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Perceptions of COVID-19 Policies in Thailand

An Analysis of the Thai Perception of Lockdown, Curfew and Social Security

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to uncover the Thai public perception of COVID-19 policies. These policies include lockdown, curfew and social security. Thailand is a country that has been praised by the World Health Organisation for their control over the pandemic. One might wonder what regulations were implemented, for the Thai government to be able to control it so well; and how did people respond to this? Therefore the aim of this thesis is to investigate how the Thai public perceived the pandemic and its repercussions.

Furthermore, this thesis explores these policies using a qualitative content analysis method, where data was gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data consists of 8 face-to-face online interviews and the secondary data consists of online documents.

There were two hypotheses formed according to the theoretical framework, evidently when tested, the hypotheses were confirmed. Vulnerable people in Thai society are more likely to have a negative perception of the policies and are less likely to abide by the policies. One of the main findings from the analysis revealed how significant it was to be protected by Thai Social Security during the pandemic. Those who did not qualify for government support were left behind. This thesis finds that negative perceptions of the government play a role in their perception of the policies and determines whether or not they will follow the policies.

Keywords: COVID-19, lockdown, social security, perceptions, policies, Thailand

Word count: 9967

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Abbreviations

B.Sc.	Bachelor of Science
CHP	Cash Handout Programmes
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
SARS-Cov2	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSO	Social Security Office
TA	Tanya Alklund Jaroenwong
TSS	Thai Social Security
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organisation

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Viruses, epidemics and pandemics are nothing new to the world. Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-Cov2); the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19); was first detected in Wuhan, China towards the end of 2019. Thereafter, the virus spread quickly across the globe, due to our interconnected world; and continued to mutate (Bollinger & Ray, 2022).

On March 11th 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the virus to be a global pandemic (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020) and as of summer 2022 COVID-19 has caused 6.33 million deaths (WHO, 2022). Policies and regulations were implemented to lift the burden from healthcare services. Limiting mobility, lockdowns and curfews are some of the policies that were carried out to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This triggered a negative effect on people's livelihoods and the economic state of the world (Rieger & Wang, 2021).

Considering developing countries, their governing and economic institutions were not equipped to handle such a socio-economic crisis which proceeded the pandemic. On January 17th 2020, Thailand was the second country to report a case of COVID-19. In early May 2020, France, with roughly the same population size as Thailand[1], had over a hundred thousand cases of COVID-19 and Thailand had less than 3000 confirmed cases (Department of Disease Control, 2020). Additionally, Thailand's COVID-19 death rate was four times lower compared to the rest of the world (Tantrakarnapa, Bhopdhornangkul & Nakhaapakorn 2020). This makes Thailand an interesting case to study in regards to COVID-19. Perhaps the policies they implemented achieved good results concerning health statistics, though negatively affecting millions of livelihoods. One might wonder what the Thai public perceived of these policies.

Those who developed the COVID-19 policies are the governing institutions. Thailand has been under a military regime since 2014, led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha who sits as Prime Minister today. Thailand has always had a complex relationship with coups d'etat. Since 1933, Thailand has endured 20

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[1] Thailand's population in 2020 was 69.8 million and France had 67.39 million in 2020 (World Bank, 2020).

constitutions and 19 military coups, of which 12 were successful (Chachavalpongpun, 2020 pp. 56). This implies that there is a coup d'etat approximately every seven and a half years in Thailand (Chachavalpongpun, 2020 pp. 6).

To give context on Thailand's current political structure; in the most recent constitution, composed by Prayut Chan-ocha, it states that the Senate has more power than the House of Representatives; together they form the National Assembly[2]. This secured Prayut's seat because he elects the senators. After years of protests and outcry from Thai people screaming for democracy, there was an election held in 2019. Evidently, after Prayut rewrote the constitution, he solidified his power. The small form of democracy that Thailand had was lost. Prayut continues his regime as Prime Minister (Chachavalpongpun, 2020 pp 12).

1.1   Scope

This thesis will be investigating the Thai public's perception of the COVID-19 policies, implemented by the Thai government. There is an extensive amount of published research on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. Oxford Policy Management & United Nations (2020) released such a study about Thailand. As profound as this research was, it overlooked the people's opinion. Therefore, this thesis would like to make a contribution to said gap.

