

The Role of Government Actors in Conflict Resolution: A Study in Southern Thailand

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Abstract: This study analyzes the role of government actors in conflict resolution in Southern Thailand, focusing on Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces. The conflict in this region is multidimensional, involving historical, political, identity-based, security, and socio-economic factors. This research applies a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical method based on a literature review. The novelty of this study lies in the development of a conceptual model that explains the relationship between the dominance of security actors, weak bureaucratic coordination, and conflict outcomes characterized by negative peace. The findings show that the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) plays a dominant role through a security-based approach, while the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) and local governments contribute through socio-economic development and trust-building initiatives. However, weak coordination among institutions reduces policy effectiveness and prevents addressing root causes.

Keywords: Government actors, Conflict resolution, Southern Thailand, Governance, Public administration.

1. Introduction

The conflict in Southern Thailand is one of the most prolonged internal conflicts in Southeast Asia, particularly in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. This conflict is not only related to security issues but also influenced by historical grievances, political legitimacy, identity differences, and socio-economic inequalities.

Historically, Pattani was a Malay Muslim sultanate before being integrated into Thailand. Centralization policies have contributed to tensions between the state and local communities (McCargo, 2008). Since the escalation in 2004, violent incidents have significantly increased, affecting both security and social conditions.

Although the Thai government has implemented various strategies such as military operations, economic development, and peace dialogue, previous studies indicate that security-dominated approaches have not resolved the root causes of the conflict (Melvin, 2020; Chambers, 2022).

Despite the growing body of literature on the Southern Thailand conflict, most studies tend to focus on security dynamics, identity issues, or historical narratives. Limited attention has been given to the role of governance structures and institutional interaction in shaping conflict outcomes. This gap is particularly important, as governance failures often play a crucial role in sustaining protracted conflicts. This study aims to fill the gap by analyzing the role of government actors from a public administration perspective and proposing a conceptual governance model.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it provides a public administration perspective on conflict resolution, which is still limited in the context of Southern Thailand. Second, it develops a conceptual model linking government actors,

bureaucratic coordination, and conflict outcomes. Third, it offers a governance-based explanation of why conflict resolution remains trapped in negative peace despite declining violence.

Recent studies emphasize that conflict in Southern Thailand is closely linked to governance challenges, particularly weak coordination and state–local relations (Jitprakong & Pongsawat, 2023). In addition, development-based approaches have increasingly been recognized as important instruments for peacebuilding in conflict-affected regions (Dongnadeng et al., 2024; Payo & Askandar, 2024). These findings indicate the need for a more integrative governance framework in conflict resolution.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conflict Theory

Conflict arises from differences in interests and identity (Coser, 1956). In Southern Thailand, conflict is also related to legitimacy and cultural identity (McCargo, 2021).

2.2 Conflict Resolution

Galtung (1996) distinguishes between negative peace and positive peace. Southern Thailand remains in a condition of negative peace (Funston, 2021). Lederach (2003) emphasizes dialogue and social transformation.

2.3 Public Administration

Government actors play a key role in policy implementation, and effectiveness depends on coordination (Peters, 2010). Weak coordination leads to policy failure (Chambers, 2022).

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive-analytical design. This approach is chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the roles of government actors and the dynamics of coordination in conflict resolution in Southern Thailand.

The research is based on a literature review method, which involves systematically collecting and analyzing secondary data from various sources. These sources include academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, and official government documents. The selection of data sources is based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to understanding conflict dynamics and governance structures.

In order to ensure analytical rigor, this study adopts a thematic analysis technique. The data are categorized into key themes, including the role of government actors, coordination mechanisms, and conflict outcomes. This process allows the researcher to identify patterns, relationships, and underlying structures within the data.

Furthermore, this study applies a conceptual analysis approach to develop a governance-based model of conflict resolution. By integrating insights from conflict theory and public administration, the study constructs a framework that explains how the interaction among government actors influences policy outcomes.

To enhance the validity of the analysis, this study uses data triangulation by comparing findings from multiple sources. This approach helps to minimize bias and strengthen the credibility of the conclusions.

3.1 Data Sources

The data used in this study consist of:

- Academic books
- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Institutional and policy reports
- Government documents

3.2 Data Collection

Data were collected through a systematic literature review process, focusing on relevant studies related to conflict resolution, governance, and Southern Thailand.

