politics or values. It is

also necessary to inspect any wrenching divergence among the youth, between rural and urban youths, for instance, or between the haves and the have-nots and between well-educated and undereducated youths. All these disparities have been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study aimed to include young people who are outside the emerging contexts of social engagement and typically excluded from research or public notice. The findings have allowed us to identify areas of vulnerability and strength among the Thai youth and to see a clearer picture of the environment in which young Thais are living and growing up. The information from the study has provided a foundation for understanding how young people articulate individual resources and structural opportunities regarding their political engagement, their visions about Thailand and the future of democracy and essentially how the gap among youth from different localities, family wealth and levels of education could be addressed and, if possible, bridged.

## Methodology

The quantitative component for this study was conducted in December 2020 through a national survey (and interviews) with 1,463 respondents aged 14–35 years. The study chose a range of districts and provinces that would give a geographic spread and diverse coverage of political orientations. A detailed description of the quantitative part of the study is presented in the following section.

## National representative sample

To select a national representative sample, this study employed a three-step sampling method: The first step was selection of sampling points. The second step was selection of houses and families. And the third step was selection of interviewed young persons.

## First step – Selection of sampling provinces and districts

We selected the sample based on regions and urban–rural division, with an aim that the sampled population would proportionally represent voter orientation of the 2019 general election results. In that election, nine political parties won at least one constituency seat: Pheu Thai (136 seats), Palang Pracharath (97 seats), Future Forward (31 seats), Bhumjaithai (39 seats), Democrat (33 seats), Chart Thai Pattana (6 seats), Prachachat (6 seats), Action Coalition for Thailand (1 seat) and Chart Pattana (1 seat). Thus, we selected districts in each province to diversify the sample and to roughly resonate with the voter preferences and alignments. For this study, 28 districts were randomly picked in 13 selected provinces (with at least two tambons, or subdistricts, also randomly selected within each district). A total of 50 interviews were to be conducted per district. To account for any potential incorrect questionnaires, a larger number of survey interviews were conducted, resulting in a total of 1,463 that were deemed valid for analysis. Table 1 lists the names of the provinces and districts chosen and the voter orientation according to the 2019 general election results in those districts.

**Table 1.** Selected provinces and districts and their voter orientation

Region	Province and district	District's voter orientation
<b>Bangkok and vicinity</b>	1a. Din Daeng District	Pheu Thai
	1b. Bangna and Phra Khanong Districts	Future Forward
	1c. Lat Phrao and Bang Kapi Districts	Palang Pracharath
	1d. Saimai District	Pheu Thai

<b>Central</b>	2a. Rayong Province, Mueang Rayong District	Democrat
	2b. Rayong Province, Ban Chang District	Palang Pracharath
	3a. Lopburi Province, Mueang Lopburi and Phatthana Nikhom Districts	Pheu Thai
	3b. Lopburi Province, Chai Badan District	Bhumjaithai
	4a. Nakhon Pathom Province, Mueang Nakhon Pathom District	Chart Thai Pattana
	4b. Nakhon Pathom Province, Don Tum District	Future Forward
<b>North</b>	5a. Chiang Mai Province, Mueang Chiang Mai District	Pheu Thai
	5b. Chiang Mai Province, Chom Thong District	Future Forward, then Bhumjaithai
	6a. Phayao Province, Mueang Phayao District	Palang Pracharath
	6b. Phayao Province, Chun District	Pheu Thai
	7a. Sukhothai Province, Mueang Sukhothai District	Palang Pracharath
	7b. Sukhothai Province, Si Satchanalai District	Bhumjaithai
<b>Northeast</b>	8a. Khon Kaen Province, Mueang Khon Kaen District	Future Forward
	8b. Khon Kaen Province, Chonnabot District	Pheu Thai
	9a. Sisaket Province, Mueang Sisaket District	Bhumjaithai
	9b. Sisaket Province, Kantharalak District	Pheu Thai
	10a. Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Mueang Nakhon Ratchasima District	Chart Pattana
	10b. Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Chaloem Phra Kiat District	Palang Pracharath

<b>South</b>	11a. Trang Province, Mueang Trang District	Palang Pracharath
	11b. Trang Province, Kantang District	Democrat
	12a. Yala Province, Mueang Yala District	Palang Pracharath
	12b. Yala Province, Bannang Sata District	Prachachat
	13a. Chumporn Province, Mueang Chumporn District	Democrat
	13b. Chumporn Province, Lang Suan District	Action Coalition for Thailand

### Second step – Selection of houses and families

The 26 interviewers were given a reference point for selection of the sample, which was generally the centre of a neighbourhood, a prominent building, a crossroad, school or public institution. After an interviewer arrived at the reference point, they walked, starting at the beginning of a road, counting the “lived-in” buildings and houses to their right side, stopping at every third one to conduct the survey and interview a youth occupant. The interviewer moved on to the next home if no one between the ages of 14 and 35 resided there.

### Third step – Selection of persons interviewed

Each interviewer was instructed to conduct a face-to-face survey and interview with only one inhabitant of the household aged 14–35 years. If more than one resident met the requirements, the interviewer had to pick one of them to voluntarily complete the questionnaire. If an occupant declined to take part in the interview, the interviewer continued on to the next home and applied the same procedure there.

Interviewers used a smartphone and tablet with the questionnaire programmed into interviewing software. The questionnaire consisted of an oral and a written part with open-ended questions. The oral part was administered by the interviewer, who read aloud the questions and filled in (on a tablet) each respondent’s answers. (For certain questions, interviewers were

instructed to use showcards to make it easier for respondents to choose among the answers provided. The average length of the interview was 32 minutes. Mathematical and statistical processing of survey data was performed using the SPSS package.

### Methodological rationale

The 28 districts in 13 provinces were chosen because they represented a good geographic spread across the country. A sample size of 1,400 respondents was the initial target for fieldwork because it provided a robust base from which to conduct analysis. The margin of error on a 1,400-sample size is +/- 3%, at a 95% confidence level, which means that if the survey were to be conducted 100 times again, 95 times out of 100 it is expected that the results would alter by a maximum of +/-3%.

## Structure of the report

Young Thai people’s lives have changed in dramatic ways in recent years, resulting from both political polarization and pandemic disruptions. To understand important transformations in the social structures and processes shaping these young lives, the report (and survey findings) is organized in eight sections, with a concluding chapter to summarize the analysis:

1. Demographic profile of respondents: Providing a demographic and socioeconomic profile of the

young people interviewed for this study by age, regional residence, area of residence, gender, level of education and family's financial status.

2. Media access: Exploring the salient changes in access to the media for information from a shifting mix of sources to look at internet accessibility and mass media exposure and thus to understand ways of reading and social assimilation.
3. Outlook and expectation: Evaluating respondents' sense of complacency with their life; their overall happiness and well-being, their fears and anxieties and the life ambitions they hold for their future selves; expectation about their personal future and future of Thailand.
4. Mobility: Looking at the extent of social mobility that young people anticipate and reasons for migrating.
5. Education: Asking whether young Thais are satisfied or dissatisfied with the Thai education system, what education means to them and how to improve it.
6. Employment: Examining the factors that young people consider important when choosing a job.
7. Youth and politics (interest, information and engagement): Examining how much young people are interested in political affairs, are political views dividing families, what defines youths' political participation, interest in voting in the next election and how young people obtain their political information to thus offer a useful overview of how young people think and act politically.
8. Political trust and values: Exploring young people's attitudes towards politics, inspecting political values and political trust of young Thai people and what they expect from "the system".

**2**

# **DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**

This research set out to explore the diverse perceptions among young people in Thailand. The 1,463 respondents were selected in a way as to be broadly representative of the demographics of Thailand’s Generations Y and Z, or persons aged 14–35 years.

## Who participated?

**Table 2.** Demographic characteristics of respondents

Socio-demographic criteria	Age groups					Total
	14–17	18–21	22–25	26–29	30–35	
<b>Total</b>	326 (22.3%)	313 (21.4%)	263 (18.0%)	248 (17.0%)	313 (21.4%)	1,463 (100%)
<b>Region</b>						
Bangkok and vicinity	24 (7.4%)	55 (17.6%)	51 (19.4%)	37 (14.9%)	45 (14.4%)	212 (14.5%)
Central	70 (21.5%)	59 (18.8%)	68 (25.9%)	61 (24.6%)	55 (17.6%)	313 (21.4%)
Northern	70 (21.5%)	87 (27.8%)	60 (22.8%)	33 (13.3%)	64 (20.4%)	314 (21.5%)
Northeastern	88 (27.0%)	41 (13.1%)	62 (23.6%)	47 (19.0%)	77 (24.6%)	315 (21.5%)
Southern	24 (7.4%)	55 (17.6%)	51 (19.4%)	37 (14.9%)	45 (14.4%)	212 (14.5%)
<b>Area of residence</b>						
Bangkok and vicinity	24 (7.4%)	55 (17.6%)	51 (19.4%)	37 (14.9%)	45 (14.4%)	212 (14.5%)
Urban	142 (43.6%)	168 (53.7%)	128 (48.7%)	102 (41.1%)	82 (26.2%)	622 (42.5%)
Rural	160 (49.1%)	90 (28.8%)	84 (31.9%)	109 (44.0%)	186 (59.4%)	629 (43.0%)
<b>Sex of the respondent</b>						
Female	162 (49.7%)	146 (46.6%)	148 (56.3%)	135 (54.4%)	167 (53.4%)	758 (51.8%)
Male	158 (48.5%)	163 (52.1%)	108 (41.1%)	108 (43.5%)	142 (45.4%)	679 (46.4%)
Other, prefer not to say	6 (1.8%)	4 (1.3%)	7 (2.7%)	5 (2.0%)	4 (1.3%)	26 (1.8%)

<b>Education</b>						
Secondary school or less	144 (44.2%)	20 (6.4%)	10 (3.8%)	8 (3.2%)	22 (7.0%)	204 (13.9%)
High school or vocational school	179 (54.9%)	126 (40.3%)	56 (21.3%)	56 (22.6%)	81 (25.9%)	498 (34.0%)
Bachelor's degree	3 (0.9%)	167 (53.4%)	192 (73.0%)	170 (68.5%)	180 (57.5%)	712 (48.7%)
Postgraduate degree	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (1.9%)	14 (5.6%)	30 (9.6%)	49 (3.3%)
<b>Occupation</b>						
In school	299 (91.7%)	250 (79.9%)	74 (28.1%)	5 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	628 (42.9%)
Working	7 (2.1%)	25 (8.0%)	144 (54.8%)	224 (90.3%)	304 (97.1%)	704 (48.1%)
In school and working	18 (5.5%)	35 (11.2%)	35 (13.3%)	10 (4.0%)	3 (1.0%)	101 (6.9%)
No longer in school and not working	2 (0.6%)	3 (1.0%)	10 (3.8%)	9 (3.6%)	6 (1.9%)	30 (2.1%)
<b>Family's financial status</b>						
We don't have enough money	31 (9.5%)	38 (12.1%)	29 (11.0%)	26 (10.5%)	45 (14.4%)	169 (11.6%)
We have enough money but never for expensive food and clothes	56 (17.2%)	86 (27.5%)	63 (24.0%)	49 (19.8%)	68 (21.7%)	322 (22.0%)
We have enough money for expensive food and clothes sometimes	169 (51.8%)	130 (41.5%)	132 (50.2%)	120 (48.4%)	136 (43.5%)	687 (47.0%)
We have enough money for everything we need	45 (13.8%)	31 (9.9%)	34 (12.9%)	38 (15.3%)	58 (18.5%)	206 (14.1%)
Don't know	7 (2.1%)	15 (4.8%)	2 (0.8%)	5 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29 (2.0%)
No answer	18 (5.5%)	13 (4.2%)	3 (1.1%)	10 (4.0%)	6 (1.9%)	50 (3.4%)



**3**

# **READING HABITS AND MEDIA USE**

For Generation Y and particularly Generation Z, rapid change has been ceaseless. Many of them do not know what is or cannot remember a cassette tape, a typewriter or a time before the internet or widespread mobile phone ownership. They were born and grew up in a time when the world went online; they were young children or adolescents when Facebook and the iPhone were launched (2004 and 2007, respectively). Childhood experiences with technology have shaped their behaviours today, including reading behaviours. It is assumed that these younger generations learned how to read in ways that are geared towards searching for information and gaining a swift overview of the content. Information that can be quickly attained in this way from the internet is not comparable to the knowledge acquired from reading books.

By reading a variety of books, magazines and newspapers, people gain exposure to complex discussion, learn new ideas, develop a better understanding of the foundational concepts of society and political issues they face today. Despite the importance of reading books for political comprehension, little is known about the pleasure reading habits of today's youth. The goal of this investigation is to examine the volume of books that young people own and the types of subject matter they most have in their possession and enjoy reading. The findings can serve as a reference point for understanding what is reasonable to expect of Thailand's young generations in general.

### Reading and owning books

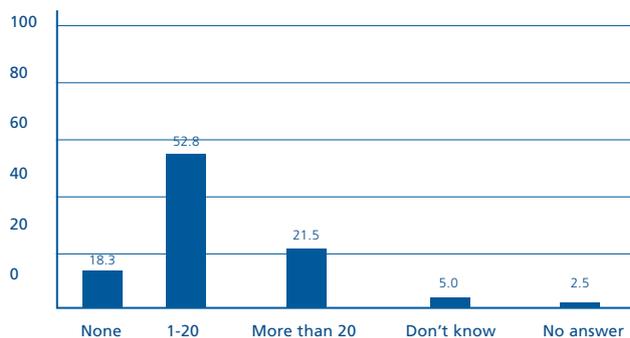
In 2018, the adult literacy rate for Thailand was 93.8%,<sup>1</sup> up from 88% in 1980. The youth literacy rate of 98.1% (among persons aged 15–24) is even more impressive. However, Thais' reading habits are often limited to lecture notes, social media platforms, comics, Pantip forums (a popular Thai-language website and discussion forum) and the sporadic news article. A 2015 study by the Publishers and Booksellers' Association of Thailand found that 88% of the population spent only 28 minutes a day reading and 40% did not read books.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adult literacy rate is the percentage of people aged 15 and older who can read and write with understanding of a short simple statement about their everyday life.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Kelley Evans, Joanna Sikora, and Donald J. Treiman, "Family scholarly culture and educational success: books and schooling in 27 nations", in *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* (2010). DOI: 10.1016/j.rssm.2010.01.002.

To understand the cognitive development of Thai youth and their ability to think critically, we started our study by asking a simple question: How many books do you own?

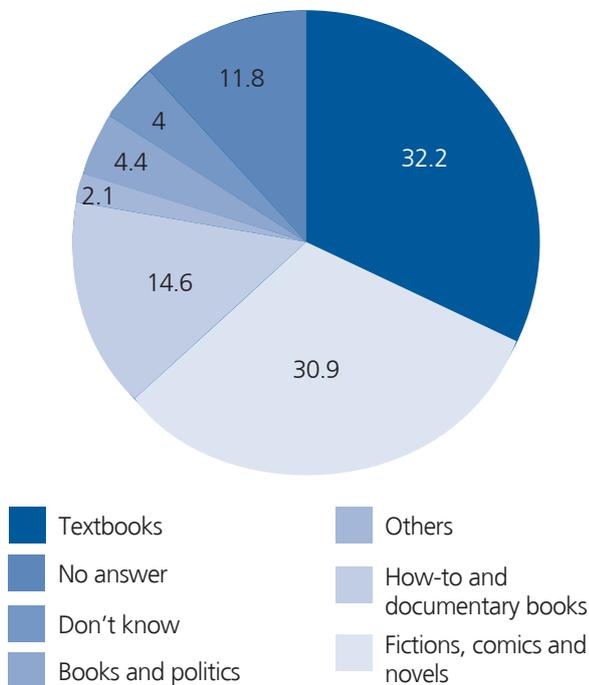
The survey's findings do not decisively confirm a long-established view that in general Thai people and young Thais hardly spend time reading books. Neither do the findings support the claim that there has been more appetite for books of various categories, including history and politics, among the young generations. Slightly more than half of respondents (52.8%) said they own 1–20 books in addition to school textbooks. However, when asked to indicate the type of books in their possession, they replied that it was primarily textbooks. One fifth, or 21.5%, of the youth respondents declared they own more than 20 books. The types of books they owned sources of learning other than textbooks include fiction, comics and novels (30.9%) and then how-to books and documentaries (14.6%). About 2.1% of the books owned by the respondents are books on politics. A significant proportion of the respondents (18.3%) does not own any book, and 11.8% gave no answer.



**Figure 1.** In addition to school textbooks, how many books do you own?(%)

Books in Thailand are quite expensive. The average price of a book is 150–200 baht (US\$5–\$7), while books in foreign languages can cost well beyond 1,000 baht (US\$33). Reading and owning books thus can be afforded only by those who have the privilege of both time and money. According to several studies, whether rich or poor, illiterate or college graduates, parents who have books in the house expand the level of their children's education. Children of lesser-educated parents benefit the most from having books

in the home.<sup>3</sup> The Thai Government should invest more to cultivate reading habits among Thais. It is imperative that the Government provide free reading resources to the public. Community and provincial libraries must be funded and supplied with reading materials to achieve this goal.



**Figure 2.** In addition to school textbooks, how many books do you own?(%)

### Internet accessibility and consumption

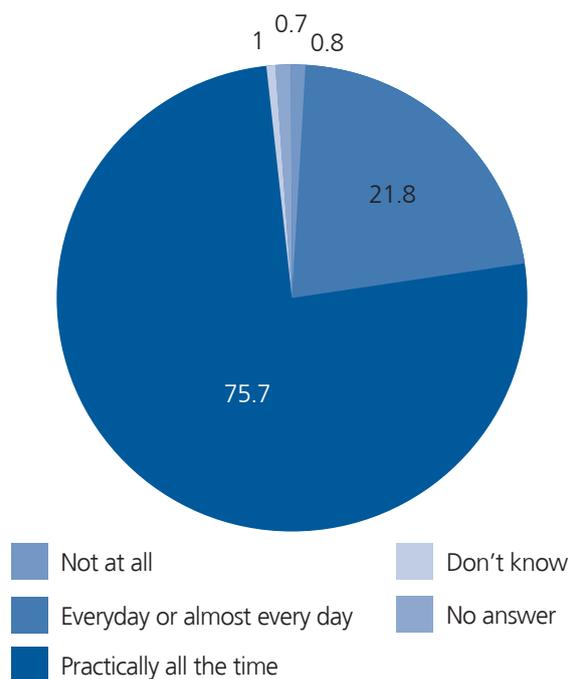
The young people interviewed for this study are the generations of digital natives who have grown up with intense consumption of social media, in which their mindsets towards information, relationships and privacy are very different from older generations. However, there remain many members of Generations Y and Z who have had limited access to communications technology while growing up, such as persons raised in poverty or remote areas. Digital access is a right for everyone, and the inequalities in that access have been greatly amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This part of the study examined how often young people used the internet in their everyday life and what

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Kelley Evans, Joanna Sikora, and Donald J. Treiman, "Family scholarly culture and educational success: books and schooling in 27 nations", in *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* (2010). DOI: 10.1016/j.rssm.2010.01.002.

they do when using the internet. These are questions that we want to answer with facts and statistics rather than anecdotes and impressions. These results invite a reflection on the dominant narrative of the purposes of internet use and the digital divide.