The year of focus this thesis will adhere to is the beginning 2020 until late 2021. To delimit the research, the focal point of this thesis is to uncover the Thai public's perception of the policies, and thus will not be analyzing the political situation in Thailand. Though it is important to remember that it may surface in the analysis since it is the government that creates these policies. Therefore this thesis will only adhere to the perceptions, which will include their perceptions of the government, as it goes hand-in-hand. For this reason it is crucial to be aware who governs Thailand. Within the scope of this thesis, the concepts of experience and perception are a feedback loop, as perception derives from experience, as such how people experienced the policies, it will form their perceptions.

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[2] The Thai Parliament

COVID-19 has directly affected multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has caused many setbacks. SDGs such as: 1 "No Poverty", 2 "No Hunger", 3 "Good Health", 4 "Quality Education", 8 "Good Jobs and Economic Growth" and lastly 10 "Reduced Inequalities" has regressed all over the world. In this sense the purpose of this thesis contributes to the

development studies discourse. Regarding the political science aspect; this thesis will be analyzing the governments response to COVID-19. Therefore it complies to both the realm of development studies and political science.

1.2   Research Aim and Question

The aim of this research is to examine the Thai public perceptions regarding COVID-19 policies. This will be accomplished by exploring how the Thai government handled the pandemic, using secondary data gathered from documents and online articles, furthermore, analyzing the perceptions gathered from interviews. Furthermore, this thesis will explore policies such as lockdown, curfew and the social security programmes that were launched to financially support people. Through qualitative content analysis, this thesis will achieve answering a research question which reads as follows:

"How did Thai people perceive their government's policies to combat the COVID-19 pandemic?"

2. Background

2.1   Lockdown and Curfew

On March 26th 2020, the Thai government issued an emergency decree with a nationwide lockdown. In the following days, additional policies were implemented to regulate the spread of COVID-19, such as closing the border and only permitting Thai citizens to enter, with mandatory quarantine for 14 days.

Other policies such as limiting group gatherings, ban the sale of alcoholic beverages, restricting inter-provincial travel and implementing a curfew from 10pm until 4am (Oxford Policy Management & United Nations, 2020 pp. 4). There was also a closure of Thai public schools and venues such as bars, gyms and clubs. Only essential supermarkets were allowed to operate as usual. Restaurants were not allowed to have dine in customers, only take-away was available. Due to the strict regulations many people could not go to work. The government encouraged people to work from home, which was possible for those who worked in an office, however it was nearly impossible for those in the informal sector, agricultural sector and countless other businesses (Serenonchai & Arunut, 2021).

In early May the government eased up on the restrictions due to the socio-economic state of the country. Schools attempted to achieve remote learning[3], small businesses were allowed to open again, the alcohol ban and curfew policies were lifted while the remaining policies stayed active until June 30th 2020. Mask wearing and good hand hygiene was essential, no one could leave their house without proper masks (Oxford Policy Management & United Nations, 2020 pp. 4). Eventually, in the following months Thailand obtained a good control over the spread of COVID-19 and was praised by WHO for their achievements (WHO, 2020a). Nevertheless, the second wave started to appear in mid-December, which the government put the blame on Burmese migrants entering the country without proper quarantining. Seeing the socio-economic results of the first lockdown, the government chose to only lockdown 10 provinces which border Myanmar (Rajatanavin et al. 2021).

During the second wave there were 7 times as many COVID-19 cases than the first wave. This lasted from mid-December 2020 until the end of February 2021, after this period the second wave started to fade (ibid). According to the Thai Department of Disease Control, on the 1st of September 2020, 35.5% of the Thai population had received their first vaccine dose and 13.1% of them were fully vaccinated. By the time the second wave had passed, 75% of the population had received their first dose (Department of Disease Control, 2020 & 2021).

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[3] Not all schools had access to computers

2.2   Social Security

When a country is in crisis, many people turn to the government for support (Dell'Ariccia et al. 2020). In Thailand, similarly to other countries, they started Cash Handout Programmes (CHP). The CHP can be viewed similarly to unemployment benefits that was created as a COVID-19 relief package, however not everyone was qualified for these programmes and millions were left behind (Serenonchai & Arunut, 2021).

