



## Original Research Article

# Analysis of the Local Branches of Political Parties and Human Resource Management in Thailand

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## ARTICLE INFO

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## ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were as follows: 1) To examine Thailand's policy towards migrant workers; 2) To investigate the underlying reasons for gaps in Thailand's migrant control policy; 3) To analyze the registration program for migrant workers; 4) To scrutinize the role of the Thai state as the primary authority shaping migrant policy; and 5) To explore the involvement of key stakeholders in migrant labor policy, including government agencies, entrepreneurs, NGOs, and academics. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, incorporating in-depth interviews and direct observations of Burmese officials and migrant workers in Mae Sot and Samut Sakhon provinces, alongside quantitative data from government statistics.

The research findings revealed that the Thai government faces challenges in controlling migrant workers due to high demand, compounded by Thailand's geographical proximity to economically disadvantaged neighboring countries, limited local employment opportunities, and poverty-driven incentives. The continuous influx of migrant workers is attributed to persistent economic disparities. Furthermore, gaps in policy enforcement may stem from employers' lack of cooperation. The migrant registration scheme suffers from lax law enforcement, as migrant workers benefit from illicit activities, such as accepting bribes from employers and extorting money from fellow migrant workers. Ambiguities in policy implementation also contribute to the persistence of gaps, evidenced by significant disparities in opinions between policymakers in Bangkok and provincial implementers, as observed in Mae Sot and Samut Sakhon provinces. Entrepreneurs wield significant influence at the implementation level, often conflicting with NGOs advocating for migrant workers' rights, as the former prioritize profit maximization. Additionally, support for migrant rights is frequently marginalized on major issues.

## Introduction

Since the mid-1980s, Thailand's greater economic opportunities and higher wages have attracted a continuous flow of migrant workers from Cambodia, Laos and Burma. In the 1990s, as the migrant worker influx intensified, Thailand made a transition from a labor exporting country to a net importer of foreign laborers. With Thailand's dwindling labor force due to sustained low birth rate, migrant workers quickly became a crucial supplement of the labor force, especially in the severe labor shortage sectors or the so-called 3D (Dirty, Difficult and Dangerous) jobs. By 2007, depending on the sources of information, the migrant worker population from these three countries was estimated to range from 2 to 5 million, or approximately 3 to 7.5 percent of the total Thai population.

Despite the contributions of migrant workers to the economy, the Thai government has always considered them a threat to national security. Because migrant workers enter Thailand illegally and there is no mechanism for controlling them, espionage, communicable diseases, competition for jobs with Thais and the long-term social burden are frequently cited as causes for security concerns among Thai officials. Therefore, since the early 1990s, the Thai government has begun to regulate migrant workers. The policies towards migrant workers, however, have displayed much ambivalence. Instead of a total ban on migrant workers, the government has been sympathetic to a strong demand for migrant workers in the business sector and has allowed the utilization of migrant workers. Registration programs have become the main policy tool for managing migrant workers. Throughout the years, these registration programs have tended to vacillate between security concerns and economic benefits from migrant workers.

The Thai government's concern with migrant workers, however, is not unusual. Many developed countries, such as the US., France, Germany, Australia, Japan and South Korea, have encountered similar concerns. While these countries are in need of migrant labor to support their economies, their governments have been reluctant to accept them for fear that migrant workers would take jobs away from natives, cause a higher crime rate, become permanent burden to their country, create immigration backlash and so on. Due to these concerns, many developed countries have produced policies to restrict and regulate migrant populations. For the most part, these policies, however, have been ineffective in controlling migrant workers. (Cornelius, Tsuda, Martin and Hollifield, 2004)

From 1992-2000, the Thai government policies towards migrants aimed at controlling the migrant population and curbing any migrant influx. The registration programs imposed restrictions on the number of provinces allowed to hire migrant workers and the types of jobs that migrant workers could undertake. The registration programs in the 1990s, however, have apparently failed to achieve these goals. The policy restrictions did not deter employers from utilizing migrant workers illegally, nor did they stop the flow of migrant workers into Thailand. By the mid-1990s, migrant workers were no longer working only in border provinces, they had spread throughout the country.

