

THE "KHON LA KHRUENG PLUS" SCHEME: REFLECTING THE ROLE OF ELITES IN PUBLIC POLICY FORMULATION

Vilasinee Jintalikhitdee

College of Politics and Government, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand

Email: vilasinee.ji@ssru.ac.th

Natnicha Chotpittayanon

College of Politics and Government, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand

Email: natnicha.ch@ssru.ac.th

Paranee Srikeaw

College of Politics and Government, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand

Email: paranee.sr@ssru.ac.th

Abstract

This study aims to examine the Elite Model, analyze the role of elites in formulating the "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme, and propose policy recommendations. The analysis utilizes Thomas R. Dye's Elite Model as the conceptual framework. The findings reveal that the Elite Model is grounded in the premise that public policy reflects the prevailing values selected by the ruling elite. Consequently, public policy formulation operates through a top-down approach, flowing from the elites to the masses. The "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme clearly exemplifies this dynamic. It reflects elite values that prioritize addressing economic challenges and the public's cost of living. The policy process was characterized by a top-down directive, initiated by the government under the leadership of Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul and implemented through the Ministry of Interior, cascading down to regional and local administrative levels. Furthermore, the scheme represents a form of incremental change, building upon the success of previous policies to ensure public satisfaction. Elections were utilized as a mechanism to establish legitimacy, with the scheme serving as a strategic tool to garner electoral support. Policy recommendations include reducing the directive authority of the Ministry of Interior, enhancing digital literacy and access to capital, implementing support measures for vulnerable groups with limited technology access, and optimizing the application's efficiency.

Keywords: Elite Model, Public Policy, Khon La Khrueng Plus, Political Legitimacy

Introduction

Public policy plays a pivotal role in society and the nation, as it significantly impacts the well-being of the entire population, encompassing all aspects of human life from birth to death and permeating every stratum of society. It includes all government activities that directly affect the public, thereby being intrinsically linked to various economic, social, and political factors. Governments formulate public policies to address emerging issues (Anderson, 1975) and to respond to public needs. When the public perceives government policies as beneficial and responsive to their livelihood requirements, their support for the government increases. Consequently, public policy is defined as "whatever governments choose to do or not to do" (Dye, 1978). It comprises various activities undertaken by the government or state agencies, such as the provision of public services, the enactment of laws, and law enforcement (Sharkansky, 1972). Furthermore, it involves the authoritative allocation of values or benefits among individuals and interest groups within the socio-political system (Easton, 1971). State

agencies are required to collaborate in policy implementation to maximize the efficiency of state administration, public service delivery, and budgetary utilization, ultimately ensuring the well-being of the public (Tingsarat & Jintalikhitdee, 2023).

Given that public policy entails the authoritative allocation of values, government decision-making, and state activities, the critical role of elites in this domain is undeniable. Public policy is not a direct reflection of public demand; rather, it is a product of elite decisions, primarily anchored in their own interests, beliefs, and values. Public policy formulation in the Thai context can be clearly elucidated through the Elite Model. Elites play a dominant role in agenda setting, policy decision-making, and the allocation of state resources, while the public plays a limited role, serving as passive recipients of policy impacts rather than active directors of policy direction. Despite the existence of elections and procedural democratic mechanisms, the policy process remains dominated by elites through a centralized bureaucracy, patronage politics, and top-down formulation. This reflects that public policy in Thailand aims to preserve the stability of existing power structures rather than genuinely responding to public needs.