In 2014, the informal sector accounted for approximately 24.6 million people, which entailed 62.2% of the Thai labour pool, which were in an insecure socio-economic position. It has not drastically changed since and there is still a vast majority of people still working in the informal sector (Kongtip et al., 2015). Thai labour regulations favour formal employees, therefore those in the informal sector are not protected by labour laws. This is due to unreported employment and not using credible contracts. Oftentimes informal employees do not pay taxes and get underground work payments. Those who do not pay taxes or have formal jobs are not qualified for social security which means they are not provided with a pensions fund, unemployment benefits or any type of government compensation (ibid). There is a large income inequality gap between formal and informal workers. Those who work in the informal sector are believed to have a higher chance of ending up in poverty than those in the formal sector (Oxford Policy Management & United Nations, 2020 pp. 19). When the pandemic arrived, it caused great distress to all employees and business owners. Not only was there a majority of unprotected workers but countless businesses relied on tourism.

Thailand is a top destination spot for tourism in Asia. As a result, the country caters to hosting foreign tourist and has thus created countless livelihoods dependent on foreign travelers and clients. Hotels, restaurants, airlines, and other small businesses such as street vendors or supermarkets were drastically set back by the pandemic, and many went bankrupt. In 2019 the capital inflow from foreign tourism was $65 billion, which came to a radical halt during the pandemic which affected the entire Thai economy (Klinsrisuk & Pechdin, 2022). Unemployment rates were high with 8.4 million people unemployed during the height of the pandemic, which made up 22% of the work force whose salary was

suddenly nothing. Of these 8.4 million unemployed, 23% came from the tourism industry (Oxford Policy Management & United Nations, 2020 pp. 95). Employees in other sectors received budget cuts: almost 20% of employees lost 75% of their income and 22.5% lost 25% of their salary (Oxford Policy Management & United Nations, 2020 pp. 171). According to Oxford Policy Management & United Nations (2020, pp. 95), formal workers in the tourism business have the hightest probability of ending up unemployed and cornered into destitute.

The first phase of policies was created on the 4th of March 2020. It was a COVID-19 stimulus package ($3.2 billion) for small and medium-sized Thai businesses and a reduction of taxes on said businesses. A portion of this fund went to CHP as well. This was extended to March 24th 2020 where the government added another $3.56 billion to the stimulus package and CHP fund. On April 7th 2020 the government pledged $58 billion which were divided to different programmes such as decreasing loans, supporting the healthcare sector and banks with the liquidity crisis (Oxford Policy Management & United Nations, 2020 pp. 5). The amount CHP handed out were around THB 5000 ($140) per individual (Oxford Policy Management & United Nations, 2020 pp. 171). Those who had Thai Social Security (TSS) before the pandemic were more fortunate than those without, however one has to be eligible to be qualified for TSS. The main qualifications include being a Thai citizen and being employed in the formal sector. There were special policies implemented to those who had TSS, for example receiving 62% of their monthly income paid if they were dismissed from work for 3 months (ibid).

One of the more sustainable and successful schemes was the 50-50 programme called "Khon La Khrueng" (Let's Go Halves) which was created in December 2020 but started to operate in the early weeks of 2021. This came in the form of an application on smartphones called "Pautang G Wallet". Those who register for the app, forwards money into the Wallet app and uses it as payments when shopping for food, house supplies or medicine. The concept of the app is the government pays for half of what the consumer spends. There is a limit on how much the government will provide, 150 THB ($4.26) is the maximum per day. If a user has reached the daily limit the user pays for the rest of the amount. One does

not have to be a part of the TSS system to register, as long as they are over 18 years old. As of December 2021, 43 million people are a part of this scheme (Musa, 2021).