In 2001, as the dependency on migrant workers became more entrenched, for the first time, the Thai government recognized the importance of migrant workers to the economy. The registration programs were recalibrated and the policies towards migrant workers became more liberal. The prior restrictions on migrant workers employment were lifted, and employers were allowed to hire migrant workers in all jobs in every province.

In addition, the government initiated a regularization program to assure that the future flow of migrant workers would be more systematic. To meet that goal, several Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) were signed with the governments of Laos (in 2002), Cambodia and Burma (in 2003). With the cooperation of the migrant-sending governments the future flow of migrant workers would be easier to manage; migrant workers would be employed properly with work contracts, health screening and travel documents. The arrangement in the MOUs would also transform the existing migrant workers into regular workers-process that the Thai security officials regard as crucial to prevent permanent settlement and the long-term burden of migrant workers. Thus, the regularization program would ameliorate the national security and other concerns that the Thai government has had.

At the same time, to improve the management of migrant workers and to proceed towards the agreements in the MOUs, an Alien Labor Management Committee (ALMC) was established. Because many government agencies are involved in the multi-dimensional aspects of migrant worker issues, a lack of policy coordination has been one of the main problems. As a focal point for migrant worker affairs, the ALMC was to make migrant worker policies more effective because transaction costs would be reduced and policies would have more continuity.

Despite various policy reforms and new initiatives, the Thai government has not been successful in improving the management of migrant workers. This study seeks to provide a better understanding of this significant policy issue. Although Thai officials often cited that the border between Thailand and its neighbors is porous and virtually impossible to control, this claim does not tell us the whole picture about migrant worker management. To understand Thailand's migrant worker policy failure, a broader examination beyond the porous border factor is required. The performance of relevant government agencies, the lack of law enforcement, the ambiguous and flawed registration program, the influence of business actors, the lack of cooperation from employers and the roles of labor smugglers and brokers are all important factors that contribute to Thailand's migrant worker policy gaps.

Thailand's problem with illegal migrant workers, however, is not uncommon. Cornelius et al. (2004) note that many developed countries have encountered problems in controlling unwanted immigrants. Their efforts to control illegal immigrants have produced a wide gap between policy pronouncements and policy outcomes. This policy gap has become an observable phenomenon in many developed countries. The main question posed in immigration control literature is: Why do policy gaps occur? (Cornelius et al., 2004: Hollifield, 1992)

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Scholars have long been interested in studying various aspects of the mobility of factors of production. Among the vast literature on the mobility of factors of production, labor mobility is the least studied. Most attention has been given to trade and capital movement, especially how they change over time and how they impact and are shaped by politics. Unlike trade and finance, which to some extents are governed by WTO and IMF, there is no international organization to regulate migration. In line with the realist's school of thought, states are cautious to preserve their rights to decide the rules of entry and exit because they are considered vital for national security and interests (Hollifield, 1992, pp. 21-22).

Interest in the movement of people, however, has been growing, especially in industrialized countries where labor migration has increasingly impacted on their societies,

politics and economies. The magnitude of global migration is reflected in the increasing number of people living outside their own countries. This number increased from 75 million people in 1965 to 191 million people in 2005 (International Organization for Migration [IOM], n.d.).

As the main recipients of immigration influxes, the scholarship on immigration issues has flourished in the U.S. and Europe. Institutions in both continents have increasingly given more attention to issues related to international migration and have produced extensive research on this topic.

International migration literature encompasses knowledge in various fields- sociology, geography, demography, anthropology, economics and political science. Utilizing this wide body of knowledge, some scholars attempt to understand the causes of international migration and propose theories to explain the phenomenon (see for example Massey, 1999, Massey et al., 2005), while others try to understand the consequence of international migration, which deals with issues like immigrant adaptation, assimilation and incorporation (see for example Hirschman et al., 1999, Joppke, 1998).