The digitalization of Thai youth is evident, as suggested by the 75.7% of the respondents who said they have internet access "practically all the time", while 21.8% said they have internet access "every day or almost every day". Only 0.8% of respondents stated that they do not have access to the internet at all.



**Figure 3.** Do you regularly have internet access (any: WIFI, smart phone, public, PC)? If yes, how often? (%)

The young people reported using the internet for different reasons. The use of the internet for social networking is considerable, with 83.9% of respondents reporting they use Facebook, Instagram, Line, Twitter and Telegram practically all the time, and 13.7% said they use these social networks every day or almost every day.

In addition to using the internet to communicate with friends and within their networks, 81% of the young respondents use the internet practically all the time for entertainment, such as watching movies, listening to

music, online shopping and gaming. Around 68% of respondents use the internet to find information and read the news, while 66.2% consume it for school, education or for work all the time.

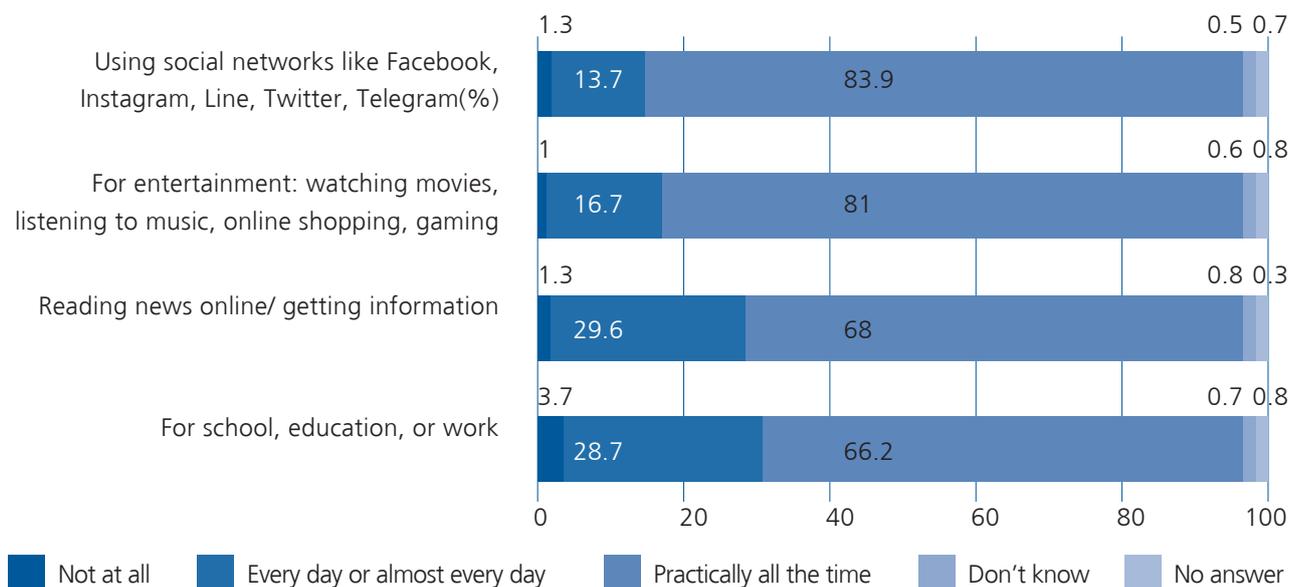


Figure 4. For what purpose do you use the internet? (%)

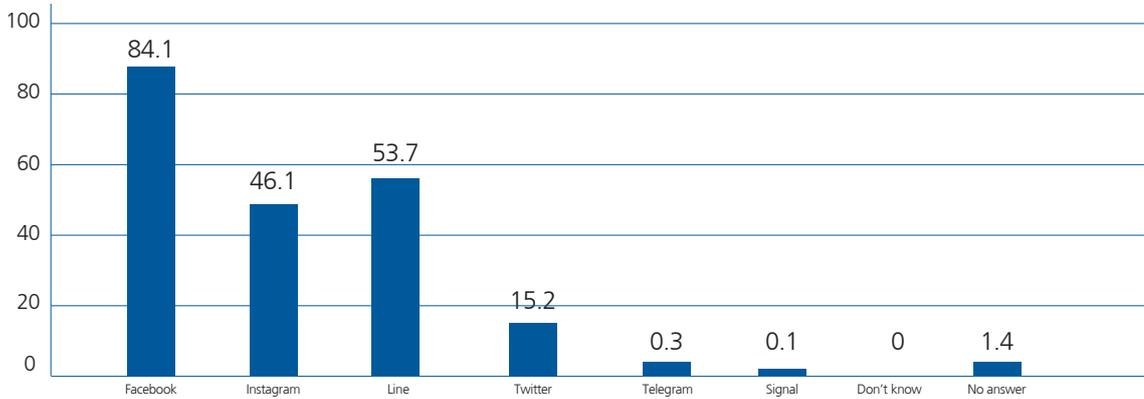
Table 3. Family's financial status, owning books and accessing the internet

Family's Financial Status	In addition to school textbooks, how many books do you own?					Do you regularly have internet access (Wi-Fi, smart phone, public, PC)?				
	None	1-20	More than 20	Don't know	No answer	Not at all	Every day or almost everyday	Practically all the time	Don't know	No answer
<b>We don't have enough money</b>	52 (30.8%)	80 (47.3%)	20 (11.8%)	14 (8.3%)	3 (1.8%)	3 (1.8%)	68 (40.2%)	97 (57.4%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)
<b>We have enough money but never for expensive food and clothes</b>	72 (22.4%)	163 (50.6%)	60 (18.6%)	18 (5.6%)	9 (2.8%)	6 (1.9%)	84 (26.1%)	225 (69.9%)	4 (1.2%)	3 (0.9%)
<b>We have enough money for expensive food and clothes sometimes</b>	95 (13.8%)	382 (55.6%)	167 (24.3%)	35 (5.1%)	8 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	119 (17.3%)	559 (81.4%)	4 (0.6%)	5 (0.7%)
<b>We have enough money for everything we need</b>	33 (16.0%)	102 (49.5%)	59 (28.6%)	5 (2.4%)	7 (3.4%)	1 (0.5%)	23 (11.2%)	178 (86.4%)	1 (0.5%)	3 (1.5%)
<b>Don't know</b>	2 (6.9%)	19 (65.5%)	4 (13.8%)	1 (3.4%)	3 (10.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (10.3%)	25 (86.2%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.4%)
<b>No answer</b>	13 (26.0%)	26 (52.0%)	4 (8.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (14.0%)	1 (2.0%)	22 (44.0%)	23 (46.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (8.0%)

The quantity of books that young people own and their access to the internet are clearly tied to their familial situation: They own more books and have access to the internet as their wealth increases.

### Youth and social media

The most popular social networks among the respondents are Facebook, at 84.1%, then Line and Instagram, at 53.7% and 46.1%, respectively. Surprisingly, Twitter, which generally is considered more popular among teens, followed distantly in fourth place, at 15.2%. Less than 1% of the respondents use Telegram and Signal. (NOTE: This study was conducted before the TikTok application became popular.)



**Figure 5.** Which social network do you use the most? (%)

Regardless of their family’s financial status, Thai youth today use the internet to research topics. The more education they have, the more they rely on social media as their main source of information more frequently.

**Table 4.** Family’s financial status, respondents’ level of education and using digital devices for news updates

Reading news or getting information from the internet					
	Never	Sometimes	Often – at least once a week	Don't know	No answer
Family's financial status					
We don't have enough money	7 (4.1%)	77 (45.6%)	83 (49.1%)	2 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)
We have enough money but never for expensive food and clothes	3 (0.9%)	81 (25.2%)	233 (72.4%)	4 (1.2%)	1 (0.3%)
We have enough money for expensive food and clothes sometimes	5 (0.7%)	198 (28.8%)	481 (70.0%)	3 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)
We have enough money for everything we need	2 (1.0%)	49 (23.8%)	153 (74.3%)	2 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Level of education (respondents)					
Secondary school or less	9 (4.4%)	85 (41.7%)	106 (52.0%)	3 (1.5%)	1 (0.5%)
High school or vocational school	5 (1.0%)	180 (36.1%)	306 (61.4%)	5 (1.0%)	2 (0.4%)
Bachelor's degree	5 (0.7%)	163 (22.9%)	539 (75.7%)	3 (0.4%)	2 (0.3%)
Postgraduate degree	0 (0.0%)	5 (10.2%)	44 (89.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

## Conclusion

- Most of the books owned by young Thais are school textbooks.
- About 2% of the books owned by respondents are books on politics.
- A significant proportion (18%) of young persons do not own any book.
- Most youths are active internet users.
- The primary purposes for surfing the internet are for communicating via social networks, watching movies, listening to music, online shopping and gaming.
- The most popular social networks are, in order of preference, Facebook, Line, Instagram and Twitter.

4

# OUTLOOK AND EXPECTATIONS

“Outlook” in this study refers to a range of aspects that young people have about themselves and the country. This includes an individual’s satisfaction with their life, with the country’s political situation, with their education or their job and with their family. There is a long list of reasons for having a negative outlook on Thai society today: political uncertainty, economic inequality, the pandemic, floods, poverty and growing polarization. With all the stories about the pressures and anxieties faced by young people, the study asked for their thoughts concerning their own well-being, the factors that make them hopeful and fearful for the future and their views on whether their life and Thailand have become better or worse in the past ten years. The study hoped to validate that young people largely refuse to see the future through the lens of adults and wanted to test whether there is strong alignment between young people’s optimistic or pessimistic outlook and their family’s wealth, their residential area and other socio-demographic variables.

### Satisfaction with life and politics

The majority of young and adolescent Thais who participated in this survey are fairly satisfied with their family life, with the education they have received

and with their life in general. Fewer than half of the respondents who were working at the time of the survey said they are satisfied with their job. But overall, the respondents are the least satisfied with the Thai political situation, and their level of satisfaction with politics is stunningly low.

Among those various aspects, young Thais markedly appear to be dissatisfied with Thai politics the most (at 56.3%), while only 7% of respondents are satisfied and 31.5% are indifferent. A high degree (84.1%) of respondents said that they are satisfied with their family life (as opposed to 1.7% who are dissatisfied), while 64% are satisfied with their education, and 59.6% are satisfied with their life in general.

The level of satisfaction with their job is notably lower, with 47.8% of the employed youth reporting satisfaction and 5.8% of respondents dissatisfied. However, more respondents are dissatisfied with their education than those who are dissatisfied with their job. A fairly large number of respondents (11.6%) replied with “no answer” because many of them were still in school at the time of the survey (42.9%) and had not yet entered the job market.

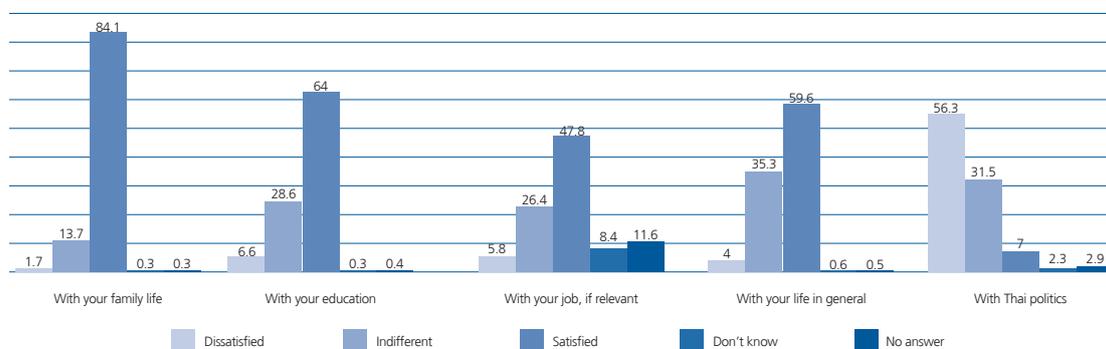


Figure 6. To what extent are you satisfied...? (%)

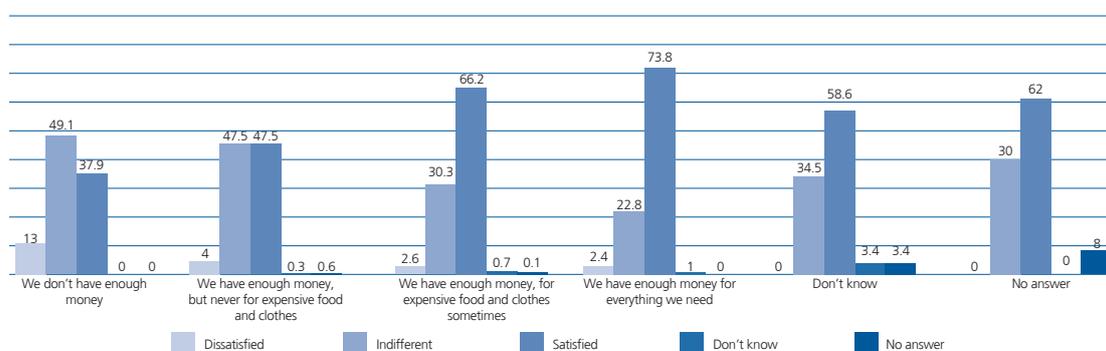


Figure 7. Family's financial status and satisfaction with life (%)

## Satisfaction and socio-demographic variables

Around 7% of the young respondents said they are “satisfied” with Thailand’s political situation. However, the socio-demographic variables and respondents’ satisfaction with politics require cautious analyses. More respondents living in rural areas than in Bangkok and other urban areas report they are satisfied with the country’s political situation (at 8.9% of young people in rural areas, 6.1% of young people in Bangkok and 5.1% in urban areas). When comparing among the regions, the young respondents from central Thailand reported the highest satisfaction, at 12.5%. Contentment with Thai politics is the lowest among the young respondents in the northern provinces (at 2.9%).

More male respondents (at 8.4%) are satisfied with Thai politics than female respondents (at 5.8%), while 7.7% of the respondents who identified as non-binary gender expressed satisfaction with Thai politics. Overall, 52% of the male respondents and 60% of the female respondents said they are not interested in politics. In terms of level of education, young people with a postgraduate degree (at 12.2% of respondents) tend to be happier with Thai politics than respondents with lower levels of schooling.

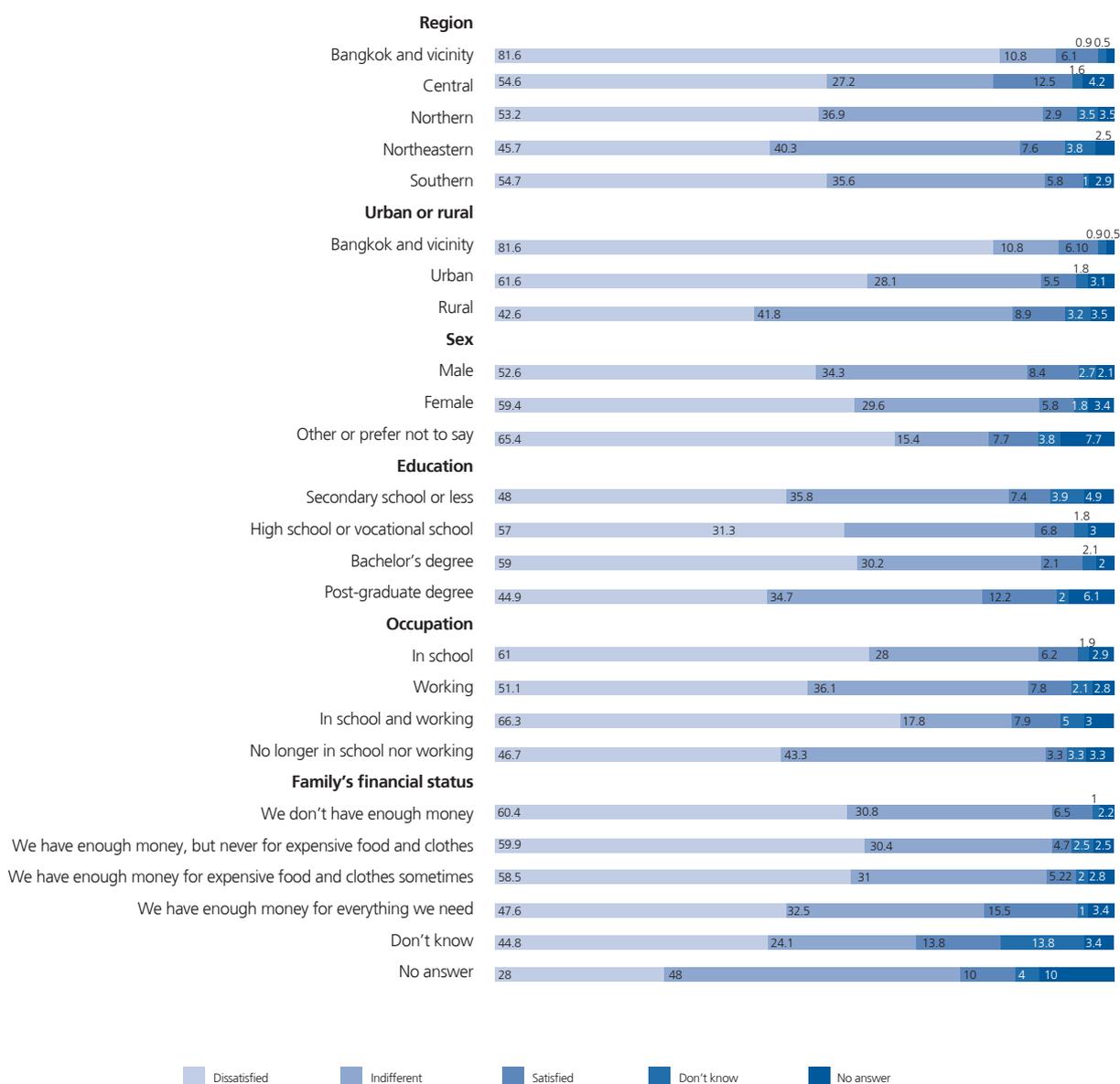


Figure 8. How satisfied are you with Thai politics? (%)

## The wealthy and the deprived

The level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction that respondents felt with most of the questions was obviously affected by their family's financial situation. The poorest respondents tended to report lower levels of satisfaction than respondents in better and most favourable financial conditions. The gaps between them are noticeably large. Young people who do not have enough money revealed the highest level of dissatisfaction in every category. The respondents with enough money for "everything needed" are twice more satisfied with their life in general (at 73.8%) and with Thai politics (at 15.5%) than respondents who do not have enough money (at 37.9% and 6.5%, respectively).

