

PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE SHARE THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF
CURRENT EVENTS

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Survey Findings on Public Familiarity and Confidence in Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) Members, and Public Opinion over Posting Images of Alcohol on Social Media

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In collaboration with Thailand’s National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA),¹ which conducts regular surveys in Thai society on a variety of issues, ISEAS’ Thailand Studies Programme² publishes selected findings for *ISEAS Perspective* readers, which offer snapshots of Thai politics and society.
- This issue carries the findings of two different surveys – Survey on Public Familiarity and Confidence in Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) Members; and Survey on Public Opinion over Posting Images of Alcohol on Social Media.
- The first survey found that public familiarity with CDC members was relatively low although confidence in the CDC to draft a new constitution was relatively high. Experts note that such findings echo the results of other polls which also reflect high confidence in the CDC. One possible reason for the high confidence is the entrenched patronage system which people have come to expect and take for granted.
- The lower level of public familiarity with CDC members, may be seen as an indictment of the malfunctioning education system and the failure of the NCPO to profile the selection process of new CDC members.



¹ For more information on NIDA please contact Assistant Professor Dr. Suvicha Pouaree, Director of NIDA Poll, at nida_poll@nida.ac.th. The surveys relied on random sampling from NIDA Poll’s master sample database. Data were collected through telephone interviews.

² The co-ordinators for ISEAS’ Thailand Studies Programme are Michael Montesano and Terence Chong. For more information, please visit <http://www.iseas.edu.sg/country-studies/country-studies-programme/thailand-studies>

- The second survey sought to understand public attitudes towards alcohol consumption and advertising. It found that most Thais do not consume alcohol, and that most respondents became aware of alcohol brands through social media.
- Most interesting is the finding that the majority of respondents support the establishment of a law to prohibit advertising of alcoholic beverages.

INTRODUCTION

ISEAS-Yusof Ishak's Thailand Studies Programme collaborates with Thailand's National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) in selecting for publication in *ISEAS Perspective* findings of surveys conducted by NIDA. NIDA surveys seek to provide snapshots of contemporary Thai politics and society. The present issue carries the findings of two separate surveys.

Survey on Public Familiarity and Confidence in Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) Members

After the coup d'état on 22 May 2014, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) was established by the military to govern the nation. To complement its determination to conduct national "economic, social and political" reforms before calling for elections, the NCPO also sponsored the preparation of a new constitution for Thailand. Following the NCPO-appointed National Reform Council's rejection of a proposed charter in September 2015, the NCPO appointed a new Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) to prepare another draft charter, which will, if adopted be the country's 20th constitution since 1932. NIDA Poll, at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), conducted a survey on 8-9 October 2015 to gauge public familiarity and confidence in CDC members with Mr. Meechai Ruchuphan as the Chairman.

The survey relied on data from NIDA Poll's master sample through stratified random sampling by dividing Thailand into five regions and carrying out systematic random sampling in each region with data collection by telephone interviews with a reliability score of 95.0 percent and standard error (SE) not exceeding 1.4.³ A total of 1,251 respondents nationwide were polled.

According to the survey findings, when asked if the public was familiar with or had heard of the 21 CDC members with Mr. Meechai Ruchapan as Chairman, 44.04 per cent of respondents answered, "I am not familiar with them. I have never heard of them". The same