When considering all the literature on international migration, the state capacity to control immigration is the most relevant to this study. This body of literature emerges as a response to the huge influx of international migrants from developing countries to developed economies in the past several decades. Historically, however, states' policies towards immigrants have not always been restrictive. Policies have varied over time depending on particular junctures related to political and economic environments. Both soliciting and stemming immigrants have been state policy tools towards international migration (Guiraudon and Joppke, 2001, p. 2).

From 1850 to 1914, for example, industrialization in Europe and North America welcomed migrant labor because it played a significant role in industrialization and population building in countries like the U.S., Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany and France (Castle and Miller, 2003, pp. 50-66). Similarly, soliciting international migration was especially prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s, when European states were short of labor (Guiraudon and Joppke, 2001, p. 2).

Since the 1970s, the proliferation of illegal migration has been the defining feature of international migration (Castle and Miller, 2003, p. 94). In 2005, roughly 30 to 40 million people or about 15 to 20 percent of world migrants were unauthorized or illegal migrants (IOM. n.d.). Immigration control has featured prominently in the politics of many developed countries due to immigrants being linked with unemployment and other negative social consequences. While some scholars have recognized the contribution of migrant workers, many scholars also question their cost. The latter group of scholars is worried that migrants are depressing wages, taking away social benefits, significantly changing the ethnic composition, and affecting their national heritage. Stemming immigration, especially illegal immigration, therefore, has become the dominant policy trend in many Western European countries, Australia and the U.S.

Because this study focuses on the role of the Thai state in controlling migrant workers, external factor explanations may provide only limited insights for the Thai case. In addition, external factor explanations overlook the importance of societal interest within a state. Policies on international migrants have a diverse effect on the host society. Taking a realist stance, it is quite inconceivable that a sovereign state would put international norms before the interest of its own political unit. Therefore, governments first and foremost are likely to reconcile the

interests and needs of their people and play the most important role in determining immigration policies.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of this research were 1) to study Thailand's policy towards migrant workers and 2) to find out why there is a gap in Thailand's migrant control policy 3) To study the registration program for migrant workers 4) To study the Thai state as the main force that sets the migrant policy 5) To study key players in migrant labor policy, including the role of government agencies. Entrepreneurs, NGOs and academics.

## **Research Methodology**

This study utilizes a qualitative method as its principal tool for research. The qualitative method repertoire employed in this study includes in-depth interviews, systematic review of important Thai cabinet decisions on migrant workers, reviews of existing research on migrant workers in Thailand and direct observation of officials and Burmese migrant workers in Mae Sot and Samut Sakhon. Quantitative data from government statistics and existing studies are also utilized whenever they are useful for illustration.

Field research for this study was performed primarily in three areas: Bangkok. Samut Sakhon province and Mae Sot district in Tak province. A total of 57 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with three main groups government officials, business actors, and NGOs, academics and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

The study focuses on examining key players in migrant policy, including the role of government agencies. Business actors, NGOs and academics. The study also examined migrant policy from the entire policy process, from policy formulation to implementation, and distinguishes between policymakers and policymakers. By analyzing these actors and distinguishing their roles in the policy process. This study will be able to provide a better understanding of why policy gaps are occurring.

## **Results**

This study set out to explain why policy gaps have persisted in Thailand migrant worker policies. The policy gaps can be measured through the difference between the number of registered migrant workers and the estimated number of unregistered migrant workers. Three main factors explain the persistent migrant worker policy gaps.

### **1. Macro-Structural Explanations**

The Thai government has had difficulties controlling migrant workers because of the demand for migrant workers and the abundant supply of labor from neighbor countries. On the demand side, Thailand possesses the qualities of labor shortage: low fertility rates, rapidly aging populations and negative attitudes towards manual labor jobs due to higher level of education. The labor shortage factor, however, provides only partial explanation to Thailand's dependency on migrant workers. Even at the peak of unemployment in Thailand in 1998, a



large number of migrant workers were still being employed. Thailand's dependency on migrant workers, therefore, is also related to business preferring to exploit cheap migrant labor.

The Thai government has also faced difficulties in controlling migrant workers due to supply side issues. Thailand is surrounded by poorer neighbors Burma, Cambodia and Laos. Limited job opportunities and poverty create a strong incentive for people in those countries to come to Thailand, where jobs pay more. The flow of migrant workers to Thailand will likely continue as long as economic disparities persist.