3.3 Data Analysis

- Data reduction
- Data display
- Conclusion drawing

This study has several limitations. First, it relies primarily on secondary data, which may limit the depth of empirical insights. Second, the absence of field-based data collection restricts the ability to capture local perspectives directly. However, the use of diverse and credible sources, as well as data triangulation, helps to enhance the reliability of the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model developed in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

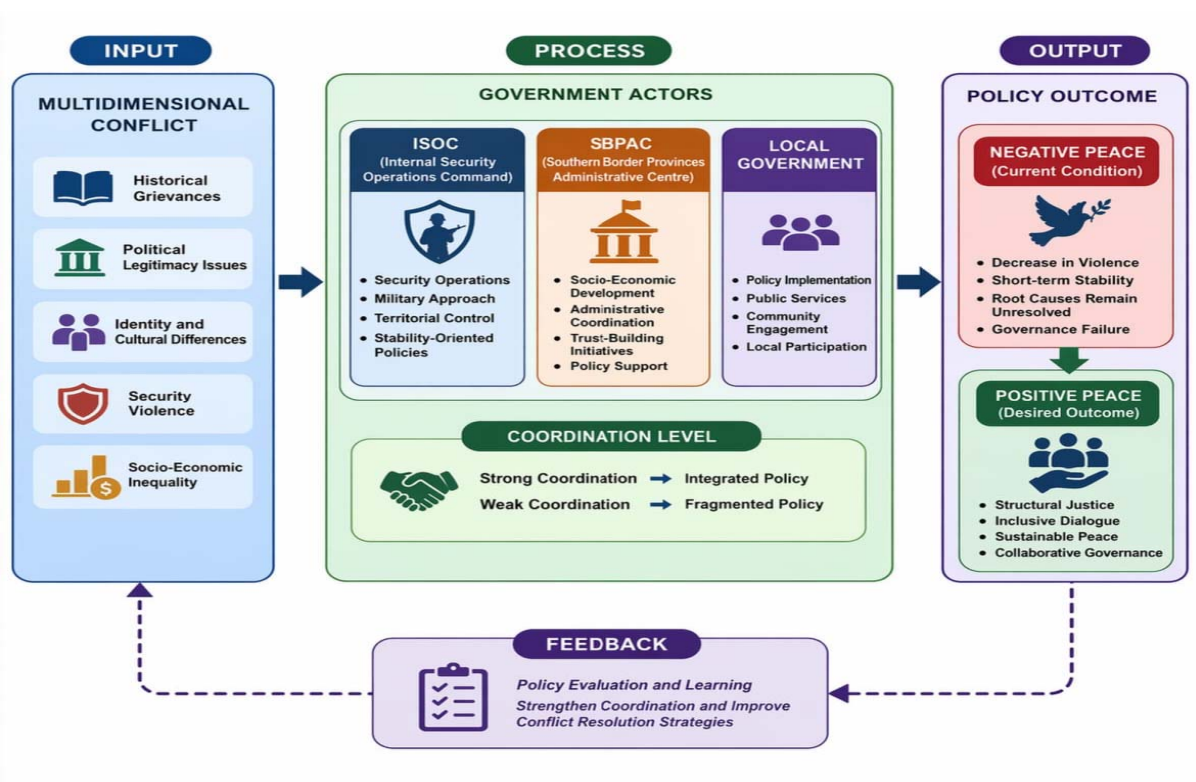


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Government Actors in Conflict Resolution

Source: Developed by the author (2025)

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between multidimensional conflict as the input, government actors and coordination as the process, and policy outcomes as the output. The model shows that the dominance of security actors, combined with weak coordination, tends to produce negative peace outcomes. Conversely, strong coordination and balanced actor involvement can lead to positive peace.

4.2 Government Actors

Table 1. Roles and Approaches of Government Actors

Government Actor	Main Role	Approach	Limitation
Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC)	Security operations, conflict control, territorial management	Security-based approach	Dominates policy; limited focus on root causes
Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC)	Coordination, socio-economic development, trust-building	Non-security approach	Limited authority and decision-making power
Local Government	Policy implementation, public service delivery	Local governance approach	Limited autonomy due to centralization

Source: Developed by the author (2025)

Table 1 shows that government actors perform distinct roles in conflict resolution. However, the dominance of security actors and the limited authority of non-security actors create an imbalance that affects the overall effectiveness of policy implementation.

The Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) plays a dominant role in conflict resolution through security operations, territorial control, and military-based approaches. This indicates that the Thai government prioritizes stability-oriented policies.

In contrast, the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) focuses on socio-economic development, administrative coordination, and trust-building initiatives. However, its effectiveness is constrained by limited authority.