## Optimistic or pessimistic outlook

Most respondents translate their high level of satisfaction onto their potential future, thus having a high degree of optimism about their personal prospects, in contrast to their considerably more pessimistic evaluation of Thai society, in ten years' time. The respondents' level of optimism about the future of Thailand is barely half as high as their outlook of their own personal future in a decade, at 35.5% and 65.9%, respectively. Specifically, the young respondents are hopeful that their personal future will be better than the future of the country in ten years.

Around 12.3% of respondents are less hopeful about their life's prospects in the coming decade, and 4% have a pessimistic view, saying that things will take a turn for the worse. This outlook is in sharp contrast to their assessment of the future of Thai society. Only 35.5% of the young respondents believe that the country will be better than now in ten years' time. Approximately 19% said that the prospects of the country are rather gloomy, meaning worse than now, and 22% reported that the future of Thai society will remain the same. A large portion replied "don't know" or "no answer", at 15.2% and 8%, respectively.

Major socio-demographic differences among the various categories of respondents highlight the patterns of perceptions about the personal future. The configurations are not exactly linear. Young individuals who are wealthier and more educated may not necessarily have the best future expectations.

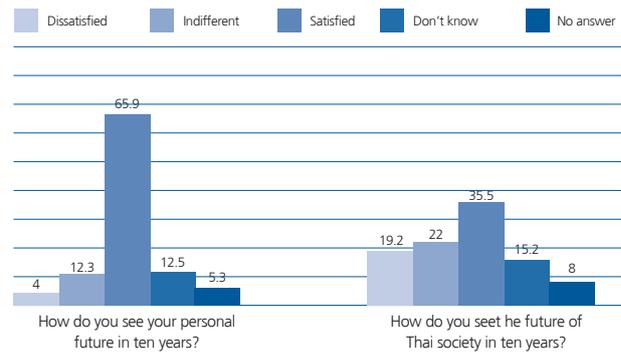


Figure 9. How do you see the future in ten years? (%)

The respondents who are the most impoverished (55% of respondents who identify as "not having enough money") and who are no longer in school nor working (at 60%) shelter the most negative opinion. The largest proportion of respondents with the highest level of hopefulness about the future are from middle-income households, at 73.7%. These young people are more into politics, thus realize that politics impacts their everyday lives. They believe they can make a difference and feel financially secure enough to speak up. It is not a coincidence that the middle-income segment of respondents (those who identify as having "enough money for expensive food and clothes sometimes") account for the largest share of interest in politics and of those who participated in the 2020–2021 youth movements (discussed later).

The Bangkokians' level of optimism about the brightness of their future is higher (at 76%) than respondents residing in urban (at 66%), and rural (at 62%) areas. Remarkably, a positive outlook is more common among young people from northeastern Thailand (82%), which is generally considered the most economically deprived region in the country. It gradually goes down, starting with respondents from the southern region (69%) and then the northern region (62%), reaching its lowest level among young people in the central region (44%).

Male and female perceptions of their personal futures do not differ significantly (at 65.8% and 65.6%, respectively). The non-binary-identifying respondents (at 76.9%) tend to be more pessimistic about their future in ten years.

## Fears and concerns

When given a list of hypothetical matters, the three issues that frighten the respondents the least are war in the region or world, which 27.3% of respondents cited as “a lot”, having a coup d’état, which troubled 38.3% of respondents, and too many immigrants, which concerned 43.3% respondents “a lot”. All three categories also reflect the top-most responses for “not at all” frightened or concerned.

The concerns of young people stretch across a wide spectrum. More than half and up to 68% of youth are afraid of all the items listed, ranging from pollution and climate change (52.6%) to corruption (55.1%) to being a victim of political violence (55.6%). The two things the Thai youth cited as their top fears or what they are most concerned with are increasing poverty in society

(68.4%) and no opportunity to make progress in their life (68%).

The fear of not having opportunity to make progress in their life highly associates with respondents’ financial status. Those who identify as have not much money have a more pronounced sense of lacking opportunity in their life. The most responses (76.9%) regarding fear of being unable to climb up the social ladder came from respondents from the bottom economic quintile. Poverty in Thailand is not just a state of mind. It is an inconvenient truth, and it preys upon the most vulnerable. The overall structure of fear reflects the respondents’ awareness of social hierarchies, concern about their relative position, inequalities and limited social mobility in Thailand.

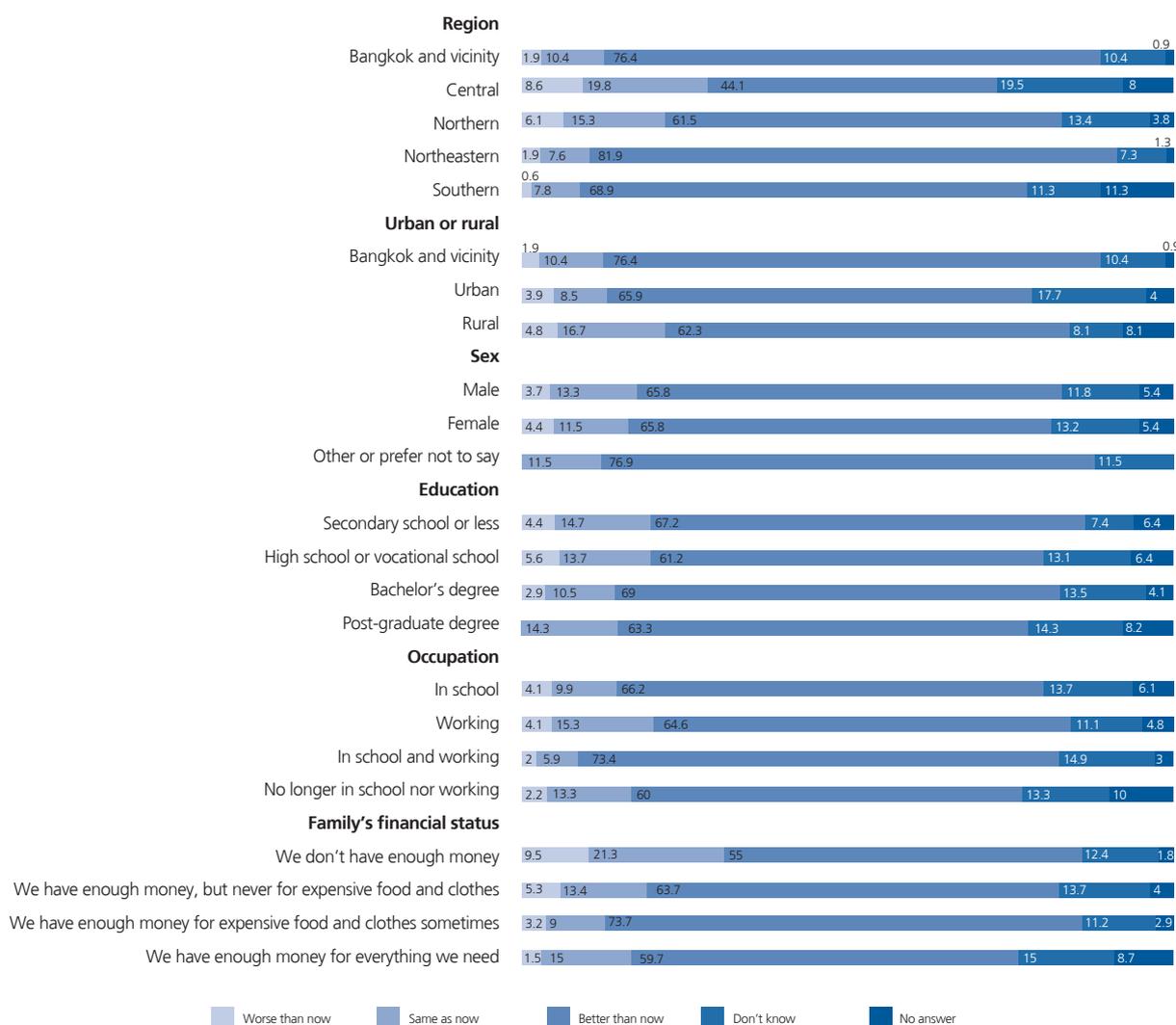


Figure 10. How do you see your personal future in ten years? (%)

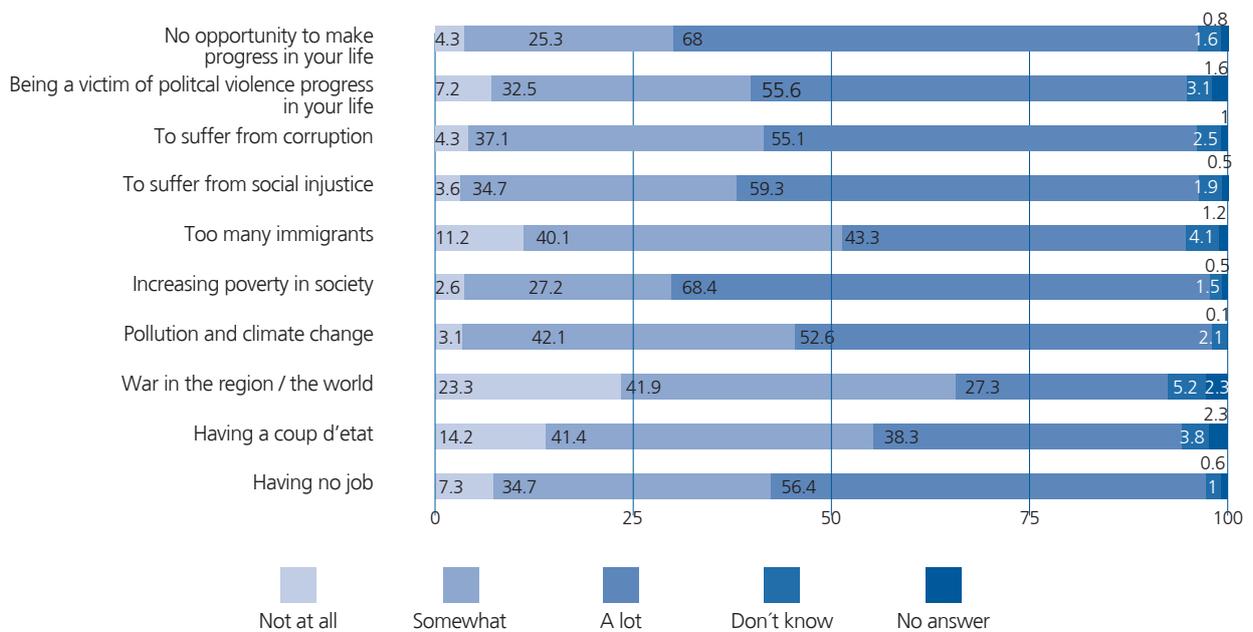


Figure 11. To what extent are you frightened or concerned in relation to the following things? (%)

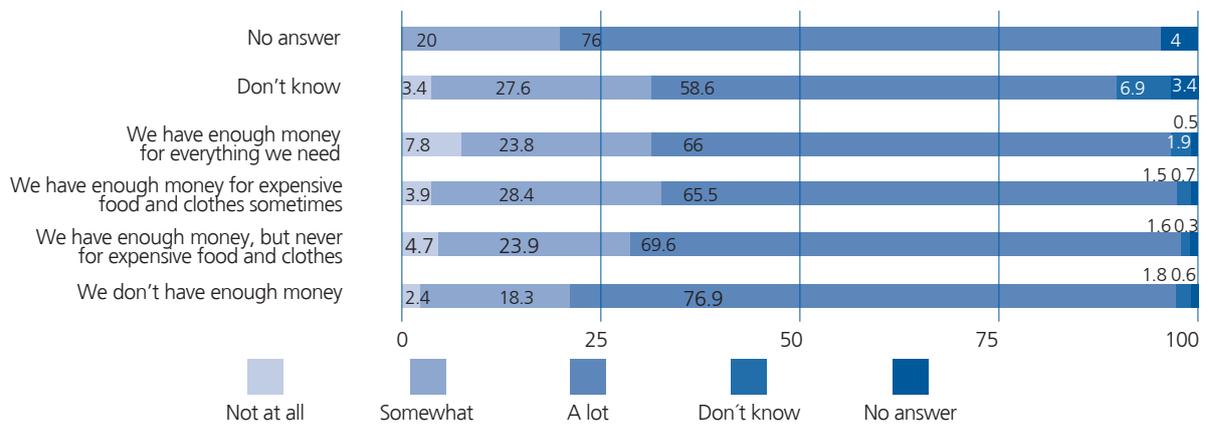


Figure 12. Opportunity to make progress in life and financial status (%)

## Conclusion

- Most young Thais are fairly satisfied with their family life, with the education they have received and with their life in general.
- The level of satisfaction with Thai politics is remarkably low.
- Respondents living in rural areas are satisfied with the Thai political situation more than respondents residing in Bangkok and urban areas.
- Young people from the northern provinces have the lowest level of satisfaction with politics.
- Male respondents are more satisfied with Thai politics than female and non-binary gender respondents.
- The level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with all topics in the survey is affected by the family's financial situation.
- The poorest respondents have lower levels of satisfaction than those in the better and most favourable financial conditions, and the gaps between these groups are noticeably large.
- The young generations are more hopeful about their personal future than the future of the country.
- Optimism about personal life in the foreseeable future but pessimism about the future of Thai society appear across all age groups.
- The two things the Thai youth fear the most are increasing poverty in society and having no opportunity to make progress in their life.
- Respondents' fear of not having opportunity to make progress in their life highly associates with financial status. The less money the respondents reported having the more pronounced is their fear of lacking opportunities in their life.

**5**

# **MIGRATION**

The Generation Y and Z persons were born at a time when information technology and communication networks were shrinking the world. They are more likely to have travelled across borders, have friends who are on the other side of the world and know people from a different culture than their parents and ancestors. They are more likely to be mobile and migrate across borders. But is this true? The study wanted to learn under what conditions did young people decide to move out of their districts or even country?

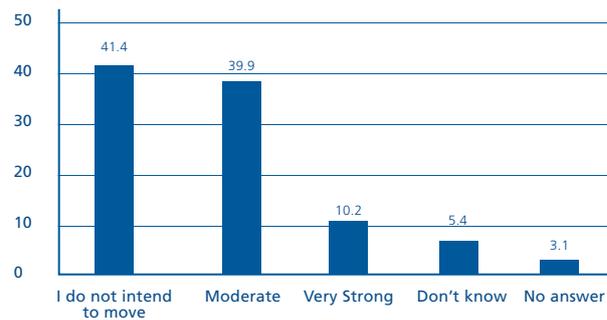
This study was conducted before the Let's Move Abroad campaign, which sprang up out of frustration over the Government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. In just four days, a group that had formed on 1 May 2021 had logged more than 650,000 members who shared tips on studying and working abroad. The most popular countries, according to members' posts, are the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Malaysia, Austria, Norway, Sweden, Russian Federation, Iceland, Canada, New Zealand and Japan. Some members of the group sympathize with Thailand's anti-government movements.<sup>1</sup>

Young people and adolescents who have a "very strong" desire to move to another country for more than one year account for only 10.2% of respondents. The majority of respondents (41.4%) do not intend to relocate. However, when combining "very strong" (10.2%) and "moderate" (39.9%) desires to migrate to another country, the total figure equals half (50.1%) of respondents.

These figures, however, do not indicate that the young people are determined to leave the country to study or work abroad or obtain permanent residence in another country. They simply describe the sentiments and attitudes of these young people—not their preparedness to leave. In general, the findings indicate that the respondents are dissatisfied with society and the opportunities they can imagine for themselves in the future. It can be interpreted as an indicator of social dissatisfaction and social tensions among respondents.

<sup>1</sup> Ann Carter, "'Let's Move Abroad' Thai Facebook group exploding with potential defectors", Thaiger, 2 May 2021. Available at <https://thethaiger.com/hot-news/media/lets-move-abroad-thai-facebook-group-exploding-with-potential-defectors>.

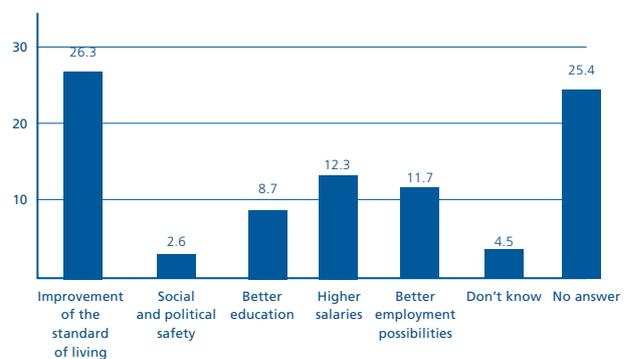
**Figure 13.** How strong is your desire to move to another country for more than one year? (%)



### Reasons to move to another country

Improvement of the living standard (26.3%), higher salaries (12.3%) and better employment possibilities (11.7%) closely relate and correspond to the desires of 50.1% of respondents who reported a strong or moderate desire to move to another country. These replies echo the poverty concern and the anxiety over opportunity to make progress in their life. Wanting a better education was reported by 8.7% of respondents. Although education was cited as an intention, it could be interpreted as a means to achieve a better life. Interestingly, 2.6% of the respondents mentioned social and political safety as a stimulus factor to move to another country.

**Figure 14.** What is the main reason for why you would move to another country? (%)



### Conclusion

- The majority of young people do not have a strong intention to relocate.
- The major reasons for moving abroad are to improve the living standard, get a higher salary and find better employment possibilities.

**6**

# **EDUCATION**

The 2017 Constitution and the 1999 Education Act guarantee 12 years of free education<sup>1</sup>, while successive Thai governments have allocated generous budget to public education. And yet, Thai schools do not measure up to international academic assessments. During 2020–2021, a group of school students who called themselves “Bad Students” joined the youth movements, rallying against Thailand’s ultra-conservative school system<sup>2</sup>. Among numerous reasons mentioned in this study as to why Thailand’s educational system lags behind, the following three issues were cited most often:

1. Uneven government support. Students who already have a high likelihood to succeed receive abundant financial subsidy. Rural schools in remote areas with disadvantaged young people are largely left out.
2. Outdated curriculum. A predominant practice in the Thai educational system is the transfer of knowledge through memorization, reiteration and repetition as opposed to improvement of students’ aptitudes to acquire knowledge, improve problem-solving skills and advance their creativity and imagination.
3. Authoritarian administration and teaching style. Thai students are seldom encouraged to express themselves, think critically, challenge what they are taught or deviate from the reinforced social hierarchies established by the top-down education system.