³ The polling sample breakdown is as follows: *Region*: 8.71% of respondents were based in Bangkok areas; 25.42% were residents in the central region; 18.15% were from the northern region; 33.57% were from the north-eastern region; and 14.15% were from the southern region. *Sex*: 54.2% were males and 45.64% were females, with the rest not specifying. *Age*: 6% were below 25 years old; 17.03% were 26-35 years old; 23.42% were 36-45 years old; 38.37% were 46-60 years old; 12.87% were 60 years old and older; and 2.32% did not specify their age. *Religion*: 92.97% were Buddhists; 3.68% were Muslims; 0.8% were Christians and others; and 2.56% did not specify their religion. *Marital status*: 19.82% were single; 74.5% were married; 2.56% were widows, divorced, or separated; and 3.12% did not specify their marital status. *Education*: 28.38% of respondents had elementary school education or lower; 28.7% had secondary school education or its equivalent; 9.11% had a diploma or equivalent; 25.18% had a bachelor's degree or its equivalent; 5.60% were postgraduates or its equivalent; and 3.04% did not specify their education level. *Income*: 14.63% did not have any income; 25.02% had monthly income not exceeding of 10,000 Baht; 27.34% had monthly incomes of 10,001-20,000 Baht; 12.07% had monthly income of 20,001-30,000 Baht; 6.24% had monthly incomes between 30,001-40,000 Baht; 7.75% had monthly incomes of 40,000 Baht or higher; and 6.95% did not specify their income.

percentage of respondents answered, “I am familiar with or have heard the names of approximately 1-5 members.” (See Table 1 below).

Meanwhile, 6.55 per cent of respondents answered, “I am familiar with or have heard the names of approximately 1-6 members”, and 2.16 per cent of respondents answered, “I am familiar with or have heard the names of approximately 11-15 members”. Only 1.04 per cent of respondents answered, “I am familiar with or have heard the names of approximately 16-20 members”; while 2 per cent of respondents answered, “I am familiar with or have heard the names of every member”. 0.16 per cent of respondents were “Unspecified/Uncertain”.

Table 1. Are you familiar with, or have you heard the names of the 21 members of the current CDC with Mr. Meechai Ruchuphan as Chairman?

I am not familiar with them. I have never heard of any of them.	44.04
I am familiar with or have heard the names of approximately 1-5 members.	44.04
I am familiar with or have heard the names of approximately 1-6 members.	6.55
I am familiar with or have heard the names of approximately 11-15 members.	2.16
I am familiar with or have heard the names of approximately 16-20 members.	1.04
I am familiar with or have heard the names of every member.	2.00
Unspecified/Uncertain	0.16
Total	100.00

The survey went on to ask if respondents were confident that the current CDC members would be able to draft an acceptable constitution for the public. 15.51 per cent of respondents answered “highly confident”, while 33.89 per cent answered “rather confident”. Conversely, 20.94 per cent answered “not very confident”, while 11.19 per cent answered “not confident at all”, and 18.74 per cent were “unspecified/uncertain. (See Table 2 below).

The respondents who had answered “rather confident” explained that the CDC was composed of persons with knowledge, ability and experience in various fields such as law and politics. It was believed that the CDC had a good understanding of Thailand’s political system and was aware of the problems from the previous draft of the constitution and could thus make modifications and corrections.

Meanwhile respondents who answered “not very confident” explained that they felt this way because of the fact that the CDC was selected by the government and the NCPO, both of which were not fully democratic. Furthermore, respondents believed that parts of the constitution’s content were to be drafted for the interests of certain groups, and they were unsure if the new draft of the constitution would again be discarded. Some viewed the drafting of the constitution as a political game to extend the government’s time in power.

Table 2. How confident are you that the current CDC will be able to draft an acceptable constitution for the public?

Highly confident	15.51
Rather confident	33.89
Not very confident	20.94
Not confident at all.	11.19
Unspecified/Uncertain	18.47
Total	100.00

According to Assoc. Prof. Siwatt Pongpiachan from the Graduate School of Social & Environmental Development at NIDA, the high level of confidence in the CDC echoes similar findings from other polls. A Suan Dusit Poll conducted in May this year showed that the majority were satisfied with the NCPO for bringing about peace and order.⁴ Other government achievements such as preparations to enter ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), addressing the issue of trade in agricultural products along the border, investment promotion, rectifying the problems in the Southern Border Provinces, and employing additional public health personnel may have gone some way in boosting public confidence. Secondly, the high confidence in Mr. Meechai Ruchuphan as the Chairman of CDC reflects the entrenched patronage system, which may contradict the values of a democratic society. Finally, the low level of public familiarity with CDC members is an indictment of the malfunctioning education system and the failure of the NCPO to profile the selection process of new CDC members.