The high demand for migrant workers and the abundant supply of migrant workers from neighboring countries has created a flourishing business for labor smugglers and brokers in Thailand. The services of labor smugglers and brokers have offered more flexibilities and advantages to employers and migrant workers. Their services have created an alternate, corrupt system, which has severely undermined registration programs and caused policy gaps.

## **2. Flawed and Ambiguous Policies**

Another reason that the policy gaps have persisted can be related to a lack of cooperation from employers. Many employers do not participate in registration programs because they view the registration program as burdensome. The registration programs have not only been expensive, they are also unable to respond to business needs for labor. The case studies in Mae Sot and Samut Sakhon highlight the unwillingness of employers to participate in registration programs, and they demonstrate the financial risk that businesses encounter when they participate in such programs. Improving registration programs by making them less expensive and more flexible may help attract more employers to register their migrant workers. There is no guarantee, however, that employers would bring forth their migrant workers as long as the alternate, corrupt system still exists at a cheaper price.

The lack of law enforcement is another major weakness of registration programs. Strict law enforcement could have improved the effectiveness of registration programs. More migrant workers would have been registered, if employers feared being penalized as a result of hiring unregistered workers. Some law enforcers, however, lack incentive to strictly enforce the law because they benefit tremendously from the illegality of migrant workers. By taking bribes from employers and extorting money from migrant workers they constitute an essential problem. These corrupt officials collude with labor brokers and smugglers, and they are an integral part of the alternate, corrupt system.

Ambiguous policy goals constitute another factor that impacts registration programs and contributes to policy gaps. Policy ambiguities are found both at the policymaking level and the implementation level. At the policymaking level, there have always been debates among policymakers concerning national security concerns and the economic benefits of migrant workers. While the national security concerns have been a dominant part of policy discourse, in reality, the policies have clearly been in favor of utilizing migrant workers for economic development. Such a contradiction has been a major source of ambiguity that undermines the registration program. Rather than encouraging more migrant workers to participate in the registration system in order to minimize the negative consequences to society, the rationale of national security has frequently made the registration program less inclusive than it should be. National security concerns, therefore, have hindered more effective registration programs.

Policy ambiguity also occurs at the policy implementation level. Case studies in Mae Sot and Samut Sakhon demonstrated the considerable differences of opinions between the

policymakers in Bangkok and the implementation actors at the provincial level. Provincial bureaucrats in both places disagreed with the policies from Bangkok and viewed the inflexibility of the registration programs as a main flaw. Provincial bureaucrats have been sympathetic towards business needs for migrant labor and therefore tend to accommodate businesses by turning a blind eye towards the utilization of unregistered workers. Policy gaps in this case emanate from a lack of implementation among the provincial bureaucrats.

### **3. Political Domestic Constraint**

Policy gaps can also occur due to various domestic groups putting pressure on governments to formulate more liberal migrant worker policies. In Thailand, business actors have had considerable influence in this policy issue, while NGOs and their networks have much less weight. The three main business actors examined in this study-FTI Tak chapter, the National Fishery Association and Frozen Food Association-have been deeply involved in migrant worker policies.

These business actors have been able to influence the policies from the policymaking and implementing stages. Formally, business actors participate in the formal policymaking process in the ALMC and are also members of various sub- committees concerning migrant workers. Through this channel, they are able to provide information to the policymakers and initiate policies that benefit them. Informally, business actors may also influence policies by paying bribes to policymakers. Whether through formal or informal means, the influence of these actors in migrant worker policies are apparent.

For example, in 2002, at the policymaking level, the National Fishery Association and the FTI Tak chapter were granted privileges to utilize migrant workers more freely than the regulations in the registration program. Such privileges undermined that year's registration program's goals by allowing more migrant workers to register than initially planned, and it further weakened the seriousness of the Thai government in managing migrant workers.