The "Khon La Khrueng Plus" (Co-payment Plus) scheme is a key measure under the economic policy of Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's administration, presented to the National Assembly on Monday, September 29, 2025. With a fiscal budget of 44 billion Baht, the scheme aims to rapidly stimulate domestic consumption. The government envisages this scheme as an urgent instrument to accelerate liquidity circulation and foster short-term economic growth, while simultaneously serving as a "Quick Win" strategy to alleviate the immediate cost-of-living burden for specific population groups. This initiative represents an extension and modification of the previous Co-payment scheme, which garnered positive reception from multiple sectors, including the general public, the business sector, and academia. Launched as a strategic move for the final quarter of 2025, the scheme aims to revitalize the nation's economic momentum. The term "Plus" signifies the expansion of privileges and opportunities to a broader range of merchants. This includes small-scale vendors, juristic entities, Micro-SMEs, and community enterprises with an annual revenue not exceeding 1.8 million Baht. Furthermore, the scope extends to the service sector—such as barber shops, taxis, and public transportation—and incorporates "Food Delivery Plus" privileges, enabling the public to utilize the subsidy via food delivery platforms.

This article aims to examine the Elite Model through the "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme, exploring the role of the elite in its policy formulation and providing relevant policy recommendations. Utilizing documentary research, the study applies Thomas R. Dye's Elite Model to analyze the project, with the goal of enhancing awareness and understanding of the elite's influence in public policy-making. Ultimately, this research serves as a foundation for the analysis and application of the Elite Model to future public policy initiatives.

Research Methodology

This article employs a documentary research methodology, synthesizing data from a variety of sources, including books, academic journals, electronic media, and research reports related to public policy and the "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme. Furthermore, Thomas R. Dye's Elite Model is utilized as the analytical framework for the study of this project.

The Elite Model

Public policy originates from the preferences of the elite—a minority group holding significant power within society—rather than the demands of the masses. In this framework, bureaucrats serve as the implementers of policy, while the general public, constituting the

majority, acts as the recipients of policy outcomes. This model operates on the premise that the masses are largely apathetic towards political activities or possess a "subject political culture" (Almond & Verba), thereby facilitating social domination by the politically powerful elite. The Elite Model dichotomizes the citizenry into two distinct groups: The Ruling Minority: Individuals with high socio-economic status who possess the authority to allocate societal values. The Powerless Majority: The general mass population lacking significant political power.

Consequently, public policy under this model does not reflect the demands of the majority but rather mirrors the preferences and values of the elite. The model emphasizes the decisive influence of the ruling class, who utilize their own satisfaction and values as the primary criteria for policy determination (Dye & Zeigler, 1981). Fundamentally, public policy is viewed as a reflection of the elite's selected values rather than the genuine needs of the people. However, elite values may occasionally coincide with public needs, particularly regarding fundamental necessities that require implementation regardless of political orientation.

The Elite Model postulates that the majority of the populace is largely apathetic towards public affairs, lacking deep engagement with government activities and possessing limited access to information regarding state administration. In stark contrast, the ruling elites are well-informed and possess in-depth information. They act as the architects of public opinion, actively shaping and molding the perspectives and views of the masses across virtually all domains. Consequently, elites exert a significantly greater influence in determining public opinion than the public exerts on the elites. Thus, public policy acts as a direct reflection of the satisfaction and personal values of the ruling elite. Bureaucrats function solely as administrators who transmit and implement policies dictated by the elite to the public (Thamrongthanyawong, 2013). In summary, public policy formulation follows a vertical, top-down trajectory from the elite to the masses, as illustrated in the diagram shown in Figure 1.