Survey on Public Opinion over Posting Images of Alcohol on Social Media

In Thailand, alcohol advertising comes under the Alcoholic Beverage Control Act, BE 2551 (2008). Under section 32 of the Act, the advertisement of alcohol in any manner which promotes its benefits or endorses consumption is prohibited. Furthermore, alcohol advertisements may not display the product or its packaging. Alcohol cannot be sold or consumed in places such as religious sites, health institutes, or government buildings. In addition to this, all alcohol advertisements have to be accompanied by a health warning. Naturally, there has been resistance to the Act from businesses and advertisers. More pertinently, the promotion of alcohol beverages and their brands have been proliferating on social media. This has caused concern over the influence of social media, the reach of the Act, and young people's attitudes towards alcohol consumption.

NIDA Poll conducted a survey of public opinion on the posting of images of alcohol on social media. The survey was conducted on 14-15 October 2015 among 1,250 respondents nationwide and distributed in every region at every level of education and occupation. The survey relied on data from NIDA Poll's master sample through stratified random sampling by dividing the country into five regions and carrying out systematic random sampling in

⁴ <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/politics/Most-satisfied-with-junta-Suan-Dusit-poll-30260861.html> (accessed 7 Dec 2015)

each region with data collection by telephone interviews with a reliability score of 95.0 percent and standard error (SE) not exceeding 1.4.⁵

According to the survey findings on public alcoholic beverage consumption behaviour (i.e. liquor, beer, rum), most of the population (49.12 per cent) reported, “I have never had alcohol before,” followed by, “I only drink alcohol on holidays or at special events” (24.08 per cent), “I drink alcohol at least once a month” (5.12 per cent) and “I drink alcohol every day” (4.8 per cent). It also found that there was public awareness of images of alcohol on social media such as Instagram and Facebook, which were in potential violation of the Alcohol Beverage Control Act. The majority of respondents (39.44 per cent) claimed to be aware of news of socialites and celebrities posting in photographs with alcoholic beverages on social media. This was followed by 33.12 per cent of respondents who said, “I’ve never been aware of it”. 27.04 per cent of respondents claimed that “I’ve known about it for a long time” while 0.4 per cent of respondents were “Unspecified/Uncertain”.

The survey also sought to ascertain attitudes towards these images. When asked for their opinion of socialites or celebrities posting images of alcohol drinking on social media, 29.36 per cent of respondents stated that “I believe it is their personal right or freedom as long as they do not drive under the influence or cause trouble for other people”. This was followed by “I believe they are hidden advertisements for alcoholic beverages” by 24.88 per cent of respondents. 20.88 per cent of respondents answered, “I believe it is a personal lifestyle choice and they did it without realizing the implications”. Only 14.56 per cent of respondents chose “I believe they are a bad example for children and adolescents”, while 1.12 per cent answered, “You have to consider their intention on a case-per-case basis”. 9.2 per cent were “Unspecified/Uncertain”.

Finally, respondents were asked if there should be a ban on alcohol advertising in all forms of media. An overwhelming 65.44 per cent agreed because “Drinking alcohol sets a bad example for children and adolescents”. Conversely, 28.08 per cent of respondents disagreed with the ban “because every type of product needs advertising for publicity and such a law would be over-limiting the right to free trade when the advertising is generally broadcast at appropriate times.” Meanwhile 6.48 per cent of respondents were “Unspecified/Uncertain”.