Furthermore, the limited autonomy of local governments reduces their ability to adapt policies to local needs. This condition weakens community engagement and undermines trust-building efforts, which are essential in conflict resolution processes.

Meanwhile, local governments are responsible for policy implementation and public service delivery at the local level. Their role, however, remains limited due to centralized governance structures.

These differences in roles and functions indicate that government actors operate within distinct institutional frameworks, which influence the effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies.

From a governance perspective, the absence of clear role integration among ISOC, SBPAC, and local governments indicates a fragmented institutional framework. Instead of functioning collaboratively, these actors often operate within their own mandates, resulting in policy fragmentation.

Therefore, strengthening institutional integration and redefining the roles of government actors are crucial steps toward achieving more effective and sustainable conflict resolution.

This finding highlights that effective conflict resolution depends not only on the presence of multiple actors but also on the quality of their interaction and coordination.

The role of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) cannot be separated from Thailand's broader security-oriented governance framework. As highlighted by Chambers (2022), military institutions in Thailand continue to play a dominant role not only in security matters but also in governance processes in conflict-affected regions. This dominance reflects a centralized approach

that prioritizes stability and territorial control over inclusive political solutions. As a result, ISOC’s interventions tend to focus on short-term security outcomes rather than long-term conflict transformation.

In contrast, the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) represents a non-security institutional mechanism aimed at addressing socio-economic and administrative dimensions of the conflict. According to Payo and Askandar (2024), development-based strategies have become increasingly important in mitigating conflict intensity and promoting local stability. SBPAC’s initiatives in community engagement, economic development, and public service delivery demonstrate the importance of non-coercive approaches in conflict resolution. However, its effectiveness remains constrained by institutional limitations and its subordinate position relative to security actors.

Furthermore, local governments play a crucial role in bridging the gap between central policies and local community needs. As noted by Jitprakong and Pongsawat (2023), the relationship between central and local institutions in Southern Thailand is characterized by asymmetry, where local actors have limited authority in decision-making processes. This condition restricts the ability of local governments to implement context-specific policies that address the root causes of conflict, particularly those related to identity, culture, and socio-economic disparities.

The interaction among these three actors illustrates a governance structure that is heavily imbalanced. Security actors dominate decision-making processes, while non-security and local actors operate within constrained institutional spaces. This imbalance reduces the potential for collaborative governance, which is widely recognized as essential for effective conflict resolution (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Without meaningful integration among these actors, policies are likely to remain fragmented and insufficient in addressing the multidimensional nature of the conflict.

Therefore, strengthening the role of non-security actors and enhancing local government autonomy are critical steps toward achieving a more balanced governance framework. Such an approach would enable the integration of security, development, and participatory strategies, ultimately contributing to sustainable peacebuilding in Southern Thailand.

This condition reflects broader governance dynamics in which state institutions tend to prioritize control and stability over inclusiveness. As argued by Fukuyama (2013), governance quality is determined not only by state capacity but also by institutional effectiveness and accountability. In the context of Southern Thailand, the imbalance among government actors indicates weak institutional integration, which limits policy effectiveness.

Moreover, the dominance of centralized authority aligns with the concept of state control described by Scott (1998), where governments prioritize order and legibility over local complexity. This approach often overlooks local identities and social dynamics, thereby reducing the effectiveness of conflict resolution policies.

4.3 Coordination Issues

Table 2. Coordination Challenges Among Government Institutions

Aspect	Condition	Impact
Authority	Overlapping roles	Inefficiency in policy implementation
Policy	Inconsistency across institutions	Weak coordination and fragmented strategies
Bureaucracy	Complex administrative procedures	Slow decision-making and response

Source: Developed by the author (2025)

Table 2 indicates that coordination challenges among government institutions significantly affect the effectiveness of conflict resolution policies. These issues contribute to fragmented governance and limit policy integration.

Coordination among government institutions faces several challenges. First, overlapping authority between central and local institutions creates inefficiencies in policy implementation. Second, policy inconsistency reduces the effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies. Third, bureaucratic complexity slows down decision-making processes, limiting the responsiveness of government interventions.

These coordination challenges also reflect deeper institutional and governance problems within the state structure. According to Peters (2010), effective public administration requires not only formal coordination mechanisms but also clear institutional roles and shared policy objectives. In the context of Southern Thailand, the absence of these elements results in fragmented policy implementation and weak inter-agency collaboration.

Furthermore, the overlapping authority between security and administrative institutions creates what is often referred to as “institutional competition,” where agencies prioritize their own mandates rather than collective outcomes. This condition reduces policy coherence and leads to inefficiencies in conflict management. As highlighted by Chambers (2022), the dominance of military institutions in governance structures often limits the role of civilian agencies, thereby weakening horizontal coordination.