Individuals covered by TSS received more compensation than those in the informal sector, if they received any at all. Those who are insured by TSS gained an increase of 50% of their salary. Over a million people who were not insured applied for TSS during the month of May 2020. Many did not qualified for the programme and only 958,304 were accepted. Concurrently, 207,895 of those qualified did not receive any compensation and waited a considerable time, meanwhile the Social Security Office (SSO) were receiving 30,000 new applicants per week. 7 million out of 22.1 million workers that applied TSS throughout the year 2020 were not qualified to receive any compensation (Oxford Policy Management & United Nations, 2020 pp. 7). Evidently, Thai institutions were not equipped to handle all the new applicants. The government was overwhelmed and the system too unstable to handle a socio-economic crisis that COVID-19 had plagued (Oxford Policy Management & United Nations, 2020 pp. 5-6).

The government was not able to assist the entire public with social insurance, and Thai people turned to the temples for support. Before COVID-19, temples collected donations for multiple charity funds to assist informal workers and other vulnerable groups. Donatinating money to the temple is a way of spreading good merit and a very common practice in Buddhist societies. Regardless, they did not receive a large amont of donations during COVID and could not provide a safety net for vulnerable people at this time (Oxford Policy Management & United Nations, 2020 pp. 13).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1   Vulnerable Groups

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most debated topics in recent years. It has affected many aspects of the general public and global institutions. It has

affected everyone, whether they were affected directly or indirectly, and impacted positively or negatively on, some worse than others (Fiske, et al., 2022). Atchison et al. (2021) finds that the most vulnerable groups in society, such as those who are financially unstable, working in the informal sector, are more likely to have a negative perception of lockdown and non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI). NPIs are policies or measures taken to limit the spread of a virus besides using health services such as getting vaccinated. This would include wearing a mask, physical distancing, self isolation, etc. Atchison et al. (2021) continue to suggest that vulnerable socioeconomic groups are less likely to follow these NPIs because they are in an economically disadvantage position and cannot work or support their families under the circumstances.

Crouzet et al. (2022) supports Atchison's et al. (2021) claim. In their research on vulnerable groups in France, Crouzet et al. (2022) found that participants felt as though the government policies were drafted for people who had stable livelihoods. The participants voiced their doubt in the policies because, according to them it was not feasible. Uncertainty in the government and its policies emerged due to the feeling of being left behind.

WHO (2020b) along wtih scholars Ataguba and Ataguba (2020), suggest that governments, especially those governing in developing countries must take extra precautions surrounding crisis communication and recognize all socioeconomic disparities. Ataguba and Ataguba (2020) found that mistrust in governerments and the doubt in policies surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic spread exceedingly fast. There must be sense of transparency and credibility from the government in order for people to feel a sense of trust in the authorities (Glik, 2007).

Glik (2007) notably implies that it is not the matter of risks that cause people to mistrust the government and their policies, but rather the risk perception. Risk perception regards the level of assessment of a threat, refering to the liability, severity or percieved likelihood of said threat. It can be defined as an interpretation of a risk (Cori et al. 2020). In the case of the United Kingdom, Newton (2020) claims that misleading information and the appearance of uncertainty shifted the British public's attitude towards their government during COVID-19; from trusting the authorities to suspicion and disbelief. Conversely,

there is a greater chance of support towards governments when people are pleased by the policies (Koh et al., 2022).

As reported by Crouzet et al. (2022) the type of communication, whether it may be an official announcement, new regulations, or news broadcasts from a government to its citizens, creates a perception of COVID-19.

Referring back to the growing mistrust of governments, Cori et al. (2020) states that the moment the trust between citizens and authorities is misplaced, it becomes very troubling for the community and it is hard to recover the lost trust. They suggest similar steps as Glik (2007) mentioned in her research about generating a sense of faith and taking precautions. The key is to decrease the level of fear and anxiety. Fear has a tendency of leading to panic, fear is a trigger for rash actions. An example of this, taking a look at Richard Grey's (2021) research; children from impoverished regions could no longer attend school during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the children are home from school there is suddenly another mouth to feed as they were dependent on the school providing their meals. This would cause fear among the families, there is no work and food must be provided, not to mention the lack of education for the children since they cannot afford computers to attend online classes. This is a leading cause in mistrust in governments and a negative perception of COVID-19 policies. It has a way of dividing a society, causing much distress. People start to rely on the government, for food and support (Hill, 2020).
Crouzet et al. (2022) and Atchison et al. (2021) agree that the economically disadvantaged groups were the most negatively affected by the lockdown policies and are most likely to not comply with the policies and regulations.

