

Online and Offline Support for Marriage Equality in Thailand

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On 23 January 2025, Thailand’s Marriage Equality Law came into effect.¹ Last year, Parliament² overwhelmingly approved the bill, and the King endorsed³ the Act in September 2024. The law replaces the terms “husband” and “wife” with gender-neutral language in Thai legislation, and it also ensures adoption and inheritance rights for all couples. This makes Thailand only the third country in Asia, after Taiwan and Nepal, to recognise same-sex marriage. While the new law is undeniably the result of decades-long efforts of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) activists and their political allies, the momentous occasion was possible due to widespread public support in online and offline spaces.

Support for marriage equality has grown steadily in Thailand. In 2019, a YouGov poll found that 63 percent of Thais, especially 18–34-year-olds, supported the recognition of same-sex civil partnerships.⁴ In 2024, that number increased to 74 percent.⁵ This can be attributed to years of activism by LGBTQ+ rights groups and the introduction of a marriage equality bill by the now-defunct Move Forward Party in 2020.⁶

A recent ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute survey of the region’s undergraduates on youth and civic engagement found similar results.⁷ When asked if the state should protect LGBTQ+ rights, the response of young Thais stands out, with almost 70 percent of Thai respondents agreeing and only 7.6 percent disagreeing [Fig. 1]. The ISEAS survey asked respondents about the protection of LGBTQ+ rights – a broader question than in previous polls by others, which specified “same-sex civil unions.” It is thus possible that the ISEAS survey respondents may support only a marriage equality bill but not other rights for the LGBTQ+ community, such as protection from discrimination or recognition of various gender identities.

Religion partially accounts for Thailand’s LGBTQ+-friendliness. About 93 percent of Thai citizens practise Buddhism,⁸ which unlike Abrahamic religions does not unequivocally condemn homosexuality or non-conforming gender identities.⁹ This arguably allows more space for gender-

diverse individuals in Thailand.¹⁰ A 2023 Pew survey found that more than half of Cambodian respondents, also living in a Buddhist-majority society, endorsed marriage equality, and that Buddhist Malaysians and Singaporeans were more supportive than other religious communities of same-sex marriage.¹¹

These findings align with the 2024 ISEAS survey results, where only 11 and 15 percent of Indonesian and Malaysian youth, respectively, who live in Muslim-majority countries, endorse LGBTQ+ rights [Fig. 1]. However, their religion cannot be the sole explanation because Thai Muslim respondents showed greater support for LGBTQ+ rights compared to these two groups. Albeit a small sample size of just 22 Thai Muslim respondents, 31.8 percent of those believe that the state should protect LGBTQ+ rights [Fig. 2].

Thailand’s social and cultural acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community likely plays a crucial role in shaping its public support for marriage equality. Since at least the 1970s, Thailand has welcomed those seeking gender-reassignment surgery¹² and has culturally recognised “third gender” individuals (*kathoey*).¹³ In recent years, this acceptance is evinced by the prominent representation of queer people in traditional Thai media, including niche but increasingly popular “boys’ love (BL)” novels and dramas, which have gained fans across Asia.¹⁴ Scholars note that this increasing support for marriage equality has contributed to the growing popularity of LGBTQ+-related media.¹⁵ This, in turn, helped normalise LGBTQ+ experiences and foster greater acceptance even among conservative groups or older Thais.¹⁶

Social media platforms have also fostered Thailand’s LGBTQ+-friendly culture. According to the ISEAS survey, over half of Thai undergraduates use X (formerly Twitter) at least three to four days a week, and Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok daily. Meanwhile 77.6 percent use social media to receive news and 53.1 percent report using it to express their thoughts and opinions.

Throughout the years, activists, politicians, and Thai netizens have vocally supported LGBTQ+ rights online.