⁵ The polling sample breakdown is as follows: *Region*: 8.72% of respondents were based in Bangkok areas; 25.44% were residents of the central region; 17.84% were from the northern region; 33.84% were from the north-eastern region; and 14.16% were from the southern region. *Sex*: 50.48% were males and 49.44% were females. *Age*: 10.24% of respondents were below 25 years old; 19.92% were 26-35 years old; 22.32% were 36-45 years old; 34.88% were 46-60 years old; 10.16% were 60 years old and above; 2.48% did not specify their ages. *Religion*: 92.56% of respondents were Buddhists; 3.68% were Muslims; 1.12% were Christians and others; and 2.64% did not specify their religion. *Marital status*: 24.96% were single; 70% were married; 2.08% were widows, divorced, or separated; and 2.96% did not specify their marital status. *Education*: 27.2% of respondents had elementary school education or lower; 29.76% graduated from secondary school or its equivalent; 7.12% had a diploma or equivalent; 26.88% had a bachelor’s degree or its equivalent; 5.44% were postgraduates or its equivalent; and 3.6% did not specify their education level. *Income*: 16.88% of respondents did not have any income; 24% had monthly income not exceeding 10,000 Baht; 27.60% had monthly income of 10,001-20,000 Baht; 12.48% had monthly income of 20,001-30,000 Baht; 5.28% had monthly incomes of 30,001-40,000 Baht; 6.72% had monthly income of more than 40,000 Baht or higher; and 7.04% did not specify their income.

Table 3. Do you drink alcohol (i.e. liquor, beer, rum, etc.)?

I have never had alcohol before.	49.12
I only drink alcohol on holidays or at special events.	24.08
I used to drink alcohol, but I've quit.	9.68
I drink alcohol at least once a week.	7.20
I drink alcohol at least once a month.	5.12
I drink alcohol every day.	4.80
Total	100.00

Table 4. Are you aware of images with alcohol on social media such as Instagram and Facebook?

I first found out about it when the cases of movie stars and socialites posting photographs showing alcohol on social media were in the news	39.44
I've never been aware of it.	33.12
I've known about it for a long time.	27.04
Unspecified/Uncertain	0.40
Total	100.00

Table 5. How do you feel about socialites and celebrities who post images of alcohol and alcohol consumption on social media?

I believe it is their personal right or freedom as long as they do not drive under the influence or cause trouble for other people	29.36
I believe they are hidden advertisements for alcoholic beverages	24.88
I believe it is a personal lifestyle choice and they did it without realizing the implications	20.88
I believe they are a bad example for children and adolescents	14.56
You have to consider their intention on a case-per-case basis	1.12
Unspecified/Uncertain	9.20
Total	100.0

Table 6. Do you agree that alcohol advertising should be banned in every form of media, whether or not the advertisements are direct, indirect or hidden?

I agree because it is something that should not be promoted. Drinking alcohol sets a bad example for children and adolescents. Not posting photographs of alcoholic beverages on social media will result in fewer people interested in alcoholic beverages, thereby indirectly reducing accidents from drink driving, fighting and crime.	65.44
I disagree because every type of product needs advertising for publicity and such a law would be over-limiting the right to free trade. Current advertisements are generally broadcast at appropriate times. If people are going to drink, they can buy alcohol easily. We should have more stringent regulations over drink driving instead.	28.08
Unspecified/Uncertain	6.48
Total	100.0

According to Assoc. Prof. Kullatip Satararuji, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Graduate School of Communication Arts and Management Innovation, NIDA, the findings underline the fact that socialites and celebrities are influential when it comes to raising public awareness over news and regulations. As “influencers” such socialites and celebrities, as well as bloggers and various Facebook fan pages, can reach a large consumer base merely by chatting, sharing and forwarding messages.

These messages or images may go viral and be used as an advertisement technique by advertisers and brands. They may also be useful in advocating for relevant educational programmes for public wellbeing. Perhaps more interesting is the finding that most support the establishment of a law to prohibit advertising of alcoholic beverages. Related government agencies may take note of the survey findings and further explore the issue for regulation purposes. This may lead to policies which further regulate the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

The survey also found that most believed that socialites and celebrities should be able to do as they pleased as long as they did not cause trouble for other people, was also revealing. It suggests that members of Thai society, perhaps younger people, place importance on personal rights and freedoms.

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