3.2 Structural inequalities

What started as a health crisis, rapidly exposed the structural inequalities within societies such as the social security programmes, healthcare divisions and other public services. It has additionally been heavily politicised and has also brought one of the biggest economic crises since the 2008 global financial crisis (Fiske, et

al., 2022). Public Health England (2020) published a report stating that the people more likely to be exposed to, and suffer from COVID-19 are those who are vulnerable to the structural inequalities. It should be mentioned that the virus can affect everyone, it does not choose to affect one group of people and save another. The reason behind vulnerable groups being most affected is directly linked to the structural inequalities (Haynes, 2020).

WHO advises people to bear masks, practice social distancing, and wash hands frequently (World Health Organisation, n.d.). This requires access to clean water, which is a privilege some people do not have. In sub-Saharan Africa they have had deep roots of structural inequalities from the colonial period and already were a struggling poverty-stricken region (Ichoku et al., 2013). However, this is a problem in every country from to most underdeveloped countries in sub-Saharan Africa to one of the world's most influencial countries such as England. A study conducted by the English Office of National Statistics (2020) showed that the rich and developed regions of England did not nearly have as many deaths in contrast to the underprivileged area, which proved to have twice as many deaths from the COVID-19 virus. This may be due to NPI's imposing costs on households, and vulnerable groups are not be able to afford those expenses. Buying masks, handsanitiser, along with getting a salary cut, can be a heavy burden on many people. This is why it is important to have social security to lean on when a crisis hits. However, social inequality impairs the government's ability to relieve the situation.

Continueing on Haynes' (2020) theory, those who live in poor living conditions, experience healthcare inequalities and other structural inequalities, are more vulnerable and exposed to COVID-19, regarding their health and livelihood. As a result, those who are poor, are more likely to suffer more (Social Metrics Commission 2020). Combining this theory with Crouzet et al. (2022) and Atchison et al. (2021) theory of disadvantaged groups not willing to comply with COVID-19 policies; this thesis will theorise and create a framework where these two theories merge (See Figure 1.). To stay within the frame of this thesis, as mentioned in section 2, workers in the informal sector are considered to be the vulnerable socio-economic group referred to in this thesis. Along with the theory

in Figure 1, this thesis will also propose two hypothese based on the framework, which will be tested further:

H1. Vulnerable socio-economic groups are less likely to abide by NPIs.
H2. Vulnerable socio-economic groups are more likely to have negative views of the NPIs.
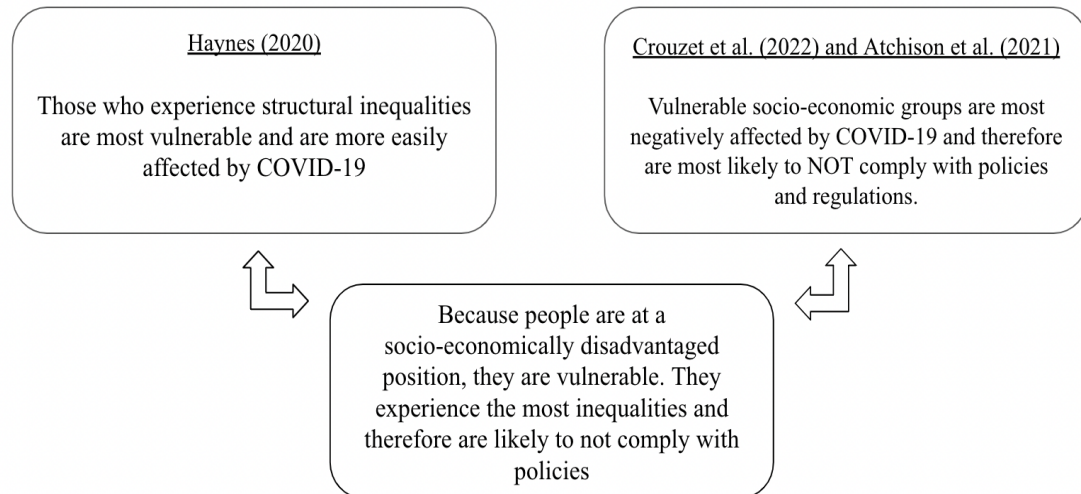
Haynes (2020)

Those who experience structural inequalities are most vulnerable and are more easily affected by COVID-19

Crouzet et al. (2022) and Atchison et al. (2021)

Vulnerable socio-economic groups are most negatively affected by COVID-19 and therefore are most likely to NOT comply with policies and regulations.