These business actors have been even more influential at the policy implementation level. The case studies in Mae Sot and Samut Sakhon illustrate that the ideas of FTI Tak chapter, the National Fishery Association and Frozen Food Association have permeated the ideology of provincial bureaucrats. In addition, these actors have been able to persuade provincial officials to ban the official transfer of workers to other provinces for the sake of their business. This ban has been one of the causes of policy gaps. Because registered workers cannot be officially transferred to other provinces or jobs, both employers and migrant workers turn to the alternate, corrupt system rather than staying within the registration system. This ban partially explains reductions in the registration programs from year to year. In addition, the influence of business actors is further highlighted in the incident concerning the Tak governor being transferred. This case demonstrated that powerful business actors can also use coercive means to get the policies that they want.

The NGOs and their networks have been relatively unimportant actors at the policymaking level; and there is still an evident lack of respect for migrant workers rights in Thailand. At the implementation level, the NGOs and their networks' ideologies concerning the protection of migrant workers rights often clash with the business principle of profit maximization. The NGOs and their networks do not always get along with the bureaucrats as well because their advocacy of migrant workers rights usually puts bureaucrats on the spot for ignoring the plight of migrant workers.

In social science, it is virtually impossible to single out which of these three factors is the most important. To do so is similar to trying to determine whether an egg or a chicken comes first. This dissertation does not pretend to have all the answers; but it aims to explain the policy gaps as completely as possible. Certainly, the explanation would not be complete without all three factors working together.

#### **4. Contribution of this Study**

This study makes three important contributions. First, this study contributes to international immigration control literature: While most literature on immigration control has been done in developed countries, this study is a unique case that examines a developing country. The in-depth analysis and the findings of this study reveal several salient features about immigration control in a developing country or a middle-income country.

This study demonstrates that the pressures of international migration do not occur in only developed countries but can also take place in middle-income countries. As long as there are some socioeconomic disparities and the migrant-sending and receiving countries are adjacent to one another, international migration can occur. In addition, the Thai case raises an interesting issue about developing countries' capacities to control migrant workers, especially concerning the issue of corruption. In most developing countries such as Thailand, bureaucracies and institutions are weaker than in developed countries. The Thai case demonstrates that there are many opportunities for bribery and corruption throughout the policy process. Surely corruption exists in all developed countries, but corruption is more prominent in most developing countries due to lower compensation for public officials and a lack of strong institutions to prevent and monitor corruption. For example, a developed country such as the U.S. may face problems with labor brokers and smugglers, but it is hard to imagine that the U.S. law enforcers would systematically collude with labor brokers and smugglers for self enhancement as do officials in Thailand. For one thing, the US law enforcers are better paid and thus less inclined to take bribes. In addition, the US justice system is more developed than in Thailand and is better equipped to detect and eradicate corruption.

Another interesting feature of this study is the lack of involvement of the Thai public in immigrant labor issues. Unlike in many developed countries, immigrant labor issues do not figure prominently in Thai politics. In addition, the lack of strong labor unions and media columnists who report on labor issues in Thailand have resulted in the Thai public being ill-informed about migrant labor issues (Matthews, 2022). In the context of developing countries, therefore, immigrant labor issues may not be as prominent as they are in many developed countries. This lack of public involvement may be one of the reasons that explains widespread public corruption and rampant worker rights violations in the Thai case. Further examination in other developing countries will be needed to prove if there is a correlation between general public involvement and the degree of corruption and exploitation of migrant workers.

Second, this study contributes to the broader scholarship on Thai studies because it provides a better understanding of Thailand's migrant worker policymaking process and its bureaucracy in general. This study found that economic development has been the most important factor driving Thailand's migrant worker policies. With the exception of Prime Minister Thaksin's decision in 2001 to make migrant worker policies more liberal, Thailand's migrant worker policies have clearly been dominated by bureaucrats.



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**Discussion**

This study also found considerable differences in viewpoints between the policymakers in Bangkok and the provincial bureaucrats. This dissonance between Bangkok and provincial areas has been one of the causes of the policy gaps, because the implementation actors do not wish to implement policies fully. Further studies of policy implementation in other provinces and policy issues would be beneficial to scholars interested in Thailand, and particularly those who are interested in Thai public administration. Last, and most importantly, this study may directly benefit the Thai government's attempt to improve the management of migrant workers. This study found multiple issues that need to be addressed.