This part of the study was designed to let young people tell us whether they are satisfied with their Thai education, what education means to them and how to improve it.

### Attitude towards quality of education

Satisfaction with the quality of education in Thailand was relatively low: one third of respondents gave negative reply (35.7%), and nearly half were indifferent (42.8%). Only 16.3% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the quality of education. Despite the negative views of the education system, respondents tended to be satisfied with their own education (64%), while only 6% were not satisfied.

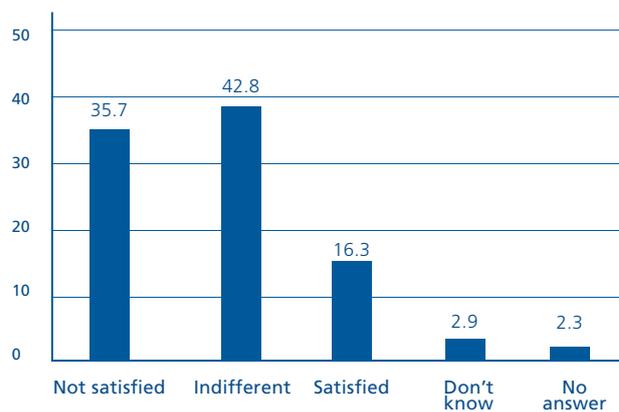


Figure 15. How satisfied are you generally with the quality of education in Thailand? (%)

### Education and the world of work

Merely 6.4% of respondents view Thailand’s education system as well-adapted to the current world of work. Three in ten respondents (34.7%) expressed a negative view towards the adaptability and training capability of the country’s educational institutions to meet the labour market’s expectations. Almost half of respondents (43.1%) thought that schools and universities in Thailand could train them properly for a future job.

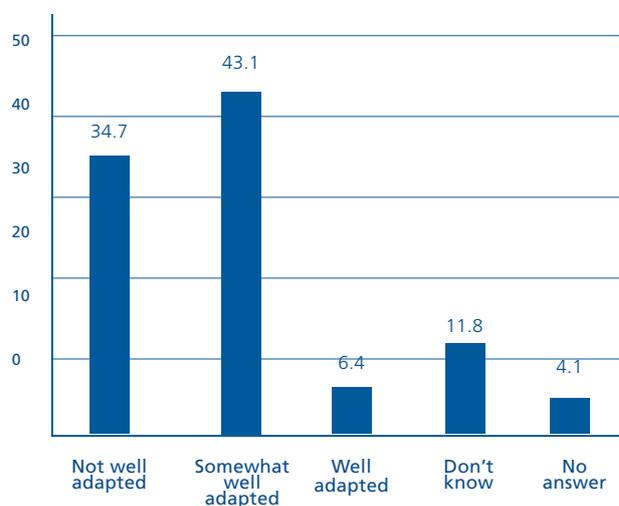


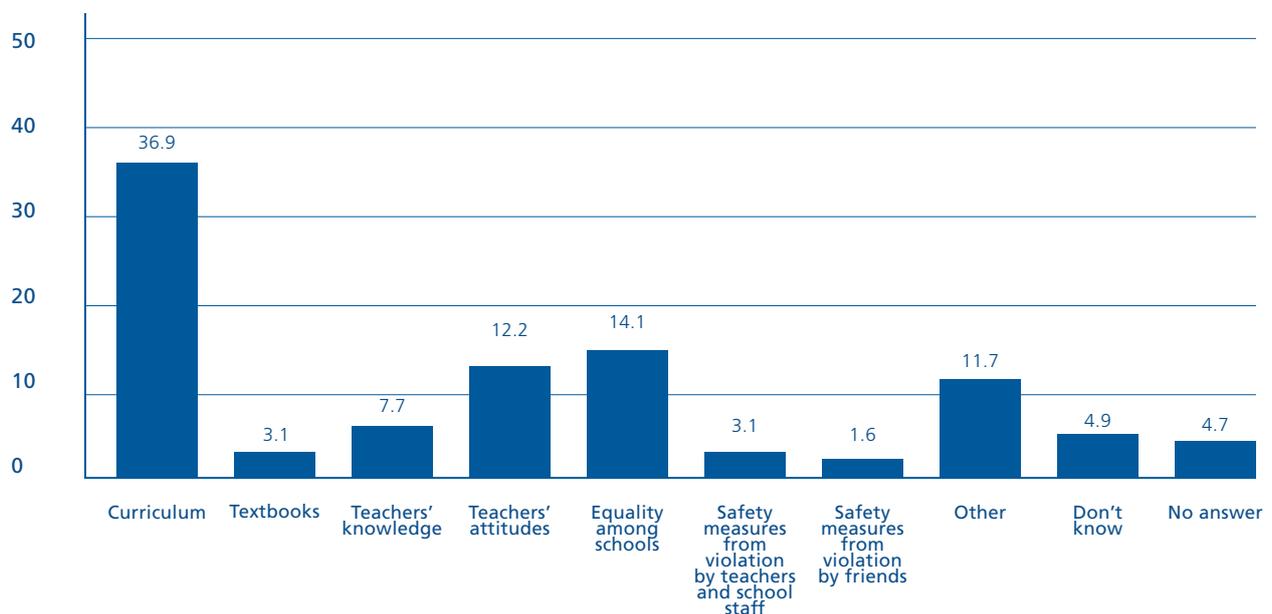
Figure 16. How satisfied are you generally with the quality of education in Thailand? (%)

<sup>1</sup> See 2017 Constitution, Section 54.

<sup>2</sup> “‘Bad Students’ not your typical school troublemakers”, Bangkok Post, 20 November 2020. Available at [www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2022963/bad-students-not-your-typical-school-troublemakers](http://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2022963/bad-students-not-your-typical-school-troublemakers).

## What needs improving?

Responding to the question on what aspect of the education system in Thailand should be improved the most, as many as 36.9% of respondents pointed to the necessity to revamp the curriculum and 3.1% replied that textbooks should be upgraded. A negative attitude on the quality and adaptability of education is not the only issue. Equality among schools and teachers' attitudes are also of concern, cited by 14.1% and 12.2% of respondents, respectively. Young people are also concerned about their rights being violated by friends (1.6%) and teachers and other school personnel (3.1%). The concern over rights violations by faculty and staff is twice as strong as the concern over violations by friends.



**Figure 17.** Which aspect of Thailand's education system do you think should be improved the most? (%)

"Other" answers not listed in the questionnaire was cited by 11.7% of respondents, the third-highest among all answers. The respondents suggested in written replies that the extent and scope of the educational system that should be improved are the following: focusing more on practicality rather than theories (28 respondents), lifting antiquated school rules, such as school uniform and the length of hair (15 respondents), school hours are too long (12 respondents), fostering students' creativity and critical thinking (6 respondents) and freedom to choose what students want to learn (4 respondents).

## Conclusion

- In the eyes of the young respondents, the quality of the education in Thailand is relatively low.
- Three in ten young people have a negative view towards the adaptability and training capability of Thailand's educational institutions to meet the labour market's expectations.
- The three aspects of the education system that should be improved the most are revamping the curriculum, upgrading textbooks and improving teachers' attitudes.
- The young respondents feel apprehensive about safety from violations by teachers and school staff.



**7**

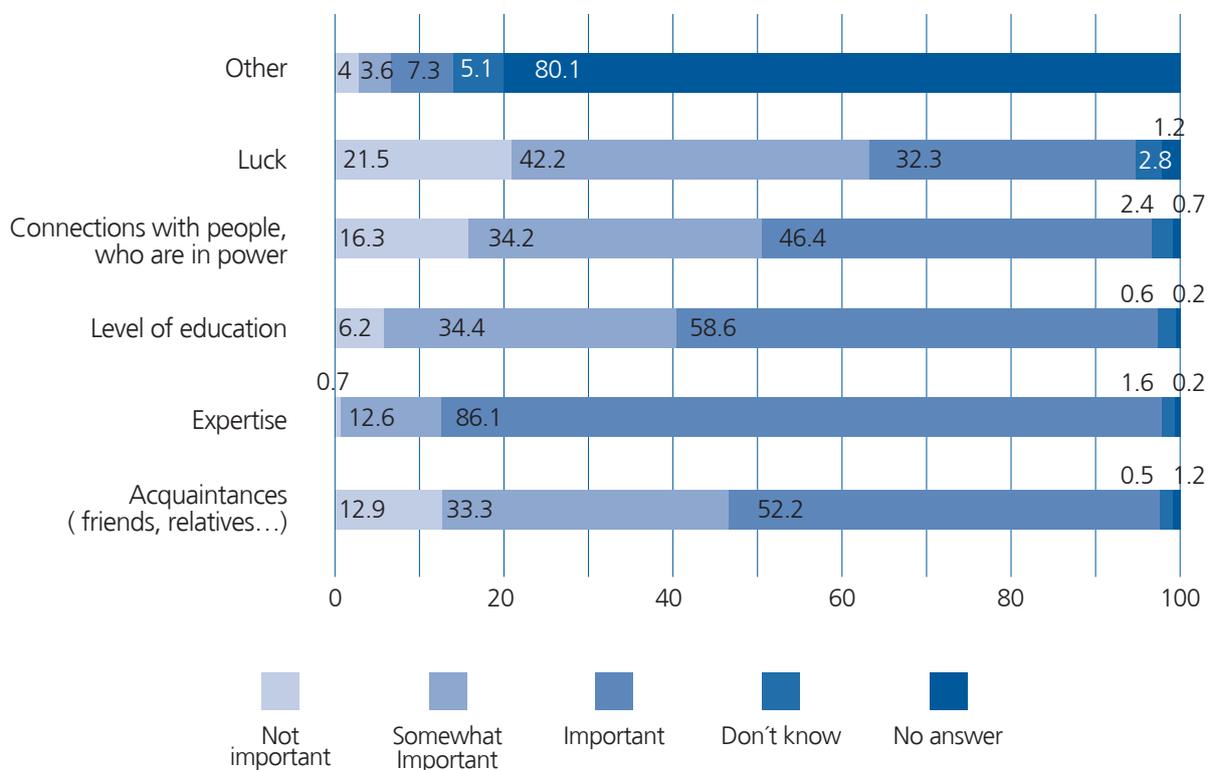
# **EMPLOYMENT**

The transition of young people from school or training institution to the labour market is an acute moment in the life cycle. Young people’s transition to adulthood has changed in recent years. Employment opportunities, aggravated by the economic downturn and worsened by the global pandemic, pose a crucial challenge for both young people and Thai society as a whole. But changes in the pursuit of decent and well-paid jobs have not affected all young people in the same ways. This section of the study explored the youths’ perspectives on employment issues.

### Hunting for a job

Respondents said key elements to finding a job are professional expertise and level of education. Still, when looking for a job, some persons rely on relations, connections and luck.

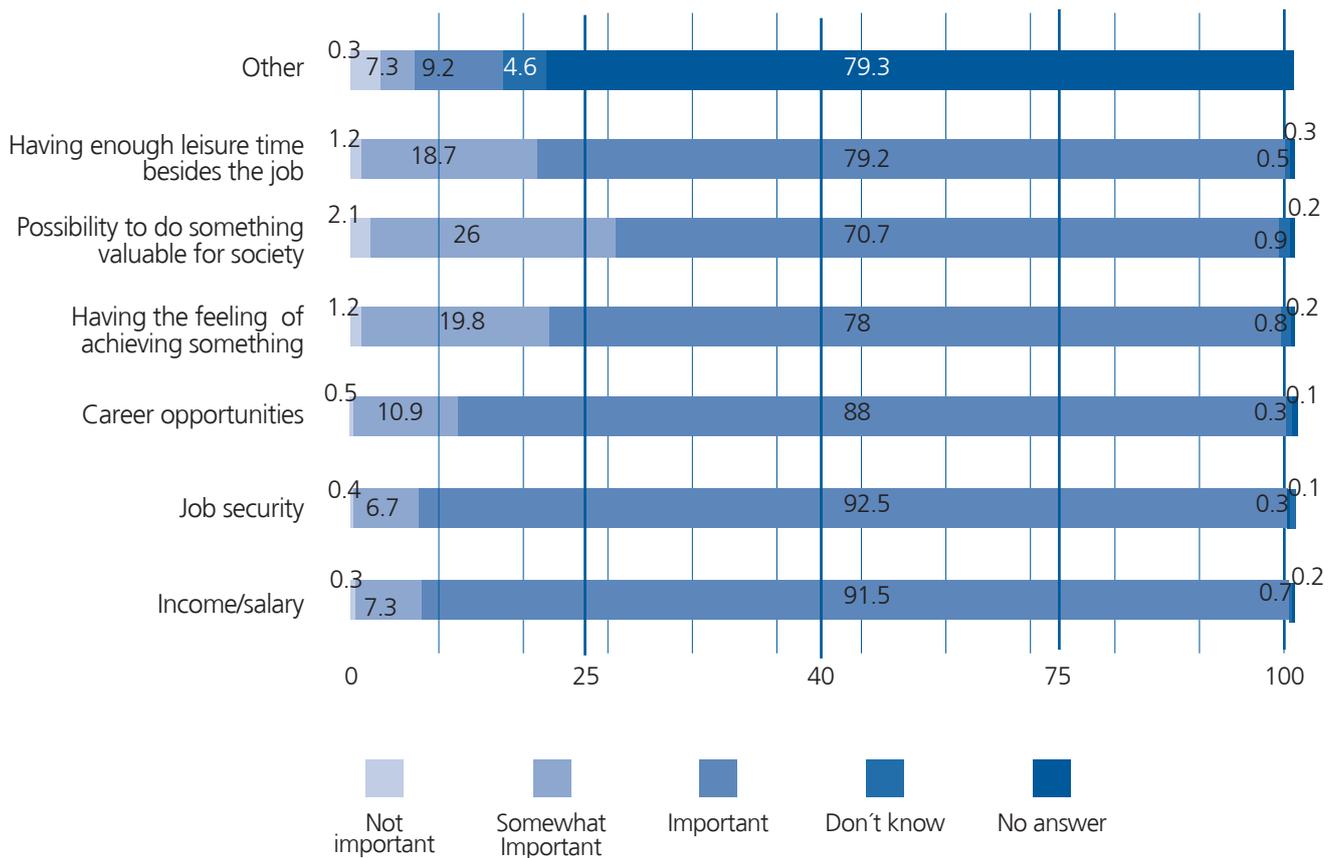
Expertise was cited by respondents as an important factor closely associated with finding a job (at 86.1%). Around 59% of respondents agreed that level of education helped them get a good job, and 52.2% of them revealed that acquaintances (friends and relatives) were a vital means to their finding a job. Connections with people who are in power (46.4%) and luck (32.3%) are also important in locating a job. When combining the portion of respondents who said that “connections with people who are in power” is “important” and “somewhat important”, the total becomes 80.6%. This suggests that expertise and education are not enough attributes to acquire a job. Young Thais think that connections are of paramount importance as well. The magic aura of luck as “somewhat important” was cited the most times (at 42.2%) to finding a job in Thailand.



**Figure 18.** In your opinion, how important are the following factors when it comes to finding a job for a young person? (%)

## Things most important to you in a job

The question on which factors are important when choosing a job sheds light on youths' and adolescents' motivation. Of all respondents, 92.5% said they prefer a job with security and 91.5% favour a well-paid income or salary, while 88% of them cited career opportunities. Having enough leisure time ranks fourth, at 79.2%. The preference for a job that allows self-realization and fulfilment follows, at 78%. Only 70.7% of respondents consider the possibility to do something valuable for society as an "important" factor when it comes to choosing a job; however, this element was cited the most as a "somewhat important" factor (at 26%).



**Figure 19.** Here are some factors that people consider important when it comes to choosing a job today. How important are they for you personally? (%)

### Conclusion

- Important factors in finding a job, in order cited, are expertise, level of education, acquaintances, connections with people in power and luck.
- Job security was cited as the most significant factor when choosing a job, followed closely by a well-paid salary.



**8**

# **YOUTH AND POLITICS**

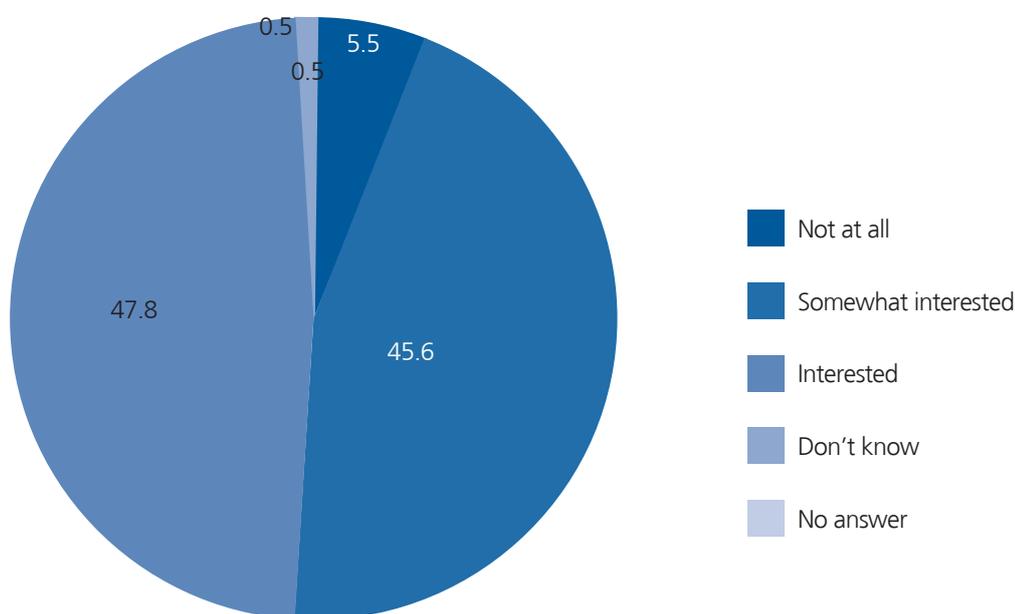
In many countries around the world, attention often centres on young people’s low levels of electoral and political engagement in comparison with previous generations. However, the situation in Thailand is quite different. Young people have recently shown extraordinary concern for formal political activities. They are also attracted to and engage in informal and alternative modes and styles of participation in political life. This study was carried out at a time in which there was a peak in politicization in society in general, including youths and adolescents. We have seen several reports about a split between the younger generations demanding democracy and the older generations favouring the status quo and traditional social order. Family rifts regarding different political opinions have been much talked about.