Because people are at a socio-economically disadvantaged position, they are vulnerable. They experience the most inequalities and therefore are likely to not comply with policies

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

4. Methodology

4.1   Research Design

This thesis follows a qualitative content analysis method. This entails analysing texts, which enables categories to surface (Bryman, 2016 pp. 290) and identify themes in the data during the coding process (Bryman, 2016 pp. 559). The data consists of both primary and secondary data. The analysis will be supported by primary data complied from semi-structured interviews. A content analysis in this thesis is relevant because it requires analysing the transcripts from the semi-structured interviews, which is considered a form of document or text (Bryman, 2016 pp. 290). This thesis will also give holistic awareness, since we

are following the cognitive process of individuals' experience during the pandemic, and they will tell their story of how they processed the policies which had socio-economic repercussions (Beal, 2013).

The secondary data comprises of policy documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Disease Control, book, articles and reports about Thailand and the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. The secondary data was collected to better grasp the situation before conducting the interviews. It was necessary to acquire this knowledge beforehand, which was also used to construct the previous sections. As this thesis intents to uncover peoples perceptions of policies, the themes will be categories according to different policies and sub-themes of negative perceptions and positive perceptions. This thesis continues the coding phase with a realist approach and has anonymised all the participants for their safety. Thailand has the strictest form of lèse-majesté (Chachavalpongpun, 2020 pp. 134); and even though this thesis does research the monarchy, I felt it was best to take the precaution. If they know they are anonymous they might speak more freely.

4.2   Sampling

This research has been executed remotely. The interviews were all conducted online via video calls on Messenger. It was very important for the meetings to be as smooth and comfortable as possible for the interviewees, since a couple of the participants were over 60 years of age. Initially, the video calls were to take place via Zoom, however I quickly realised that it was not a popular program in the region and many did not know how to operate Zoom therefore Messenger was the most convenient alternative. And it turned out very well.

I sought out participants from different regions of Thailand. I was seeking a variety of people; informal workers, formal workers and business owners from different socio-economic backgrounds. I was not aware of their position in the economy before the interviews started. Therefore there are a mixed range of participants and more from one sector than another. The age range of the participants varies from 22 up to 71 years of age. The participants are men and women, however they are all anonymised in this research. The level of education

was also a factor to consider, they range from dropping out of 9th grade to university graduates.

I grew up in Thailand and due to my connections I managed to assemble participants eager to share their story. I would like to clarify that I did not know all of the interviewees beforehand. I got in contact with a few of them through my own networking and which led me to a snow-balling sampling procedure thereafter, I did not search for any specific traits, I was simply looking for participants willing to do an interview with me. On account of knowing the language and customs, it was not necessary to work with a translator. During the meetings we spoke both Thai and English, whichever they were most comfortable in, sometimes mixing both languages. I conducted a total of 8 interviews and already after conducting 4 interviews I started to see a pattern. I noticed that there was no new information surfacing, most of the participants answered in a similar manner and there was a pattern in the data. Each interview lasted for approximately 25-30 minutes. The sample size was enough to draw a conclusion.

4.3   Data Collection

The thesis aims to understand the perception of the interviewees and their thoughts on the implemented COVID-19 policies, conducting interviews was the best approach (Stewart-Withers et al. 2014 pp. 65). I carried out one-on-one virtual interviews with semi-structured questions. My intention for the interviews was to have a natural flow as if it were a normal conversation, and meanwhile ask the necessary questions. Semi-stuctured interviews allows there to be more flexibility and depth in the interviews, it involves having a set of open-ended questions prepared ahead of time and also asking unplanned questions that arise from those answers, which could lead to interesting breakthroughs (Robson, 2016 pp. 284-286).