In addition, bureaucratic complexity and hierarchical decision-making processes hinder timely responses to conflict dynamics. This is particularly problematic in conflict-affected areas where rapid and adaptive policy responses are required. The slow decision-making process reduces the effectiveness of interventions and may exacerbate tensions at the local level.

From a governance perspective, these coordination problems indicate the absence of integrated governance mechanisms that can align the roles of different actors. Collaborative governance frameworks, as proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008), emphasize the importance of shared decision-making, trust-building, and institutional integration. However, such mechanisms remain underdeveloped in Southern Thailand, limiting the potential for comprehensive conflict resolution.

Therefore, improving coordination requires not only administrative reforms but also a shift in governance approach toward more inclusive and integrated policy frameworks. Strengthening communication, clarifying institutional roles, and promoting inter-agency collaboration are essential to enhance the effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies.

These coordination challenges can also be understood through institutional theory, which emphasizes the role of formal and informal rules in shaping organizational behavior (North, 1990). In this case, overlapping authority and fragmented structures indicate weak institutional arrangements that hinder effective governance.

Furthermore, the lack of coordination reflects what March and Olsen (1989) describe as institutional inconsistency, where organizations operate based on internal logic rather than collective goals. This condition reduces policy coherence and limits the effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies.

4.4 Discussion

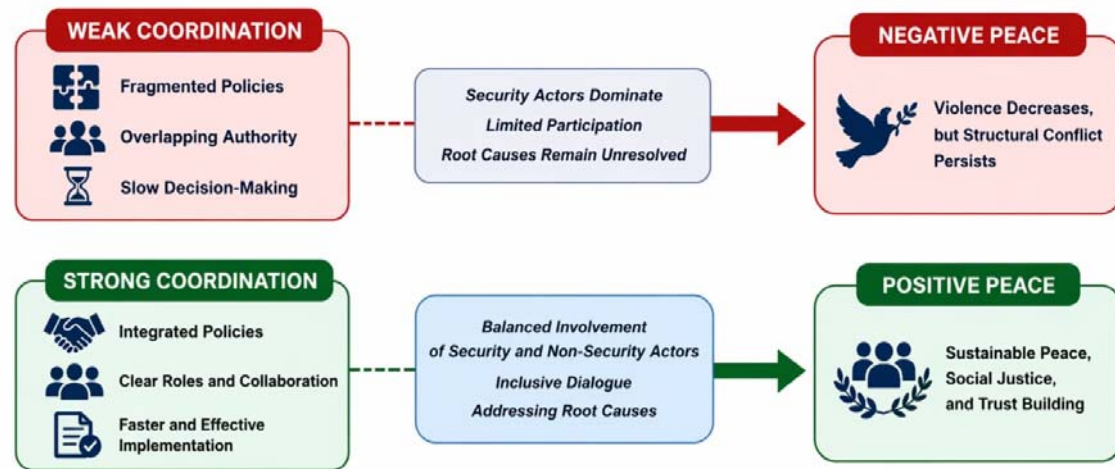


Figure 2. Relationship Between Coordination and Peace Outcomes

Source: Developed by the author (2025)

Figure 2 illustrates that the level of coordination among government actors significantly influences conflict resolution outcomes. Weak coordination tends to result in negative peace, while strong coordination supports the achievement of sustainable positive peace.

The dominance of security actors shows a focus on short-term stability. Although violence has decreased, the conflict remains unresolved structurally.

This reflects a governance failure in integrating actors effectively. A collaborative governance approach is necessary.

This finding is consistent with recent studies highlighting that weak coordination and fragmented governance structures remain key obstacles in conflict management (Jitprakong & Pongsawat, 2023). Moreover, development-oriented policies play an important role in reducing tensions and supporting long-term peacebuilding (Dongnadeng et al., 2024; Payo & Askandar, 2024).

However, without strong institutional coordination, these initiatives tend to produce limited impact, reinforcing the persistence of negative peace conditions.

In addition, the dominance of security-based approaches reflects a path dependency in Thailand's governance strategy, where military institutions continue to play a central role in managing conflict. This condition limits the flexibility of policy responses and reduces opportunities for inclusive governance.

From a public administration perspective, the imbalance between security and non-security actors indicates the absence of collaborative governance mechanisms. Effective conflict resolution requires not only coordination but also the integration of diverse stakeholders, including civil society and local communities.