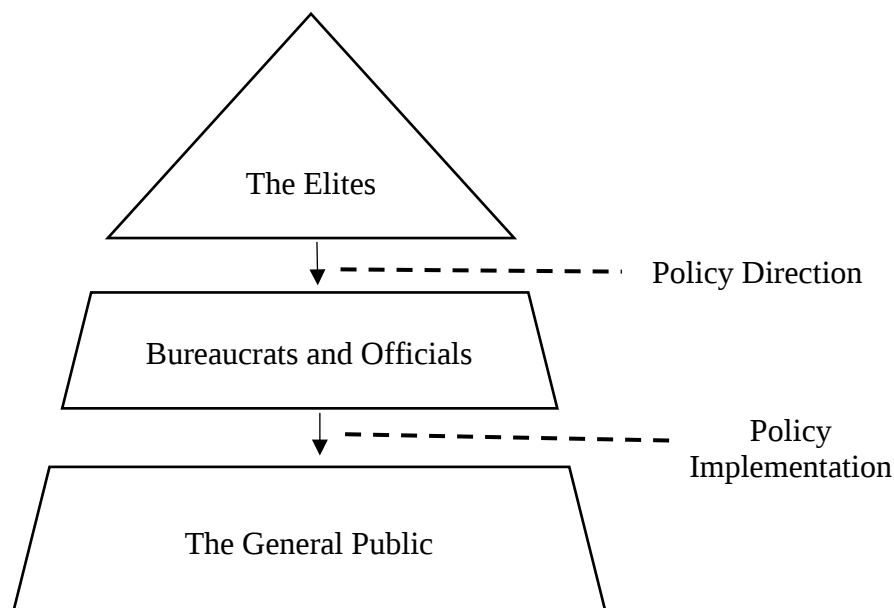


Figure 1: The Elite Model: Thomas R. Dye, 1978

However, the essence of the Elite Model can be summarized through the following five propositions:

1. Social Dichotomy: Society is divided into two distinct groups: the powerful minority and the powerless majority. Only the minority possesses the authority to allocate societal values, while the general public is precluded from public policy decision-making.

2. Elite Distinctiveness: The ruling elites are not representative of the governed masses. They constitute a minority characterized by disproportionately high socio-economic status.

3. Controlled Mobility: Upward mobility from the non-elite to the elite stratum is slow and continuous to maintain social stability and mitigate resistance. Individuals permitted to enter the elite circle must assimilate, accepting and adhering to the established elite consensus and ideology.

4. Value Definition & Hierarchy: Elites define the fundamental values of the social system and act to perpetuate the vertical power relationship between the rulers and the ruled.

5. Incremental Policy Change: Public policy reflects the preferences of the elite rather than the demands of the masses. Policy changes are characteristically incremental rather than revolutionary, driven primarily by elite values. As elites are inherently conservative and seek to preserve their privileged status, any necessary policy adjustments are minor modifications. These adjustments aim to pacify the public by offering perceived benefits without significantly threatening elite interests, rendering complete or radical policy overhauls unlikely.

6. Asymmetry of Influence: High-status elites are minimally influenced by the politically apathetic masses. Stated explicitly, elites exert significantly greater influence over the public than the public exerts over the elites.

7. The Illusion of Democracy: Based on the premise of public apathy towards national affairs, elections and referendums are viewed merely as roles assigned by the elites. In reality, elites retain the power of policy formulation. Elections serve primarily as symbolic rituals that bind the masses to the elite-dominated system. Consequently, the public possesses negligible influence over public policy. Elites continue to shape policies in alignment with their own values. Public policy, therefore, does not stem from public decisions via elections or political party platforms. While these processes allow for political participation on election day, the ultimate authority for post-election policy decision-making remains the exclusive prerogative of the elites.

8. Elite Consensus as Stability: Political liberty is contingent upon the consensus among elite groups regarding the transmission of state policy. As long as there is a unified agreement among elites concerning state activities, political stability—and the stability of the elite class itself—is guaranteed to endure.

The Role of Elites in Formulating the "Khon La Khrueng Plus" Scheme

An examination of the "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme under the administration of Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, who concurrently serves as the Minister of Interior, reveals a distinct reflection of elite influence in public policy formulation, characterizing a clear top-down administrative approach.

The "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme represents a strategic revival and enhancement of previous economic stimulus measures, featuring a three-tiered assistance framework implemented from November to December 2025. Under this scheme, State Welfare Cardholders (Group 1) receive a one-time 2,000 THB lump sum, while individuals outside the formal tax system (Group 2) and registered taxpayers (Group 3) are allocated 2,000 THB and 2,400 THB respectively, both subject to a daily spending limit of 200 THB. For the latter two

groups, the government provides a 50% co-payment subsidy facilitated through the "Pao Tang" mobile application. The "Plus" designation denotes multidimensional expansions, specifically broadening the merchant base to target small-scale entrepreneurs and community enterprises under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior. Furthermore, the scheme encompasses a diverse array of participating goods and services, ranging from food, beverages, and general merchandise to service sectors such as massage parlors, spas, beauty salons, public transportation, and food delivery services.