Before the interviews began, I asked each participant if I had their consent to record the meeting, and they all agreed. When I started the interviews I asked for their consent again, to have it on record. Since this interview was conducted remotely it was difficult to physically sign a consent form therefore we all agreed to verbal consent. In this circumstance it was not informal, rather the best alternative (Banks & Scheyvens, 2014 pp. 167). I recorded my interviews on the

Voice Memos app on my Iphone, which was then transferred to my Google Drive for safe storage.

The secondary data was collected from researching on Google Scholar which was used for section 1, 2 and 3, most of which consisting of global health publications. For statistics and imporatant dates, such as when the first COVID-19 cases appeared, I searched on Statisa, The World Bank, The WHO and the Thai Department of Disease Control.

4.4   Data Analysis

The analysis phase started when I began transcribing my interviews. After transcribing, the coding phase proceeded. I chose to do a thematic coding approach, where I first colour-coordinated the transcripts according to the respected themes which had surfaced, then I placed those with the same colours in a labeled folder on Google Drive. These themes include: lockdown & curfew, tourism, government and social security, in total four themes. Within each theme, they all have the same sub-themes consisting of positive perceptions and negative perceptions. I coded this on Google Documents and I used the 'comment' function to create memos, where I wrote my reflections as I was coding. I approached my thematic coding with a realist method, as I was attempting to uncover peoples' reality and experience's (Robson, 2016 pp. 467). I am also aiming to answer a 'how' question, therefore using a realist approach suits this thesis (Robson, 2016 pp. 405).

4.5   Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The most apparent challenge with qualitative content analysis is the vast amount of data, which can become very time consuming to transcribe, interpret and analyze (Bryman, 2012 pp. 565). It is important to plan the time wisely and work effectively. Bryman (2012, pp. 215) discusses the disadvantages of telephone interviews, claiming that it is less sustainable for discussing sensitive topics. However I believe that sensitive topics are difficult to discuss no matter how the

meeting was conoducted. The discussion of money and failed businesses could be seen as a sensitive topic, however non of my interviewees seemed to find it difficult to share their story. Bryman (2012) was also published a decade ago and technology has advanced quickly since then. I did not experience these limitations when I was conducting the virtual interviews, as I could see their face and they could see mine, reading each other expressions. It could be considered a new form of face-to-face interview, instead of a classic telephone interview. An advantage of conducting these virtual interviews is that it has been entirely cost-free and time-saving. It has also been comfortable for the participants to be able to call from their homes (Nehls, Smith & Schneider, 2015).

A couple of things I was concerned about was the level of internet connection they had and if they were able to operate the technology since a couple of participants are elder, however I did not expereince these problems at all. A disadvantage of this virtual interview that perhaps would not be a problem in a face-to-face interview is that I did not see their surroundings and environment. Nonetheless, again this was not a problem for me. My participants were so eager to share their stories, they happily sent me pictures of their shops and took screenshots of the G wallet app for me to see. However, I will not be adding them into this thesis, to further protect their identity.

An important factor that needs to be recognised is that I have asked questions about their experiences from two years ago. One of the biggest limitations of this thesis has been the interviewees not remembering. I have received a couple of "I don't remember or I don't know" answers, but they usually answer with "I think…", because they do remember but they are not 100% certain. The pandemic was a difficult and unhappy time for many, and some may not choose to remember. The participants have told their truths as best to their abilities, and I value their time and effort. I conducted this research to bring their thoughts to light, to understand what they perceived of the NPI's.

5. Analysis

This section will present the analysis from the data I have collected from the interviews. It will be supported by the knowledge I received from analyzing the secondary data. The section has been divided into sub-headings according to the biggest themes that had I came across during the coding phase. Social security, lockdown & curfew and the perceptions of the government. Additionally, within each subheading there will include three subsections. The interviewees will be categorised according to three subsections: business owners, informal workers and formal workers, to correspond with the theoretical framework and test the hypotheses.

5.1 Perceptions on Social Security

In section 2.2 I presented the schemes which were implemented to help fight poverty during the pandemic. In this section I will put forward their experiences of these policies and uncover if they received any government support during the pandemic.

5.1.1 Business Owners

'Interviewee A' was a student at University when the pandemic arrived but was still helping out part-time at their family's supermarket. As covered, supermarkets were allowed to stay open and operate during lockdown, however the family had to file for bankruptcy on February 3rd 2021.