The underlying factors associated with and shaping young people’s political values, attitudes and patterns of political behaviour are complex. Looking at political interest, source of information and participation of young people in Thailand, this portion of the study

examined the relevant issues through the lens of five guiding questions: How much are young people interested in political affairs? Are political views dividing families? What defines youths’ political participation? Would they vote in the next election, if eligible? How do young people obtain their political information? This section offers a useful overview of how young people think and act politically. The findings provide a good reflection on the current state of youth and politics in Thailand.

### Interest in politics

In the midst of the youth demonstrations against the government, it was normal to expect a strong interest in politics on the part of young people. The survey has generated encouraging results. As much as 47.8% of respondents mentioned that they are interested in political affairs in Thailand. Impressively, 93.4% of them are either “interested” or “somewhat interested”, as opposed to only 5.5% who said they harbour “no interest” in Thai politics.



**Figure 20** How much are you personally interested in political affairs? (%)

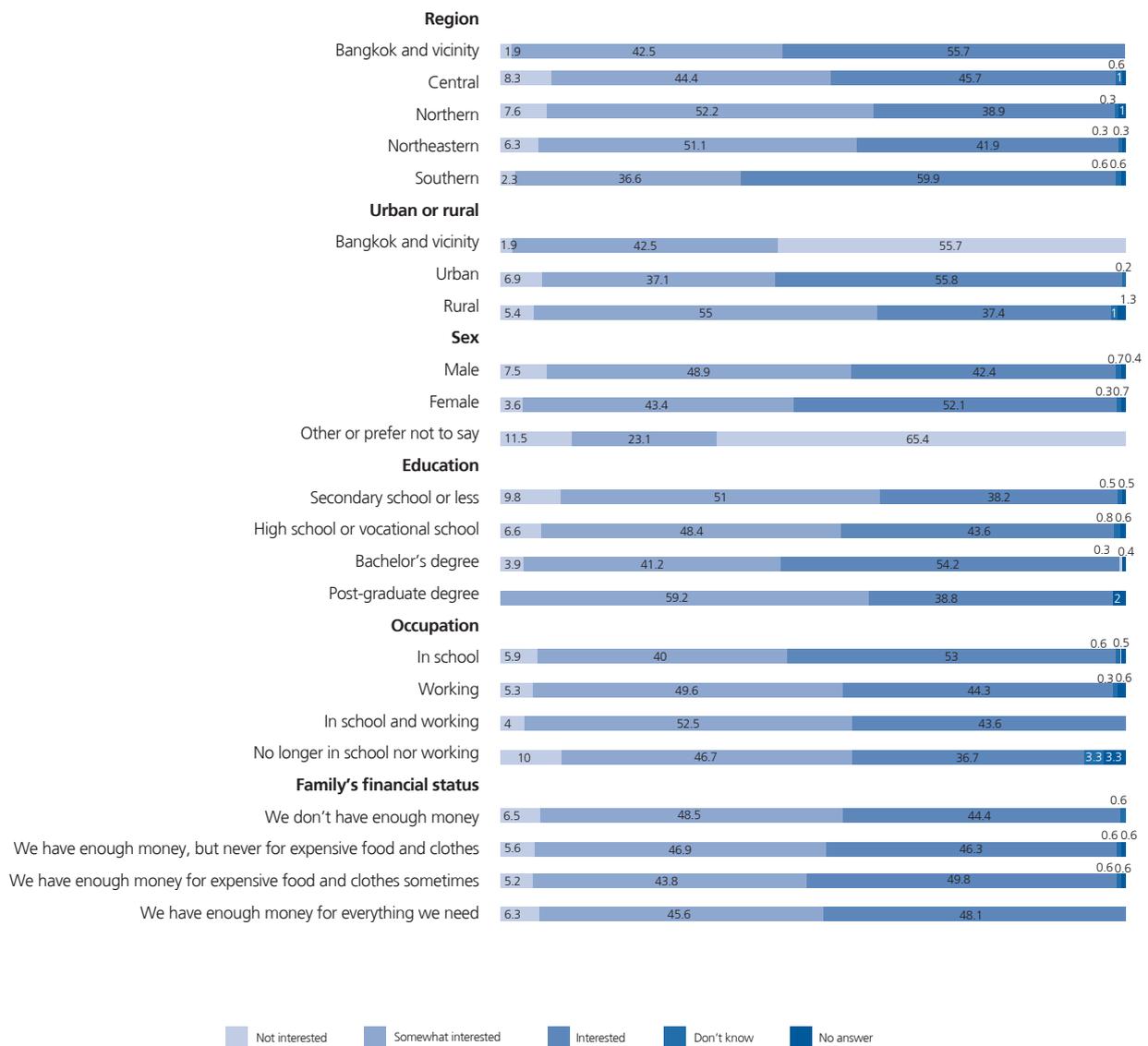


Figure 21. How interested in Thailand's political situation are you? (%)

Regarding family financial status, although the figures among groups do not differ significantly, there is a correlation between the financial status of young people and their interest in political affairs. But this correlation is not linear. The respondents whose families are in the middle-income or upper-income tiers (aligned with the statements “we have money for expensive food and clothes sometimes and “we have enough money for everything we need”) have the greatest and second-greatest interest in politics (at 49.8% of middle-income respondents and 48.1% of upper-income respondents). The level of interest in politics drops to 46.3% among

respondents whose families “have enough money but never for expensive food and clothes” and to 44.4% of respondents who are the poorest in our sample. whose families hardly make ends meet.

Respondents with a bachelor's degree have the greatest interest in Thai politics (at 54.2%), followed by those who were still in high school or vocational school at the time of the survey (at 43.6%).

### Disparity of political views within the family

Since 2020, we have heard stories about families across Thailand being torn apart by the deepening political divide. The survey's findings reveal a rather contradicting viewpoint. Most respondents claimed that their political convictions either "very much" (20%) or "partially or to some extent" (50.6%) coincides with those of their parents. Only 10.1% of the respondents said their political views and beliefs do not align with their parents.

The results indicate a divide and political conflict between generations that can destructively affect the country's development. Yet, family conformity, which has been a trait underlying Thai society, cannot be underestimated. The respondents who answered "to some extent" (at 50.6%) might mean that they lack opinion leaders and reference points of their own. It is also possible that the shortage of public leadership has driven them to yield to the opinions and views of their parents.

Agreement and disagreement with parents over political issues and beliefs correlates with such factors as family financial status, level of education and location of residence. Disparities in political views between respondents and their parents appear greatest in poorer families, with 11.8% of young people from low-income families reporting contradiction between their political views and those of their parents. Whereas in affluent families, only 5.8% of the young people politically conflict with their parents.

A similar pattern emerges in terms of education and place of residence. The respondents with more education tend to have less divergent opinions from those their parents. Only 6.1% of respondents with a postgraduate degree have political views that do not align with those of their parents, while differences in family opinions of young people who have finished secondary school is twice as high (at 14.7%).

In terms of regional parameters, respondents in southern Thailand reported the lowest level (4.5%) of misalignment within their family, as opposed to the greatest level (16.6%) found among respondents in the central region.

Disagreement in political perspectives with the family is highest among male respondents (12.4%), followed by female respondents (8.2%) and lowest (7.7%) among young people who declined to state a gender identity. Across all

segments, a large proportion of respondents did not answer (nearly 12%) or did not know how to answer (10%). As much as 19% of respondents from the non-binary gender cluster did not answer this question.

### Consequences when disagreements occur

As discussed previously concerning disagreement in political perspectives, the survey findings do not indicate stark differences between the views of young people and their parents. When disparity on political views does occur, 55.9% of the respondents said that they and their family members have agreed to disagree and be respectful of the differences. This represents a positive effort to avoid and resolve conflicts within a household. Nevertheless, family estrangement and authoritative relationships also have occurred. Notably, 6.8% of respondents claimed they had been warned to quit participating in politics or face punishment, and 0.4% of teenage young respondents stated they had been kicked out of their home because of their political views. Many respondents also chose "no answer" (18.6%) or "don't know" (13.6%). This might be because such a question is sensitive. Among the 4.7% of those who cited "other" consequences, "silent treatment" or "never discuss politics with their parents" were given as examples.

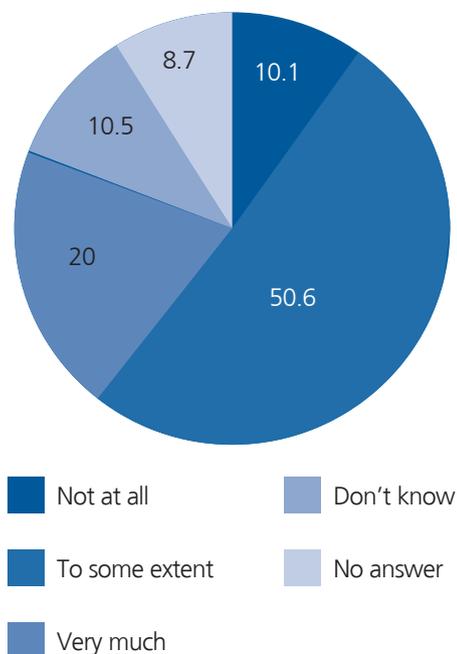


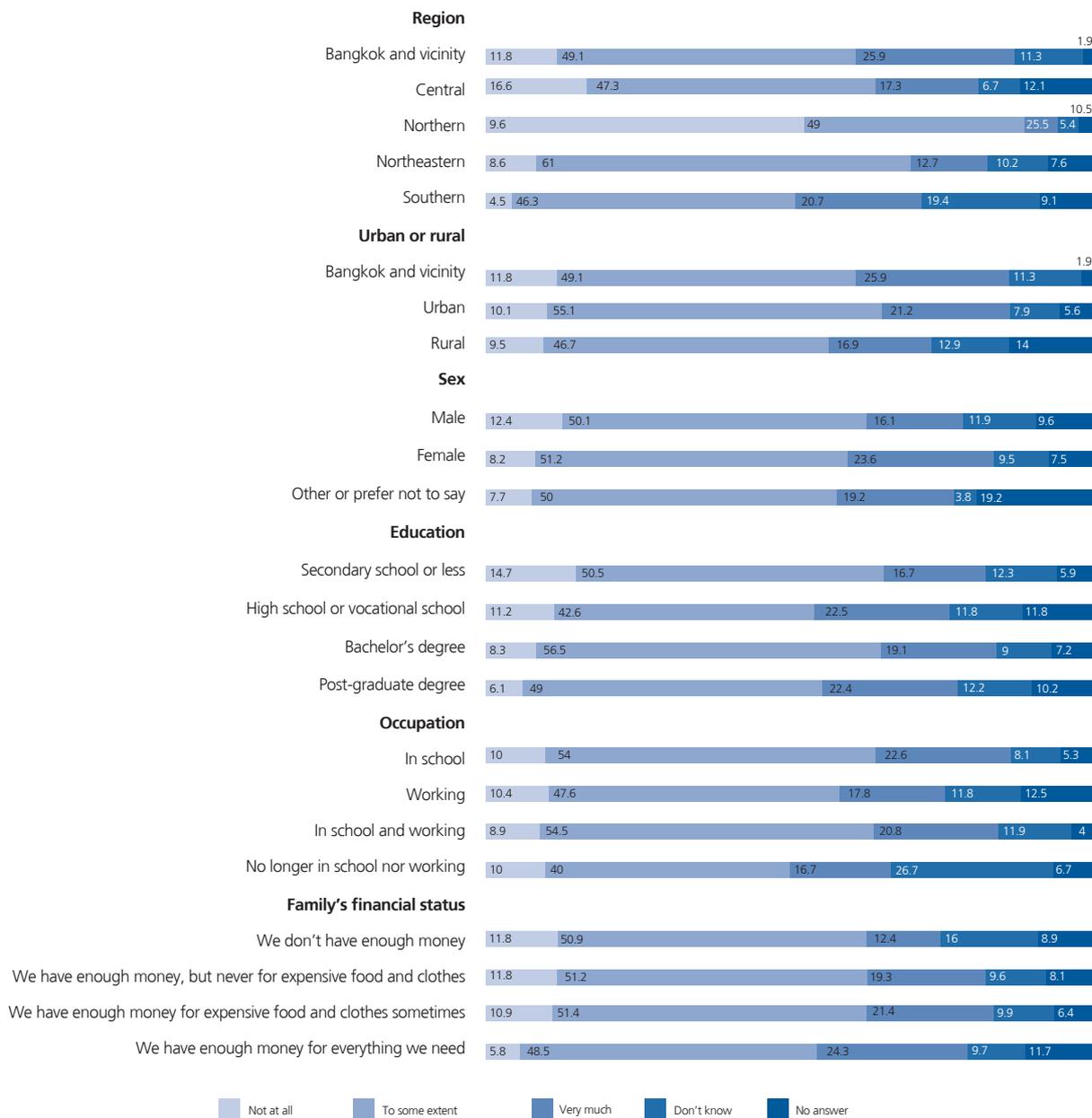
Figure 22. To what extent do your political views and beliefs align with those of your parents? (%)

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A similar pattern emerges in terms of education and place



**Figure 23.** Do your political views and beliefs align with those of your parents? (%)

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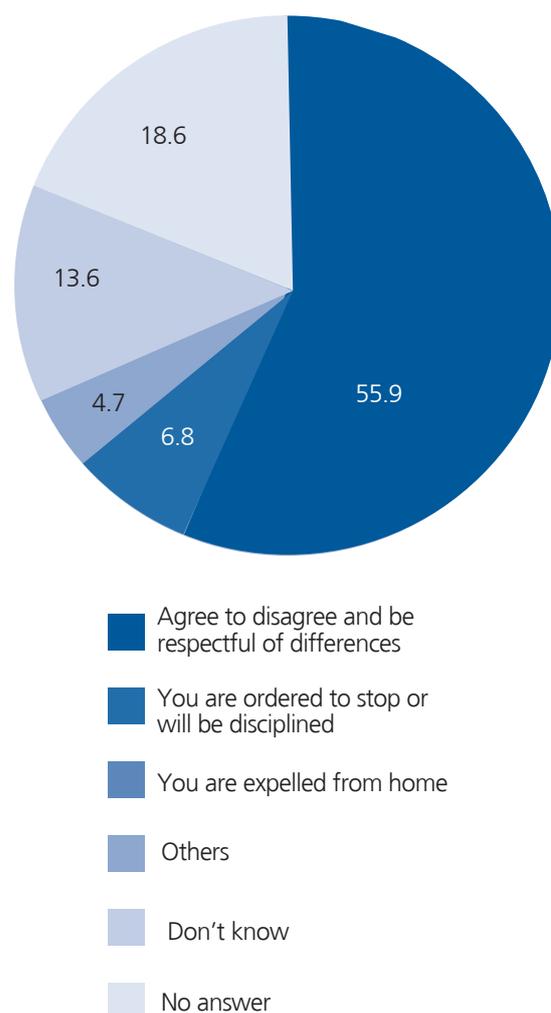
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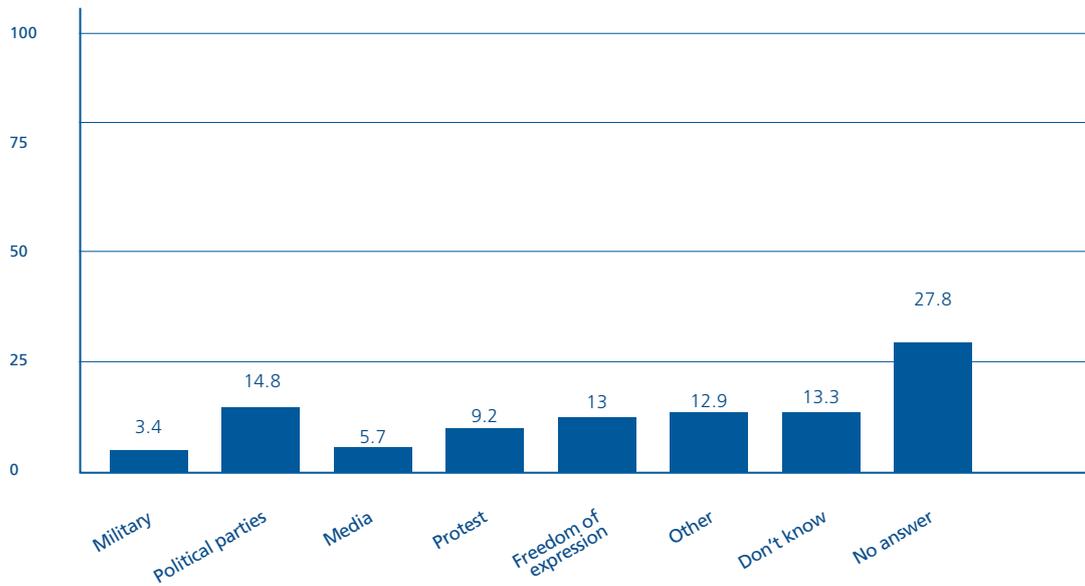
The top-three issues that led to disparity in views between respondents and their parents are political parties (14.8%), freedom of expression (13%) and protest (9.2%). To a lesser degree, political divergence

between young people and their parents also relates to views about the media (5.7%) and the military (3.4%). Remarkably, as much as 12.9% of the respondents chose “other” issues as their response, and 41.1% did not answer (27.8% chose “no answer” and 13.3% chose “do not know”). These figures might imply a major difference between the youth and their parents, but they were unable or unwilling to specify the disagreement.