Analysis of the "Khon La Khrueng Plus" Scheme through the Elite Model Policy as a Reflection of Elite Values

Elites typically prioritize political stability, and the "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme serves as a distinct manifestation of this prevailing value. The government, under the leadership of Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul, strategically opted to stimulate short-term purchasing power—a measure directly correlated with bolstering governmental stability. Furthermore, the implementation of the co-payment mechanism reflects the elite conviction that the public must participate in burden-sharing. This approach underscores the belief that the state should refrain from providing total unconditional welfare (handouts). Instead, the policy is designed to uphold fiscal and financial discipline, a principle highly prioritized by the ruling elite.

Moreover, drawing upon the fundamental premise of the Elite Model—that public policy reflects the selected values of the elite rather than the genuine demands of the masses—it is posited that a convergence of interests can occur. This happens when elite values coincide with the public's fundamental necessities that require inevitable implementation. The "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme exemplifies this alignment where elite values correspond with the basic needs of the populace. The administration under Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul has defined its most explicit mandate as addressing economic challenges and alleviating public distress. By prioritizing livelihood issues and the cost of living as the topmost urgent agenda, the government's strategic direction resonates with the genuine demands of the public, who explicitly seek solutions to these pressing economic concerns.

The Top-Down Policy Process

The inception of the "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme was not derived from public hearings or concrete grassroots demands. Instead, it originated solely from the initiative of the government under the leadership of Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul. The policy implementation followed a vertical trajectory, transmitted from the central administration—specifically the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Finance—cascading down to regional and local administrative levels. The role of the public was confined to that of passive participants, required merely to register for the scheme via the government-designated application. This phenomenon elucidates that the elites act as the primary agenda-setters, exclusively determining both the definition of societal problems and the prescriptive solutions that the public receives through state policy.

The implementation of public policy is executed through the Ministry of Interior (MOI), under the direct supervision of Minister Anutin Charnvirakul. Directives were issued to provincial, district, and local administrative organizations to mobilize support for the "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme in alignment with government policy. Key mandates included publicizing the scheme to the populace and delegating authority to local administrative officials—ranging from sub-district and village headmen to district and municipal clerks—to certify merchant registrations within their respective jurisdictions. Furthermore, these officials

were tasked with recruiting OTOP vendors and local entrepreneurs, verifying eligibility, providing guidance to participants, and strictly monitoring compliance to prevent violations of scheme conditions. This operational structure underscores the scheme's reliance on the MOI mechanism and a vertical bureaucratic system to control and distribute resources conditionally. It demonstrates the exercise of elite power through a rigid chain of command. Consequently, these bureaucrats function not merely as policy implementers, but as custodians of control, ensuring that the scheme's execution aligns with the government's intent and achieves its objectives at the local level.

Incremental Policy Change and Political Legitimacy

The "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme exemplifies incremental policy change, strategically built upon the foundation of the original "Khon La Khrueng" scheme initiated by the administration of General Prayut Chan-o-cha to stimulate the domestic economy (Chutiman & Rungsisawat, 2023). Subsequently, the government under the leadership of Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul recognized the initiative as a successful public policy, particularly in terms of its public popularity. This decision to extend and enhance a successful existing policy demonstrates the elite's intent to administer the country in a manner that engenders public satisfaction. Given Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul's background as both a business and political elite, the scheme is embedded with significant political implications. It is utilized as a strategic instrument to consolidate a voter base and construct political legitimacy, positioning Mr. Anutin as a competent manager of the grassroots economy and a leader who "Delivers on Promises" (reflecting the political slogan "Pood Laew Tham"). Consequently, this policy serves to accumulate popularity to ensure political stability for himself and the Bhumjaithai Party. Ultimately, this public policy reflects the elite's desire to capture the hearts and minds of the public in order to preserve their role as the ruling class in the long term.