Furthermore, the persistence of negative peace suggests that existing policies are reactive rather than transformative. While security measures may reduce violence in the short term, they do not address structural inequalities and identity-based grievances that underlie the conflict. Therefore, a shift toward adaptive and participatory governance is necessary to ensure long-term peacebuilding outcomes.

This indicates that without governance reform, conflict resolution efforts are likely to remain limited and unsustainable.

The findings of this study also suggest that conflict resolution in Southern Thailand is not merely a policy implementation issue but a structural governance problem. The persistence of negative peace indicates that existing strategies are unable to transform the underlying causes of conflict, particularly those related to identity, inequality, and political legitimacy.

This condition can be understood through the lens of conflict transformation theory, which emphasizes the need to address structural and relational dimensions of conflict rather than focusing solely on security stabilization (Lederach, 2003). The dominance of security actors, combined with weak coordination, limits the potential for such transformation by prioritizing control over inclusion.

Moreover, the imbalance between central authority and local participation reflects a lack of institutional inclusiveness. Effective conflict resolution requires not only coordination among government actors but also meaningful participation from local communities. Without this, policies risk being perceived as externally imposed, thereby reducing their legitimacy and effectiveness.

In this context, the integration of collaborative governance and conflict transformation approaches becomes essential. Collaborative governance provides a framework for inclusive decision-making and stakeholder engagement, while conflict transformation emphasizes long-term structural change. The combination of these approaches can offer a more comprehensive strategy for achieving sustainable peace.

Therefore, future policy directions should focus on strengthening participatory mechanisms, enhancing institutional inclusiveness, and promoting long-term structural reforms. Such efforts are necessary to move beyond negative peace toward a more sustainable and positive peace in Southern Thailand.

From a broader perspective, the persistence of conflict in Southern Thailand can also be linked to governance capacity and institutional development. As highlighted by Leftwich (2000), effective governance is essential for managing complex social conflicts. Weak institutional coordination and limited inclusiveness often lead to policy failure in conflict-affected regions.

In addition, Putnam (1993) emphasizes the importance of social capital in supporting effective governance. The lack of trust between the state and local communities in Southern Thailand further complicates conflict resolution efforts. Therefore, strengthening trust and institutional legitimacy is crucial for achieving sustainable peace.

4.5 Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes theoretically by bridging conflict resolution theory and public administration perspectives within the context of protracted internal conflict. While previous studies on Southern Thailand have predominantly focused on security and identity dimensions, this research highlights the importance of governance structure, institutional interaction, and coordination in shaping conflict outcomes.

First, this study extends Galtung's concept of negative and positive peace by demonstrating how governance arrangements influence the persistence of negative peace. The findings show that the dominance of security actors, combined with weak inter-agency coordination, creates a condition where violence may be reduced, but structural issues remain unresolved. This suggests that negative peace is not only a product of conflict dynamics but also a consequence of governance failure.

Second, this research contributes to public administration literature by emphasizing the role of inter-institutional coordination in conflict resolution. The study shows that fragmented institutional structures and overlapping authority hinder policy effectiveness,

thereby reinforcing conflict persistence. This finding supports and extends existing arguments that coordination is a critical determinant of governance performance (Peters, 2010).

Third, this study introduces an integrative analytical framework that combines security, development, and governance approaches. By linking government actors, coordination mechanisms, and policy outcomes, the proposed model provides a more comprehensive understanding of conflict resolution processes in complex environments.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of collaborative governance as a pathway toward sustainable peace. The findings suggest that effective conflict resolution requires not only the presence of multiple actors but also the quality of their interaction, inclusiveness, and institutional integration. This contribution provides a foundation for future research to further explore governance-based approaches in conflict-affected regions.

5. Conclusion

Conflict resolution in Southern Thailand remains constrained by the dominance of security approaches and weak institutional coordination, resulting in the persistence of negative peace.

To achieve positive peace, it is necessary to:

- Strengthen coordination
- Empower non-security actors
- Promote inclusive dialogue

From a policy perspective, this study suggests that governments in conflict-affected regions should prioritize governance reform alongside security measures. Strengthening institutional coordination, enhancing local participation, and promoting inclusive decision-making are critical for achieving sustainable peace. These findings are not only relevant to Southern Thailand but also applicable to other regions experiencing similar governance challenges.

The study highlights that weak coordination is the primary factor limiting policy effectiveness in conflict resolution. These findings provide important implications for improving governance-based conflict resolution strategies.

These findings highlight that governance quality is a critical determinant of sustainable conflict resolution outcomes.

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