First, the alternate, corrupt system must be eradicated in order to improve the management of migrant workers. Any migrant worker management system, whether it will be the ongoing MOUS with neighbors or the current migrant registration program, cannot compete with the alternate, corrupt system. The alternate, corrupt system does not only undermine the governing rules and regulations but also creates incentives for enforcement officials to become a part of this alternate system.

Labor smugglers and brokers who break the law should face harsh punishment. Labor brokers who provide legitimate services to migrant workers must be managed (Kemp & Rajiman, 2014). For example, labor brokers charging excessive prices for providing basic help with registration programs should not be a common practice. Government agencies, especially the MOL, should manage the practice of labor brokers or directly provide help to employers and migrant workers concerning registration programs. Eradication of corruption among law enforcers, however, will be a daunting task, as it has become part and parcel of the Thai police (Hung, 2023). Ending police corruption would require persistent strong political will from the government to tackle this problem. It is likely that any change must come from a politician because the police will likely resist change.

Second, the business actors' influence concerning migrant worker policies can be detrimental to the government's policy goals. In many circumstances, the influence of the business actors caused the alteration of the government policies and caused registration policy gaps. In addition, the influence of business actors can lead to irrational policies. For example, the One-Stop Service initiative by FTI Tak chapter was an initiative for self-enhancement rather than a policy that served Thailand's national interest. While the initiative would have been convenient for businesses to draw migrant workers from the detaining camps, if it had been implemented, it would have drawn massive international criticisms from human rights advocacy groups and tarnished Thailand's reputation and image in the international stage.

The exploitative practices of employers should not be tolerated. Like many other studies, this study found that employers are selfish and only care about using cheap labor. The Thai government policies are equipped to protect the rights of workers but the problem is more related to implementation and enforcement. As long as government officials and business actors do not see the necessity to protect migrant workers' rights, migrant workers will continue to suffer. No matter how influential employers are, public officials should not turn a blind eye on exploitative employers or side with employers to the detriment of weak migrant workers. There is an urgent need to change the mindset of employers and public officials with regard to workers' rights.

Third, considering the potential shortcoming of the MOU with Burma, the Thai government must consider other policy alternatives. This study proposes a truly liberal migrant

worker registration program. The national security rhetoric should be abolished because it has had a negative impact on the management of migrant workers. The government has to accept that Thailand is dependent on migrant workers, and all migrant workers should be in the system in order to reduce concerns about national security (Kunpeuk, et al, 2022). Conceding that there is a dependency on migrant workers, the Thai government should make the registration programs cheaper and them open all year round so migrant workers can register on their own and no longer have to rely on employers to advance them registration fees.

If to the skeptics the main weakness of the more liberal type of registration program would involve a potential massive influx of migrant workers into Thailand, then the question policymakers have to ask themselves is whether the current migrant registration program has been able to limit the influx of migrant workers. The registration programs and the border control have been severely undermined by the alternate, corrupt system. In reality, labor smugglers and brokers have already helped migrant workers who wish to cross to the Thai side and to other parts of Thailand without many difficulties. In terms of labor influx, therefore, it is possible that the current fractured system would not be much different from the proposed more liberal system. The only major difference would be that labor smugglers, brokers and corrupt officials would no longer reap the benefits of the illegality of migrant workers.

A more liberal registration program, however, does not mean that the border must be opened. The existing migrant workers in Thailand should be more than enough to serve the Thai economy. To prevent huge influxes of migrant workers, the Thai government has to be serious about border control and guard against illegal entry. Labor smugglers should face the maximum penalties when found guilty. Domestic law enforcement concerning the employment of unregistered workers needs to be improved to demonstrate the seriousness of breaking the law. Employers who use unregistered workers and migrant workers who are found unregistered should be imprisoned.