**Figure 24.** When disagreement on political views between you and your parents occurs, what is the common consequence? (%)

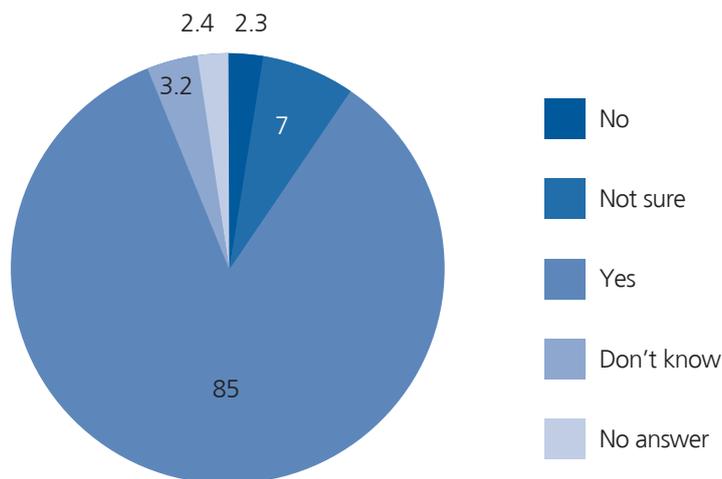
**Figure 25.** What are your main sources of information on political events? (%)



### Voting in the next general election

The responses to the projective question, “If elections for the national Parliament were held today and you would be eligible to vote, would you vote?” reveal an impressive enthusiasm among the young generation. As much as 85% said yes. This is greater than the 74.7%

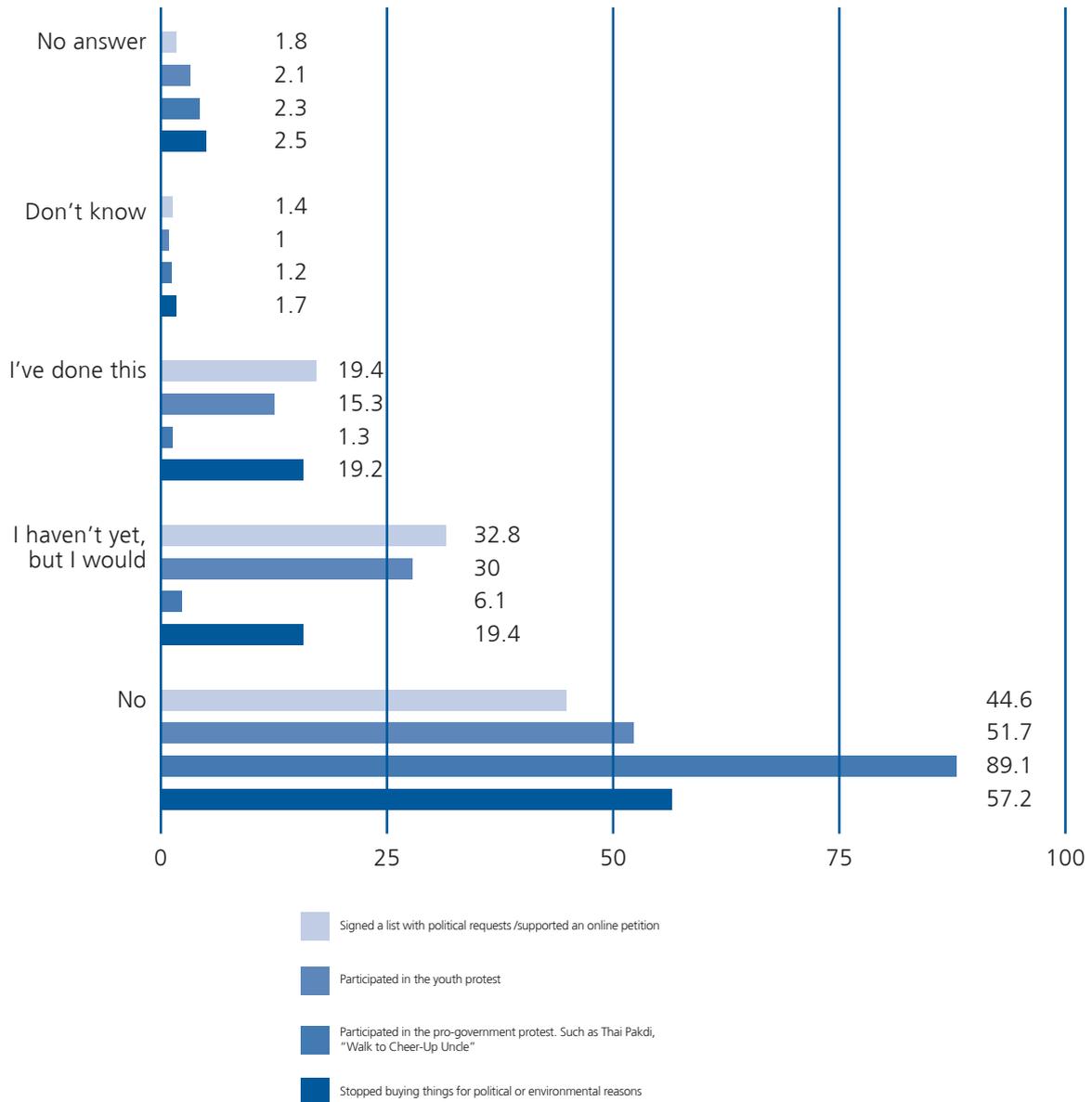
actual voter turnout of Thailand’s entire eligible voters in the 2019 general elections. Only 2.3% of the young respondents said no, while 7% of them chose “not sure”. Of course, the responses do not reflect actual behaviour of young people but rather an idealistic mode of political engagement.



**Figure 26.** If elections for the national parliament were held and you would be eligible to vote, would you vote? (%)

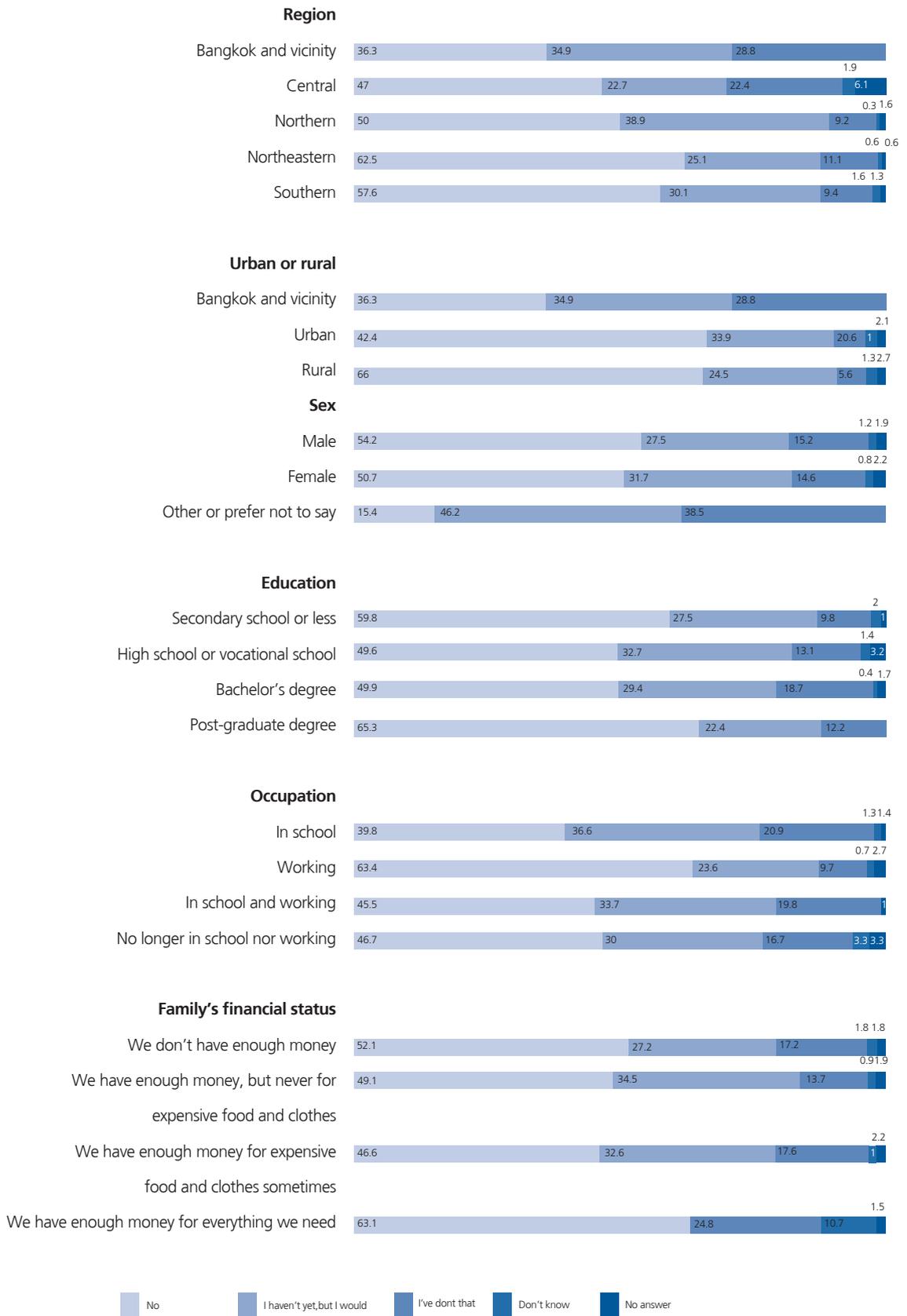
## Engagement with the youth movements

Respondents mentioned they had engaged in several kinds of voluntary political activities. Based on reference to involvement, the findings indicate: 19.4% have signed a list with political requests or support for an online petition; 19.2% have stopped buying things for political or environmental reasons; 15.3% have participated in the youth protests; and 1.3% have participated in a pro-government protest, such as Thai Pakdi, Walk to Cheer-Up Uncle.



**Figure 27.** There are different ways to show your political opinion. Did you or would you try one of the following ways of political engagement? (%)

In general, most young Thais who answered the questionnaire have participated in political events or engaged in any kind of activity listed in the survey. More than half (51.3%) of the young respondents indicated they have expressed their political opinions by other means, such as posting on social media forums, having meaningful conversations with friends and acquaintances, debating over issues, donating to the youth movements, trying to persuade others to vote or joining the Red Shirt protests in the past.



**Figure 28.** Have you participated in the youth protests? (%)

Interestingly, the prospect of political engagement in the future ranks higher than the past political engagement in every category. For example, 32.8% of respondents would sign a list with political requests or support an online petition, and 30% would join in the youth demonstrations.

To dissect the engagement with the 2020 youth movements, cross-tabulation analysis was employed. It reveals that 28.8% of respondents from Bangkok had joined the demonstrations, and 34.9% said they had not participated in the youth public demonstrations but would do so in the future. A significant share of the youth respondents living in urban areas had joined the youth rallies more than the youth respondents in rural areas (20.6% versus 5.6%).

Slightly more male respondents (15.2%) than female respondents (14.6%) had attended youth protests, although the potential participation in the future is greater among female respondents (31.7%). A large portion of youth respondents who identified as non-binary gender had attended the youth protests (38.5%), but it should be reiterated that this group of respondents account for only 1.8% of the total respondents.

Some 20.9% of respondents who were still in school at the time of the survey had participated in the youth protests, compared with 9.7% of the working respondents. About 19.8% of the respondents who were both in school and working at the time of the survey had joined the demonstrations, while 16.7% of those who were no longer in school and unemployed had attended the protests. A total of 18.7% of the respondents who hold a bachelor's degree had participated in the youth protests, the most among all other groups in terms of education level.

In terms of financial situation, respondents from middle-income and lowest-income households have been more politically engaged than young people from the well-to-do families. The highest levels of engagement in the 2020–2021 youth movements emerged among two groups of respondents: The first group is in the middle-income cluster, comprising those who identify as having “enough money for expensive food and clothes sometimes” (at 17.6% of respondents in this group).

The second group, at only a decimal point difference, are respondents whose family has difficulties to manage financially. Around 17.2% respondents from the bottom-most cluster who identify as not having enough money had joined the anti-government rallies. The respondents identifying as having “enough money for everything we need” had joined the youth protests at the smallest portion (at 10.7% of the respondents from this group). And 13.7% of the respondents from the lower-middle-income group had participated in the youth protests.

Three additional breakdowns should be highlighted. First, the respondents from the middle-income households have the greater political interest (49.8%) and greater participation in the youth protests (17.6%). Second, respondents from the wealthiest cluster have the second-highest political interest (at 48.1%) but participated the least in the youth protests (10.7%). Third, respondents from the lowest-income group have the least political interest (at 44.4%) but the second-highest involvement in the political protests (17.2%). Respondents from the financially struggling families have the lowest political engagement in other forms of activities, such as signing online petitions or partaking in raising public-awareness campaigns on particular issues or events.

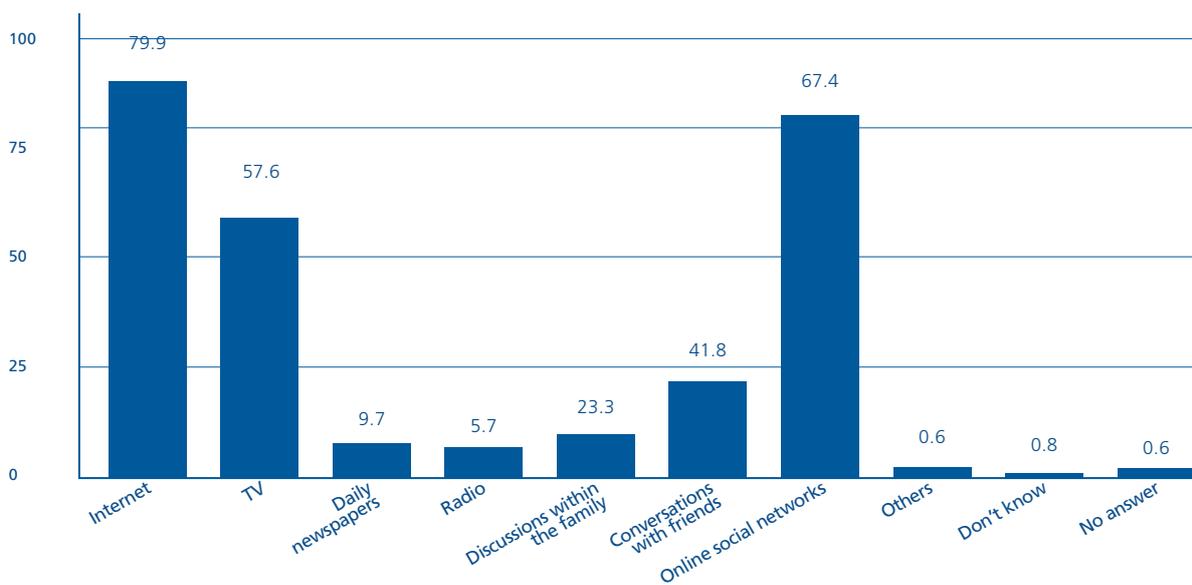
## Sources of political information

Digital outlets have become the main resources for political information, replacing traditional media and analogue channels. Given what has been said about the growing addictions of young people to the internet, it is not surprising that 79.7% of the respondents receive their information on political events from the internet and 67.4% from online social networks.

Television remains an important source for news about public events and political activities for 57.6% of the respondents, but it is seen more as a supplement to information obtained from the internet and social networks. Although television is seen to be heavily dominated by state authorities, it is a traditional outlet that cannot be squeezed out because it contains a variety of entertainment programmes and popular Thai lakorns (soap operas).

Conversation with friends and discussions within the family also a frequently cited as means to attain political news, at 41.8% and 23.3%, respectively. Radio appears to be the least viable outlet, used by only 5.7% of respondents. A daily newspaper is slightly more used, at 9.7%. (The respondents could select more than one answer for this question.)

Figure 29. What are your main sources of information on political events? (%)



## Conclusion

- Nearly half of the young respondents are interested in political affairs in Thailand.
  - Few of the respondents are interested in world politics and especially ASEAN politics.
  - Interest in politics is highest among respondents whose families are in the middle-income and the upper-income tiers.
  - In general, respondents from urban areas are more politically attentive than the respondent residing in rural areas.
  - Female respondents have greater interest in politics than male respondents, and the respondents who identify as non-binary have the greatest interest of all.
  - Most of the young people in the study have political convictions that very much or partially coincide with those of their parents.
  - About 10% of respondents have political views that do not align with their parents.
  - Respondents with more education and who are more affluent have political opinions that tend to not diverge from those of their parents.
  - When disparity on political views occurs, most young persons choose to agree to disagree and be respectful of the differences.
  - Some of the young people have been expelled from their home because of their political views (0.4%).
- The top-three issues on which respondents' political views and those of their parents diverge are political parties, freedom of expression and protest. But 41% respondents either gave no answer or did not know what to say.
  - Most of the young respondents (85%) vowed to vote in the next general election.
  - Youth from middle-income families have the highest interest in politics and participated in the youth protests in the greatest number.
  - Youth from the wealthiest families have the second-highest interest in politics but participated the least in the youth protests.
  - Youth from the lowest-income group have the lowest interest in politics but are the second-highest group involved in the political protests. However, their political engagement in other forms of activities is the lowest, such as signing online petitions or joining public-awareness campaigns.
  - Respondents obtaining information on political events mostly from the internet. Television, however, remains an important source for news about public events and political activities.

9

# **POLITICAL TRUST AND VALUES**

Political values are defined here as cognitive representations of desirable goals in politics. Values serve as guiding principles for an individual's identity, attitude, disposition, political stand and orientation in the political sphere. Political values have an ability to motivate people and to influence people's thinking and decision-making in the political sphere. They are the foundation underlying political orientation. For example, voters are inclined to vote for the political party and candidates who promise to shape the country in a way that resonates with their beliefs and who propose the values essential to them.

Internationally, young people often find themselves marginalized from mainstream politics, and there is strong evidence showing that impoverished and the least educated persons feel withdrawn, powerless and distrustful of formal political institutions. A decline in the perception of political efficacy and falling trust in political institutions has been argued to have resulted in a democratic deficit.

This final section of the study explored young people's attitudes towards politicians and political institutions in Thailand, inspected political values and the political trust of young Thai people.

## Trust in political and public institutions

Trust is a contested term and quite conditional on time and specific spheres. For instance, people might trust the government to issue an emergency decree during wartime or political unrest but do not trust a prolonged continuity of emergency decree during a pandemic situation. Trust judgements are expected to motivate courses of action, people's compliance and their cooperation. Political trust is perceived as a key factor in people's relationship with the State. People's judgement of trust in the government and public agencies is deemed essential to a stable and effective society. Distrust, on the contrary, makes problem-solving harder and may inspire uncooperative behaviour or even hostility in a relationship.

Political trust in this study refers to the extent to which the young respondents have confidence in various institutions and public agencies and the extent to which they see these institutions and particular political leaders as trustworthy, reliable, credible, competent and honest.

Although political distrust has been the norm rather than the exception even in many established democracies in recent decades,<sup>1</sup> the overwhelmingly negative assessments of all political and public institutions in Thailand that emerged in our survey is of grave concern.