In December 2021, when the Constitutional Court ruled that marriage was only between a man and a woman “consistent with natural conditions and tradition,”¹⁷ the hashtag #ศาลรัฐธรรมนูญเหยียดเพศ [*#HomophobicConstitutionalCourt*] became the longest trending with over 260,000 posts on X in Thailand.¹⁸

Thais closely followed the legislative process for the marriage equality bill. During each parliamentary reading, the hashtag #สมรสเท่าเทียม [*#MarriageEquality*] trended on social media, with most users expressing their support. When the law was officially passed on 18 June 2024, the hashtag surged again, becoming Thailand’s most tweeted topic.¹⁹ Many politicians and celebrities participated in the conversation, further promoting the acceptance and normalisation of LGBTQ+ rights.

Over time, online support for LGBTQ+ rights transformed into tangible offline actions. This shift is evident in growing attendance at Bangkok Pride events, spurred by LGBTQ+ groups on social media encouraging allies to publicly demonstrate their support. While it is difficult to statistically ascertain the impact of such online encouragement, activist groups succeeded in organising well-attended Pride Parades in Bangkok. Bangkok Pride 2024’s popularity was reflected in its trending hashtag *#BangkokPride2024* on X, and LGBTQ+ groups successfully organised parades in other provinces like Phuket, where the march had the explicit goal of supporting the marriage equality bill. In conjunction with the Marriage Law coming into effect on 23 January 2025, Bangkok Pride successfully organised a mass marriage registration involving 1839 same-sex couples.²⁰

Thai political elites are not typically inclined to yield to public pressure. Yet, Thailand’s Marriage Equality Law exemplifies a perfect cocktail of effective activism, political campaigning, and widespread public support, as reflected in opinion polls and social media trends. This highlights the potential of online activities to bolster a cause in real life, provided they are successfully translated into tangible actions to foster alliances among activists and political groups.

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Fig. 1: Southeast Asian youth attitudes to LGBT rights. Respondents were asked to quantify their attitude towards the statement “Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights should be protected by the state.” (Source: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Youth and Civic Engagement in Southeast Asia Survey, 2024)

	Country						
	Total	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam
Base	3081	529	506	506	504	501	535
1 Strongly disagree	28.7%	68.1%	63.0%	12.3%	9.9%	3.6%	14.2%
2	7.6%	9.8%	7.7%	7.5%	10.5%	4.0%	5.8%
3	17.2%	8.1%	11.5%	20.3%	25.6%	18.9%	18.9%
4	13.8%	3.8%	6.7%	15.4%	25.8%	15.8%	15.7%
5 Strongly agree	28.7%	7.0%	8.5%	41.7%	23.8%	53.9%	37.9%
Don’t know/no answer	4.0%	3.2%	2.6%	2.8%	4.4%	3.8%	7.5%

Fig. 2: Thai youth support of LGBT rights, by religion. (Source: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Youth and Civic Engagement in Southeast Asia Survey, 2024)

	Religion										
	Total	Islam	Protestantism	Catholicism	Buddhism	Hinduism	Confucianism	No Religion	Taoism	Folk Religion	Others
Base	501	22	7	8	432	3	4	19	1	1	4
1 Strongly disagree	3.6%	27.3%	-	12.5%	2.3%	-	-	-	100%	-	-
2	4.0%	-	-	12.5%	3.7%	33.3%	-	10.5%	-	-	-
3	19.0%	31.8%	14.3%	-	19.2%	-	50.0%	10.5%	-	-	-
4	15.8%	9.1%	-	25.0%	16.0%	33.3%	25.0%	5.3%	-	-	75.0%
5 Strongly agree	53.9%	22.7%	85.7%	50.0%	55.3%	33.3%	25.0%	63.2%	-	100%	25.0%
Don’t know/no answer	3.8%	9.0%	-	-	3.5%	-	-	10.5%	-	-	-

Notes

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- 14 See: (1) The Nation, ‘Boys’ Love Novels Dominate Book Expo Thailand 2024’, Asia News Network, 17 October 2024, <https://asianews.network/boys-love-novels-dominate-book-expo-thailand-2024>; (2) Arista, ‘The Thai “Boys” Love TV Dramas Conquering Asia’, Thai PBS World, 13 June 2024, <https://world.thaipbs.or.th/detail/the-thai-boys-love-tv-dramas-conquering-asia/170>.
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