The gains from the more liberal system would be substantial to the Thai government's coffers as well as to migrant workers. Instead of losing money to labor smugglers, brokers and corrupt police, the Thai government would be the sole beneficiary from the registration fee. Migrant workers would also face less human suffering from exploitative employers, brokers, smugglers and the police because migrant workers would no longer be dependent on them (Jinkang, 2020). In other words, these middle men between migrant workers and the Thai state would be eradicated. Of course, some businesses would not be happy with this change, as it would mean the end of cheap and exploitable labor. Higher wages and improved migrant workers' rights would cause major adjustments to some businesses because the current wages paid to migrant workers in some sectors and provinces are well below the Thai official minimum wage. In the long run, however, these changes could have positive effects on the Thai economy in general. Businesses would have more incentives to turn away from labor intensive sectors or invest in labor-saving methods, which could move Thailand to more value-added sectors.

Finally, the Thai government has been ill-prepared for the scenario that some migrant workers may become permanent settlers. These people include Burmese who will have problems proving their citizenship because they are born in Thailand, and those who do not want to return to Burma due to economic, social and political reasons. More studies on migrant workers should be focused on the integration and incorporation of migrant workers because such studies can benefit the government in the future.

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## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlighted significant disparities in viewpoints between policymakers in Bangkok and provincial bureaucrats, contributing to policy gaps as implementation actors often resist full policy implementation. Further research into policy implementation across various provinces and issues would greatly benefit scholars interested in Thailand, particularly those studying Thai public administration. Moreover, this study has direct implications for the Thai government's efforts to enhance migrant worker management. Several issues requiring attention were identified. Firstly, the eradication of the alternate corrupt system is imperative to improve migrant worker management. Any management system, whether it be ongoing MOUs with neighboring countries or current migrant registration programs, cannot effectively compete with the corrupt system. Labor smugglers and brokers engaging in illegal activities must face severe penalties, while those providing legitimate services should be regulated to prevent exploitation. However, eradicating corruption among law enforcers, particularly the police, presents a formidable challenge requiring sustained political will. Secondly, the influence of business actors on migrant worker policies poses a threat to government policy objectives. Their influence has led to policy alterations and gaps in registration policies. Moreover, it can result in irrational policies that harm Thailand's international reputation. Therefore, there is a need to address exploitative practices of employers and ensure strict enforcement of worker rights protection. Thirdly, considering potential shortcomings of MOUs with Burma, the Thai government must explore alternative policy options. A more liberal migrant worker registration program, devoid of national security rhetoric, is proposed to acknowledge Thailand's dependency on migrant workers. Opening registration programs throughout the year and reducing fees would empower migrant workers and reduce reliance on employers. Border control must be tightened to prevent illegal entry, with severe penalties for labor smugglers and unregistered workers. The gains from a more liberal system would be substantial for both the Thai government and migrant workers, leading to increased government revenue and reduced human suffering. However, adjustments may be necessary for businesses accustomed to cheap labor. Nonetheless, these changes could ultimately benefit the Thai economy by incentivizing investment in value-added sectors. Lastly, the Thai government must prepare for the possibility of some migrant workers becoming permanent settlers. More research focused on migrant worker integration and incorporation is needed to address this issue effectively in the future.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to address the challenges identified and improve the management of migrant workers in Thailand:

1. **Eradication of the Alternate Corrupt System:** Efforts must be intensified to eliminate the alternate, corrupt system that undermines official migrant worker management mechanisms. This includes stringent enforcement against labor smugglers and brokers engaging in illegal activities. Government agencies, particularly the Ministry of Labor (MOL), should closely monitor and regulate labor brokers to prevent exploitation and ensure fair practices.

2. **Strengthening Law Enforcement:** There is a critical need to combat corruption among law enforcement officials, particularly within the police force. This requires sustained political

will to enact reforms and hold accountable those involved in corrupt practices. Additionally, harsh penalties should be imposed on violators to deter future misconduct.

3. Mitigating Business Actors' Influence: Measures should be implemented to mitigate the undue influence of business actors on migrant worker policies. Policymakers must prioritize national interests over self-serving initiatives that may undermine Thailand's reputation and international standing. Close scrutiny and oversight of business practices are essential to prevent exploitation and ensure compliance with labor regulations.

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