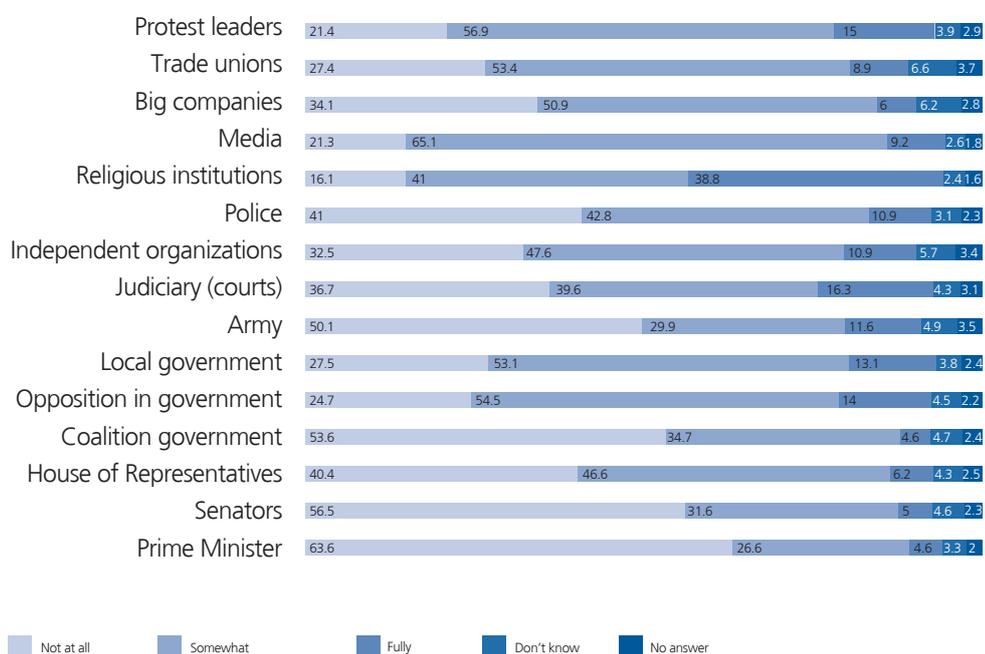


Figure 30. On the whole, how far do you trust the entities listed below? (%)

<sup>1</sup> Eri Bertsou, "Political distrust and its discontents: exploring the meaning, expression and significance of political distrust", *Societies*, vol. 9, No. 4 (2019), p. 72. Available at <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc9040072>.

No institution listed in the questionnaire was singled out as having full trust from more than half of the young people who responded. Remarkably, except for religious organizations, the share of full distrust is predominantly greater than the share of full trust towards all the other institutions.

The two principal powers in the democratic system that can exert influence over people’s daily lives through political decision-making—the prime minister and the coalition government (both cited at 4.6%), senators (5%) and House of Representatives (6.2%)—emerged at the bottom of the fully trust ranking. The young respondents not only have the lowest level of trust but also the highest level of distrust (not at all trust) in the prime minister (63.6%), the Senate (56.5%), the coalition government (53.6%) and the army (50.1%).

Other institutions, including independent organizations (10.9%), police (10.9%), media (9.2%), trade unions (8.9%) and big companies (6%), do not have a large proportion of full trust from the respondents. Six institutions are “somewhat” trusted (or trusted to some extent): media (65.1%), protest leaders (56.9%), opposition in government (54.5%), local government (53.1%), trade unions (53.4%) and big companies (50.9%). The basis of this “somewhat”

trust in each case could be different. The young respondents said they trust media to some extent because there are various sources of media outlets to choose from. Big companies are trusted for their credibility and competence. Protest leaders are highly respected and appreciated for their audacity and courage. And the opposition parties are appreciated for their function in checking the power of the government, for example.

In general, most trade unions in Thailand are characterized as weak and factory based. Their official role in politics is not publicly recognized, but some workers and leaders, as individuals, have been known to support the youth movements.

### Political orientations

Here we explore young people’s personal values with proposed dimensions of political orientation. Political orientation in this study is the expression of values and an individual’s position on the political continuum as ideological self-identification stimulated by their values.

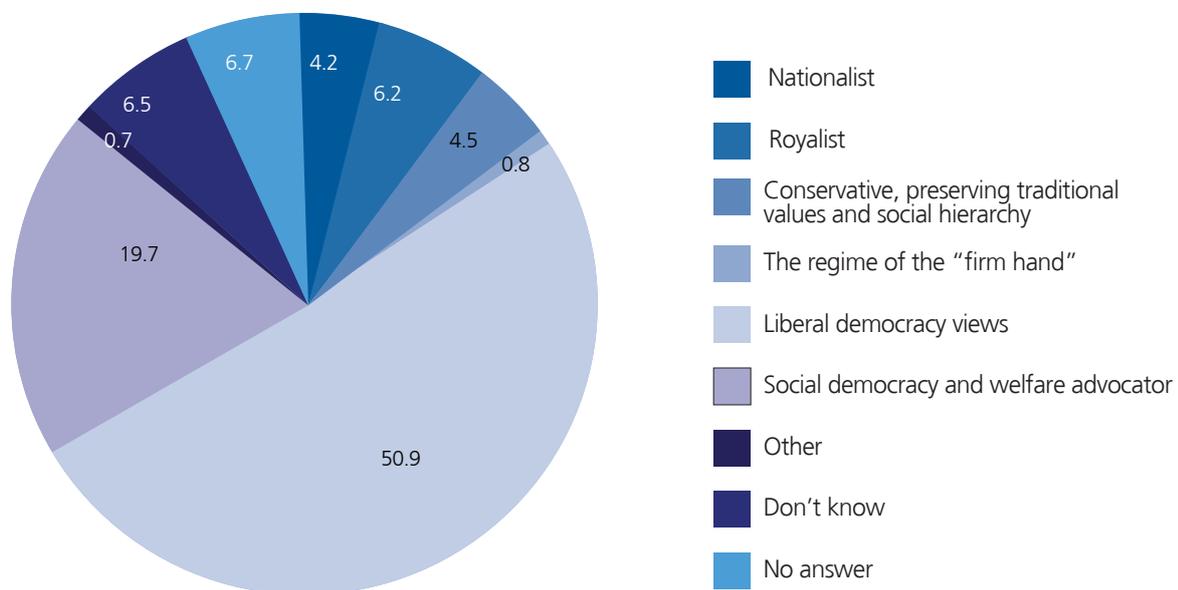


Figure 31. Which political views do you hold today? (%)

With a supposition that a sizeable share of young Thais have a hard time describing their political orientation, the interviewer during each survey interview session displayed cards explaining the meaning of each political view.

More than half of the respondents associate themselves with liberal democracy views (50.9%). The second-largest political leaning is a social democracy and welfare advocator stand (19.7%). The proportion of democratically minded people, the combination of liberal democrats' and social democrats' preferences, among the young persons is 70.6%. This is an impressive picture when compared with the 15.7% of those who subscribe to different doctrines. The share of those who support traditional and conventional political views identify as royalist (6.2%), preserving traditional values and social hierarchy (4.5%), nationalist (4.2%) and supporters of a firm-hand regime (0.8%). At a total of 13.2%, respondents either did not answer (6.7%) or did not know what to answer (6.5%) when asked about their political views.

It is interesting that the largest proportion of respondents holding traditional or conventional political orientations identify as royalist, while a firm-hand regime has the fewest supporters.

A more liberal set of attitudes and a liberal socio-political orientation among Thai youth may be driven by being exposed to social media and globalization. The beliefs of older generations are increasingly challenged by younger people's mindsets, and the democratic influence is undoubtedly getting stronger in Thailand.

### Political opinions

When asked which statement they agree with the most, more respondents (at 68.4%) picked: "Young people should have more possibilities to speak out in public". This suggests that young people want to make their views known and that they long to be recognized and acknowledged. This statement aligns with the 53.6% of the respondents who do not think that "politicians care about the opinions of young people". Specifically, respondents do not think they are represented enough at the political level—even though they have a sceptical view of all existing mechanisms, they still want to be represented through political parties (see the findings on strong party representing the common folks further on).

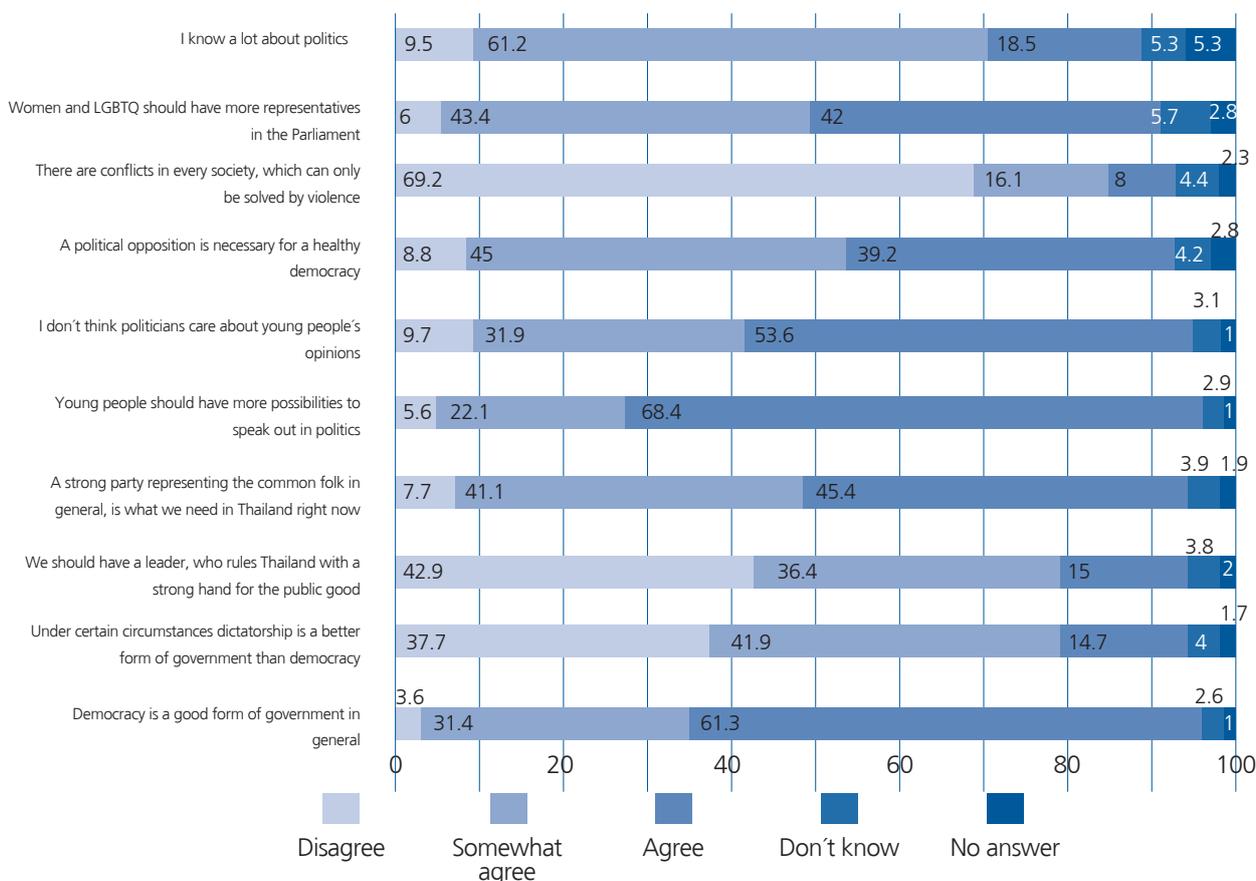


Figure 32. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (%)

In terms of political understanding, 18.5% of respondents claimed “they know a lot about politics”, while as much as 61.2% of respondents think they have a certain level of political knowledge (“somewhat agree”).

The young and adolescent Thais have witnessed at least two cycles of military coups, lost two Constitutions, have lived through several waves of political unrest and deep polarization. These experiences with masqueraded electoral politics and despotic leadership have translated into an unmistakable choice of democracy over dictatorship, with a substantial portion of respondents (61.3%) who agree that “democracy is a good form of government in general”, while rejecting dictatorship is apparent (37.7%). Or conversely, only 14.7% agree that “under certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy”.

It is noteworthy that the political expectation of the young respondents relates to political parties: 45.4% and 41.1% of them either agree and somewhat agree, respectively, that “a strong party representing the common folk in general is what Thailand needs right now”. This feedback is acutely remarkable considering the widespread negative sentiment towards political parties among older generations for the past many years. From a different angle, while more than 80% (45.4% + 41.1%) of the young and adolescent population concentrate their high hopes on a strong party to represent the interests of the common people, the young Thais are not captivated by a populist leader who exercises excessive powers, even for “the public good”. Merely 15% agree with the statement “we should have a leader who rules Thailand with a strong hand for the public good”, while the largest grouping of respondents, at 42.9%, disagree.

Careful analysis is required to understand the seeming contradiction in the young respondents’ mentalities. On one hand, they need a strong party, but on the other hand they are not taken by a strong leader. In fact, these results reflect the articulation of assertive young Thais who have become disillusioned with politicians (elected and non-elected), thus putting more faith in political parties and hoping that “a strong party as a system will protect the interests of the people”. The idea does not at all oppose their thirst for democracy. Further, the young Thais realize that a leader with a strong hand can be erratic and untrustworthy. This belief is consistent with the idea that to nurture a healthy democracy, a political opposition is necessary. According to the 39.2% of respondents who “agree” and the 45% of respondents who “somewhat agree”, a political opposition

is necessary for a healthy democracy. The emphasis on opposition to ensure that no one person or a clique of rulers has absolute control over decisions. The largest portion of young Thais trust in the opposition more than they trust the coalition government (14% versus 4.6%). In sum, the resentment towards despotic leaders has clearly manifested, and a new democratic awakening has taken place among the young, by a large margin.

Regarding gender equality, there is the appearance of acceptance for women and LGBTQ in Thai society. But many people face discrimination from their family, the education system, workplaces, the media and the legal system. About 42% of respondents support the statement that women and LGBTQ persons should have more representation in Parliament, with 43.4% who somewhat agree.

Few respondents (8%) agree with the assertion that “there are conflicts in every society that can only be solved by violence”. The strong disapproval to this proclamation (69.2%) signifies that young people favour non-violent conflict resolution. This sentiment is in congruence with their fear and concern of being a victim of political violence (55.6%), discussed in the section on fears and concerns.

### Stands on the current political directions

With 47.8% of respondents taking active interest in political affairs, the young people’s stance on current political issues are self-explanatory, loud and clear. A striking majority of the respondents (68.9%) agree that Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha should resign. The survey results also reveal favourable views of dissolution of the House of Representatives (58.8%).

Noteworthy is the low endorsement of applying criminal charges against the protestors (6.9%). This unjustified legal action has the greatest disagreement, at 55%. In addition, the rationality of democratic advocators among the young population transfers into sizable disagreement (51%) with the provision of the 2017 Constitution in giving the Senate considerable extra power in choosing Thailand’s prime minister, both in the 2019 general elections and at least one more time in the upcoming election.

The provisional measure under Section 272 of the 2017 Constitution stipulates that for a five-year period, it is not just the 500 elected members of the House that choose the prime minister but the 250 appointed Senators also join the vote. After the March 2019 general elections, all

250 senators selected General Prayuth as prime minister to head the coalition government led by the Palang Pracharath Party.<sup>1</sup> There has been a demand in the public, not only among the youths, to strip the Senate's power to take part in the selection of the prime minister. This provision is seen as diluting the voices of the people because the Senate was essentially handpicked by the military government and the National Council for Peace and Order, led by General Prayuth.

endorse rewriting the whole Constitution, and as much as 20.6% of them disagree. Regarding the constitutional amendment process, 49.9% of respondents agree that the new Constitution should be drafted by Constitutional drafters who come from popular election.

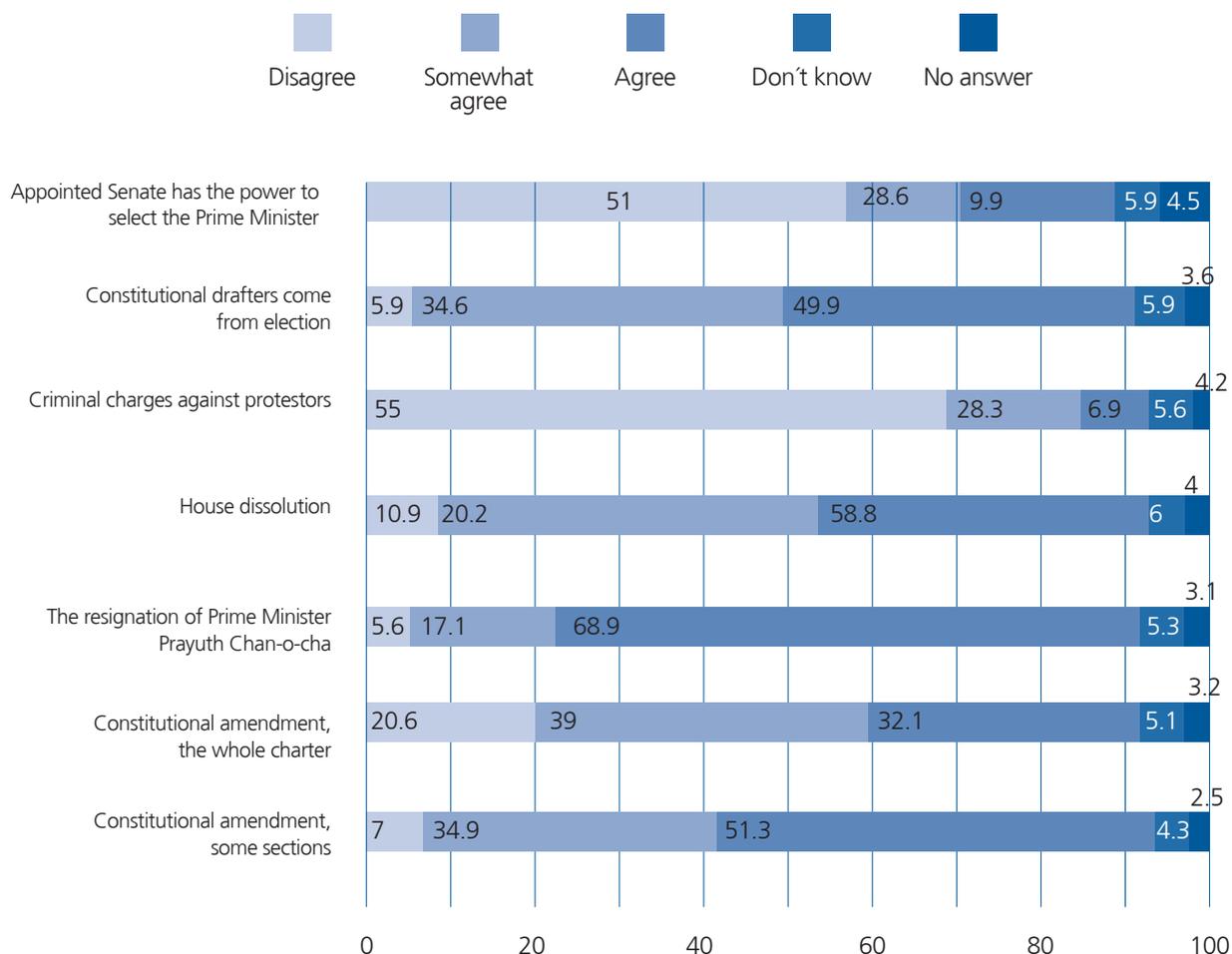


Figure 33. How do you feel about the following statements? (%)