Elections as a Mechanism of Legitimacy

Within the framework of the Elite Model, elections do not signify that the public determines the trajectory of public policy. Rather, they function as a role assigned by the elite to instill a perception of public participation. The "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme was utilized as a political instrument to garner electoral support. It represents a public policy agenda established by the elite—specifically, the administration under the leadership of Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul. The public did not initiate the proposal for this scheme; rather, the elite assessed and determined that this policy would generate public satisfaction most expeditiously. Evidently, elections merely provide an opportunity for the public to select between competing elite factions—for instance, choosing between the "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme and the "Digital Wallet" initiative. Fundamentally, both policies remain capital injections governed by conditions set by the elite, rather than structural economic reforms that foster genuine public engagement. During electoral periods, elites from various political parties present public policies they have pre-evaluated for public selection; the public does not participate in the actual drafting of these policies. The "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme follows this pattern. Originated by the elite—Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul and the Bhumjaithai Party—this policy was selected and presented to the public to ensure political stability during his premiership and to secure favorable outcomes in the impending election.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following policy recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness and equity of the scheme:

1. Decentralization of Authority: The government should reduce the centralized directive role of the Ministry of Interior and empower Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs). LAOs should be granted the authority to design co-payment conditions that align with the specific economic context of their respective areas, thereby shifting the paradigm from a "Top-Down" to a "Bottom-Up" policy formulation.

2. Redefining the "Plus" Concept: The government should expand the definition of "Plus" to encompass digital skill enhancement and access to capital for participating merchants. The scheme must transcend mere monetary injections for daily consumption and focus on long-term capacity building.

3. Bridging the Digital Divide: Concrete measures must be implemented to support the non-digital population (vulnerable groups lacking technology access) to ensure equitable access to rights. Failure to address this issue will exacerbate inequality, widening the gap between the elite and marginalized groups.

4. Establishing a Feedback Mechanism: Develop a "Merchant Feedback" feature within the application to facilitate real-time data collection. This will establish a "Bottom-Up Feedback Loop," allowing policy recipients to communicate directly with policymakers for continuous improvement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis through the lens of the Elite Model reveals that the "Khon La Khrueng Plus" scheme is unequivocally a product of elite decision-making. The scheme operates through a vertical public policy process, wherein the elites exclusively formulate policies and allocate resources. Implementation relies on central, regional, and local bureaucracies, while the public functions merely as passive recipients of policy outcomes. Crucially, public policy is utilized as a strategic instrument to generate popularity. Within this framework, elections are interpreted merely as a role assigned by the elite to the masses to construct political legitimacy. In reality, elites retain the ultimate authority to shape policies in alignment with their own values. However, to maintain political stability and preserve their status as the ruling class in the long term, they must simultaneously address public demands through populist approaches. Collectively, these findings serve as a concrete confirmation that public policy in Thailand is fundamentally driven by the Elite Model.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank you Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand, are for all of the supports.

References

- Anderson, J. E. (1975). *Public policy-making*. Praeger.
- Chutimant, K., & Rungsrisawat, S. (2023). The policy communication model of the 50-50 co-payment affecting the image of the General Prayut Chan-o-cha government. *Journal of Buddhist Innovation and Management*, 6(2), 142–153.
- Dye, T. R. (1978). *Understanding public policy* (3rd ed.). Prentice-Hall.
- Dye, T. R., & Zeigler, H. (1981). *The irony of democracy* (5th ed.). Brooks Cole.
- Easton, D. (1971). *A framework for political analysis*. Rainbow-Bridge Book.

- Sharkansky, I. (1972). *Public administration: Policy-making in government agencies*. Markham Publishing Company.
- Thamrongthanyawong, S. (2013). *Public policy: Concepts, analysis, and process* (26th ed.). Sematham.
- Tingsarat, P., & Jintalikhitdee, V. (2023). Leadership of executives in accordance with the principles of good governance of the Secretariat of the Senate. *Journal of Legal Entity Management and Local Innovation*, 9(2), 316–325. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jsa-journal/article/view/257921>