Complementary to the call to switch off the Senate's power in selecting the prime minister is a favourability ranking among 51.3% of respondents in amending some sections of the 2017 Constitution, along with 34.9% of respondents who somewhat agree. This somewhat contrasts the support to amending the whole Charter. Only 32.1% of respondents

### Political values

The study wanted to learn about the respondents' perception of how well Thailand reflects good governance, economic justice, rule of law and democracy. The evaluations of how well Thailand is upholding these values are decidedly mixed and mediocre. The study reveals that in the young persons' points of view (at around 30% of respondents), eight democratic ideals and core principles—freedom, security, equality, employment, economic welfare, human rights, rule

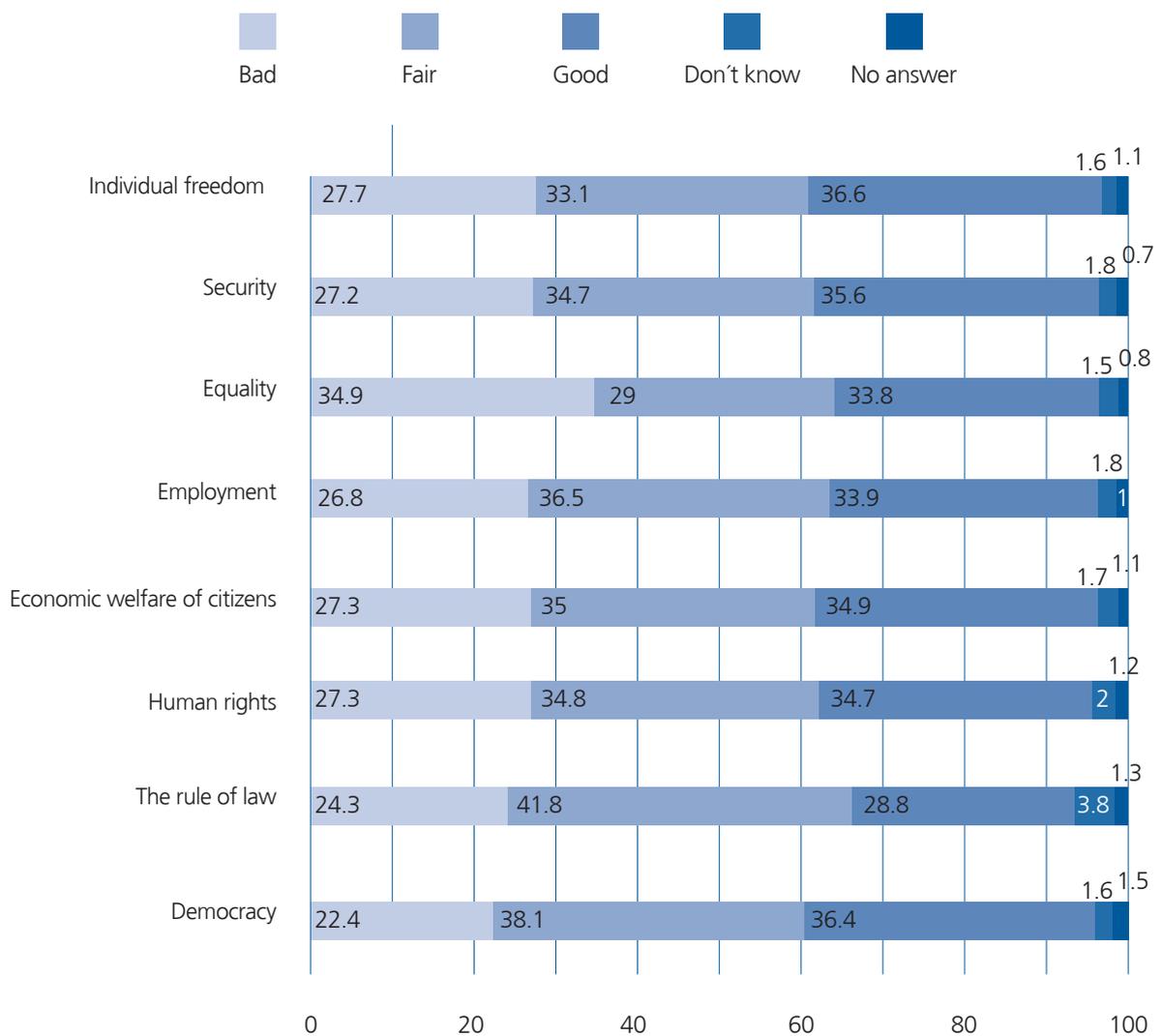
<sup>1</sup> Eri Bertsou, "Political distrust and its discontents: exploring the meaning, expression and significance of political distrust", *Societies*, vol. 9, No. 4 (2019), p. 72. Available at <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc9040072>.

of law and democracy—are not well preserved or cherished in Thailand. Differences among the conditions of each value assessed by the young respondents are minor and hardly noticeable.

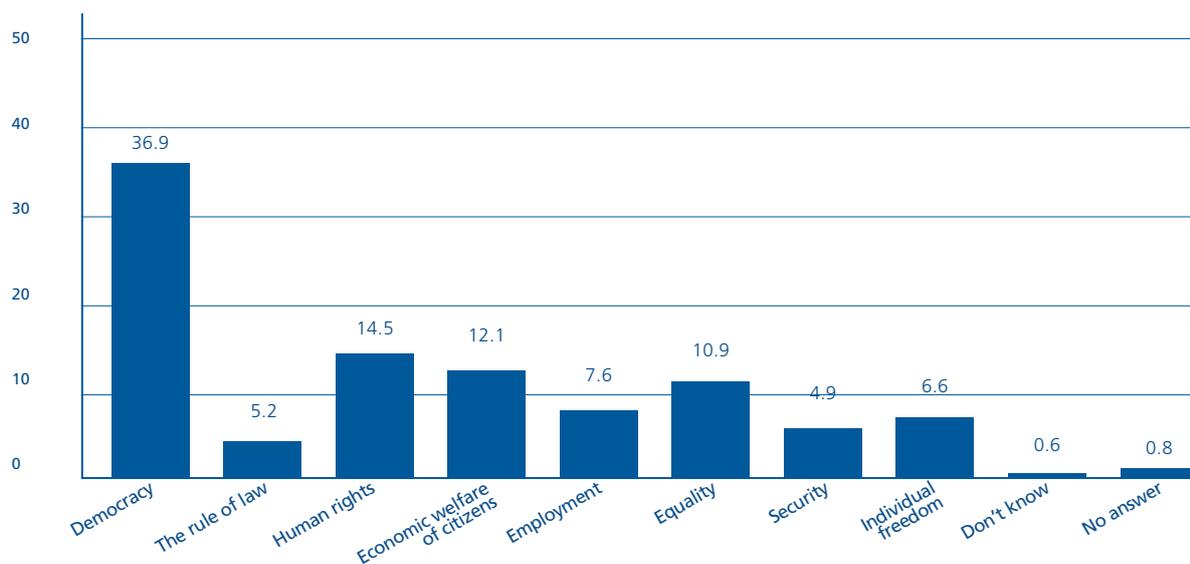
worst condition, in contrast with democracy, which is seen to be in the best shape in comparison with the other values.

The respondents' two most negative judgements relate to equality and the rule of law. Equality is the only value with a larger share of bad than good assessment (at 34.9% versus 33.8%), while the smallest share of the respondents (28.8%) think the rule of law is in good shape. This is not in disagreement with Thailand's realities, where state officials hardly face serious consequences for their misconduct. COVID-19 vaccine equity and allocation and flood control are recent manifestations of inequality and differential treatment in Thailand. In all, equality is perceived as in the

**Figure 34.** How good or bad in your view are the following values in Thailand? (%)



**Figure 35.** Which are the three most important values (listed above) for you personally? (%)



The most important values prized by the respondents can be illustrated by comparing the ranking orders. Three related values stand out: democracy, equality and human rights. The biggest share of respondents (36.9%) decidedly place the greatest importance on democracy.

Having ranked all these elements, we arrived at a clearer image of a hierarchic structure of political concern and major goals. In general, this reflects the resilience of beliefs in democracy among young people. The sceptical doubters might argue that this is due to the fact that young people are more familiarized with the term democracy than any other attributes registered. But throughout the study, the values of democracy have been consistently treasured. It is likely that the young respondents reckon democracy is a prerequisite feature: without democracy, human rights, rule of law, individual freedom and other elements cannot be fostered and sustained.

## Conclusion

- No political or public institution listed has full trust from more than half of the young respondents.
- The institutions with the largest share of full trust are, in order of ranking, religious organizations, the judiciary, protest leaders and the opposition in government.
- Trust in the prime minister is the lowest, followed closely by the coalition government and then the Senate.
- The majority of the youth see themselves as democratically minded (the combination of liberal democrat and social

democrat leanings).

- Respondents who support traditional and conventional political views break down as royalist (6.2%), conservative (4.5%), nationalist (4.2%) and supporters of a firm-hand regime (0.8%).
- More of the respondents holding traditional and conventional political orientation identify as royalist, while a firm-hand regime has the fewest supporters.
- More than half of the young respondents do not think that “politicians care about the opinions of young people”.
- The majority of respondents agree that democracy is a good form of government and disagree that under certain circumstances that dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy.
- Young people concentrate high hopes on a strong party to represent the interest of the common people but are not captivated by a strong populist leader.
- Young people favour non-violent conflict resolution.
- Around half of the young respondents prefer amending some sections of the 2017 Constitution or agree that a new Constitution should be drafted by constitutional drafters who come from popular election.
- The most important values prized by the young respondents are, in order, democracy, equality and human rights.

**10**

# **CONCLUSION**

Globally, today's youths believe that their generation has the potential to change the world for the better and that they will be actively involved in creating stronger societies and a healthier planet. This study contributes to understanding the contemporary political orientation of young Thai people by exploring their lifestyles, expectations, hopes, despair, outlooks, attitudes, dispositions and values. It is essential to state upfront that it was not the intention of the study to simplify the findings and generalize the conclusions. By way of summary, 20 general findings are worth highlighting.

1. One fifth of the youth participating in the survey own more than 20 books, but the greatest number of those books are primarily textbooks. Roughly 2% of the books owned by respondents are about politics. A significant proportion of the respondents, at 18%, do not own any book.
2. The digitalization of Thai youth is evident, with 75% of respondents revealing they have internet access practically all the time. The most popular social networks among the respondents are, in order of ranking, Facebook, Line, Instagram and Twitter. Only 0.8% of respondents do not have any access to the internet. If we translate this figure into Thailand's population, it indicates that about 5.5 million Thai people do not have the ability or means to connect to the internet.
3. The young Thais appeared to be dissatisfied with Thai politics (56% dissatisfied versus 7% satisfied), while they are fairly contented with their family life, with the education they have received and with their life in general. The level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction is affected by their family's financial situation: The poorest respondents have lower levels of satisfaction than those in the better and most favourable financial conditions, and the gaps between these groups are noticeably large.
4. The respondents are more hopeful about their personal future than the future of the country, with nearly 66% saying their personal future in ten years will be better than now and only 36% believing the future of Thailand in ten years will be better than it is today. The largest proportion of respondents with the highest level of hopefulness about the future are from middle-income households, at 73.7%. This group also has the greatest interest in politics and a large portion of them participated in the 2020–2021 youth movements. The Bangkokians' level of optimism about the brightness of their future is higher (at 76%) than respondents residing

in the urban ( at 66%), and the rural (at 62%) areas.

5. The two things the Thai youth listed as their top fears are increasing poverty in society and having no opportunity to make progress in their life (each cited by 68% of respondents). The fear of not having an opportunity to make progress in their life highly associates with the family's financial status. The lower down the financial scale their household goes, the more pronounced is their feeling of lacking opportunity in life.
6. The survey results tell a mixed story on the desire to migrate. Around 10% of the young respondents have a "very strong" desire to move to another country for more than one year. However, when combining "very strong" and "moderate" desire (40%) to migrate to another country, the total figure equals half of the respondents. These figures, however, do not indicate that the young people are determined to leave the country to study or work abroad or obtain permanent residence in another country. They simply describe the sentiment and attitude of these young people—not their preparedness to leave. Improvement of living standard is the major reason for thinking about moving abroad (at 26% of respondents).
7. Satisfaction with the quality of education in Thailand is relatively low: One third of respondents have a negative view. Only 16% of respondents are satisfied with the quality of education. When asked to identify what aspect of the education system should be improved the most, 37% of the respondents believe the curriculum must be revamped.
8. In the eyes of the young generations, important factors in finding a job are, in order: expertise (86%), level of education (59%), acquaintances (52%), connections with people who are in power (46%) and luck (32%). Job security is the most significant factor when choosing a job, followed closely by a well-paid salary.
9. As much as 48% of respondents are interested in political affairs in Thailand, as opposed to only 5% with no interest in Thai politics. Only 17% of respondents are interested in world politics, and 12% have interest in ASEAN politics.
10. The interest in politics is highest among the respondents whose families are in the middle-income (50%) and upper-income tiers (48%). In general, respondents from urban areas are more politically attentive than respondents residing in rural areas (56% versus 37%). Female respondents are more interested in politics than male respondents, although respondents who identify

as non-binary have the highest interest of all (but they represent only 1.8% of the study respondents).

11. Most respondents have political convictions that either very much (20%) or partially (51%) coincide with those of their parents, while 10% of the respondents have political views that do not align at all with their parents. The more affluent and the better educated the respondents are, the more their views and opinions align with their parents. When disparity on political views occurs, 56% of respondents choose to agree to disagree and be respectful of the differences. About 7% of respondents have been ordered to stop their political activities or be disciplined, and 0.4% of the young respondents were expelled from their home. The top-three issues that trigger disparities in views between young people and their parents are political parties (15%), freedom of expression (13%) and protest (9%), while about 41% of respondents gave no answer or did not know.
12. Unlike in many other countries, most young Thais do not shun conventional politics, like elections. Around 85% of respondents would vote in the next general election if eligible, which is a much larger proportion than the 74.6% of the actual voter turnout in the 2019 general election. Additional political activities respondents have engaged in: 19% have signed a list with political requests or have supported an online petition; 19% have stopped buying things for political or environmental reasons; 15% have participated in the youth protests; and 1% have participated in a pro-government protest, such as Thai Pakdi, Walk to Cheer-Up Uncle.
13. To dissect the anatomy of the 2020 youth movements, cross-tabulation analysis was employed. A significantly larger share of the youth respondents living in urban areas joined the youth rallies than the youth respondents dwelling in rural areas (21% versus 6%). Three additional breakdowns emerged:
  - 13.1 Respondents from middle-income households have the greatest political interest (at 50%) and more of them participated in the youth protests (at 18%).
  - 13.2 Respondents from the wealthiest cluster have the second-highest political interest (at 48%) but they participated the least in the youth protests (at 11%).
  - 13.3 Respondents from the lowest-income group have the least political interest (at 44%) but the second-highest involvement in the political protests (at 17%). However, respondents from financially struggling families

have the lowest engagement in other forms of political activity, such as signing online petitions or partaking in raising public-awareness campaigns on particular issues or events.

14. It is not a surprise that 80% of the respondents receive their information on political events from the internet. Yet, television remains an important source of news about public events and political activities for 58% of respondents.
15. No institutions listed in the questionnaire have full trust from more than half of the young respondents. The institutions with the larger shares of full trust are, in order of ranking: religious organizations (39%), the judiciary (16%), protest leaders (15%) and opposition in government (14%). The prime minister and the coalition government have lowest level of trust (each at 4.6%), followed by the Senate (5%) and the House of Representatives (6.2%). These views are consistent with the highest level of distrust (not at all trust) in the prime minister (63.6%). Likewise, there is a deep distrust of the Senate (56.5%), the coalition government (53.6%) and the army (50.1%).
16. The proportion of democratically minded people (the combination of liberal democrat and social democrat leanings) among the young generations is 70.6%, compared with 15.7% who subscribe to different dogmas. Respondents who support traditional and conventional political views identify as royalist (6.2%), conservative (4.5%), nationalist (4.2%) and supporters of a firm-hand regime (0.8%).
17. More young people agree (at 68%) that “young people should have more possibilities to speak out in public”. This statement aligns with the finding that 54% of young Thais do not think that “politicians care about the opinions of young people”.
18. A large share of the respondents (61%) agree that democracy is a “good form of government in general”, while only 15% of them think that “under certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy”.

18.1 Young people concentrate their high hopes on a strong party to represent the interest of the common people (45% agree + 41% somewhat agree that “a strong party representing the common folk in general is what Thailand needs right now”). However, they are not captivated by a strong populist leader, with only 15% agreeing with the statement “We should have a leader who rules Thailand with a strong hand for the public good”.

18.2 The young respondents favour non-violent conflict resolution, and said they are afraid of and anticipate that conflicts and violence are highly possible and might not be avoidable. Few of them (8%) accept the assertion that “there are conflict in every society, which can only be solved by violence”. This sentiment is in congruence with their fear and concern of being a victim of political violence.

18.3 A striking majority of the respondents (69%) agree that Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha should resign, and 59% are in favour of dissolution of the House of Representatives. They also disagree (at 51% of respondents) with the Senate’s extra power in choosing Thailand’s prime minister.

19. Regarding constitutional amendments, about 51% of respondents prefer amending some sections of the 2017 Constitution, while 32% endorse rewriting the whole Constitution. And 50% think that the new Constitution should be drafted by constitutional drafters who come from popular election.

20. The most important values prized by the young generations are, in order, democracy (36% of respondents), equality (19% of respondents) and human rights (19% of respondents).

This study sought to render a critical reflection on how we should understand young people and to send potent messages to the public at large on the value of connecting with the young generations in Thailand. The findings add to the discussion on youth perspectives and engagement by bringing to the fore youths’ assessment of individual, social and economic conditions. The young generations are perceived as conventional challengers and political disruptors. However, young Thais are not all educated or come from comfortable middle-class households who could become game changers. Many are disadvantaged and disempowered, with few chances to achieve an education, societal position or even an internet connection.

This socioeconomic background undoubtedly affects many facets shaping young people’s perspectives, their aspirations, their dispositions and how they imagine school, employment, politics and democracy. It is necessary that the country ensures that the youth of Thailand become a vibrant, constructive force that can address social and economic issues and contribute to the competitiveness and development of the country in the future.

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