> TA: 'In your own knowledge, do you know if you or your family
> receive any compensation from the government?'

> Interviewee A: '**No, no compensation whatsoever.** I think one of the
> reasons was that we weren't forced to shut down. We were allowed to stay
> open, but due to us just not having customers at all, and we still had a lot

of payments to make during COVID. We just couldn't financially support
ourselves after that.'

When I asked about their staff:

Interviewee A: 'They received compensation from my parents who had to pay for
letting them go'

TA: 'Directly out of their pockets?'

Interviewee A: 'Yeah. And also from their social security. I believe they were
getting some compensation for being unemployed and let go at that time. But
yeah, that's it. I think they were getting paid for three months or six months. I'm
not positive.'

The staff at their supermarket were protected by the social security they had for
being formal workers, however 'Interviewee A' and their family did not receive
anything because they are the owners. They also said that there is no social
security for business owners, non that they knew of at least. 'Interviewee A' had
to move on from the family business, and started working in a restaurant as an
assistant manager and became a formal employee, covered by TSS.

Interviewee 'C', 'D', 'F' and 'G' were also business owners. 'Interviewee
C' owned a travel agency. When asked if they had received any compensation
from the government when their company was in trouble:

*Interviewee C: 'No, this is due to the fact that **Thailand is very pro-employees**.*
Thailand approveed my staff so they could get help. I mean, as a company, I
didn't get anything... The only thing... Yes, there is one little yes to your question.
If I'm right, there was a tax reduction for the company... Something was reduced
of the tax from the company.

Again, the owner of the company did not receive anything from the government
but their staff did. Interviewee 'D' responded in a similar way. They own a
housing project, where they had built and sold the houses to foreigners and now

manages the compound. Their straff were also paid with compensation. Out of all the business owners in this research, 'Interviewee C' was the only business owner that receive a tax reduction on their business.

Interviewee 'F' and 'G' did not have any staff, they were the only 'employees' in their companies. 'Interviewee F' managed a spare-parts shop for motor engines, while 'G' opened a corner shop during the pandemic after quitting her day-job to be able to spend more time with her daughter. I asked them the same question as I asked the other interviewees. Did they receive any compensation from the government?

Interviewee F: 'No.'

TA: 'How come?'

Interviewee F: 'I don't communicate with the government. I only pay taxes'.

TA: 'Okay, so you did not apply for anything?'

Interviewee F: No.

In the case of 'Interviewee F', they did not want to associate themselves with the government, and asking for help from the government was not on their agenda. 'Interviewee G' had a different response than the others.

Interviewee G: 'I opened the shop using a government programme, that helps poor people. I connected my shop to the government, so people who have the 'Pautang app' can use it in my shop.'

TA: 'So you have the 'Khon La Khrueng'?[4]

*Interviewee G: 'Yes, so I was **not negatively affected** by money during covid.'*

'Interviewee G' had the opportunity to open their own business during the pandemic, spend more time with family and did not experience any economic disadvantages.

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[4] Let's Go Halves programme

I uncovered that one of the requirements to qualify for CHP was that people had to have less than 500,000 baht[5] in their bank account. Most of the business owners have more than this saved up, therefore they couldn't receive any money. Those who do not have TSS, do not receive a pensions scheme when they retire.

*Interviewee D: 'I applied for government help, you know 5000 Baht for lockdown and **they denied me.**'*

TA: 'Because you have more than half a million saved in the bank?

Interviewee D: 'Exactly. I need that for when I retire, I am already old.'

5.1.2 Informal Workers

Before the pandemic, 'Interviewee B' called themselves a freelancer, however freelancing is synonymous with informal working. They were a singer in a band playing at different bars, and restaurants. This was not possible when the pandemic hit and they lost their income.

TA: 'Did you try to ask the government for any compensation?'

Interviewee B: 'There were government campaigns that people could sign up for, but you had to qualify for it; where you could get like 5k or 15k depending on your situation, but I didn't qualify. And also there's other government campaigns like 'Khon La Khrueng' which I couldn't get it as well because it filled up so fast.'

TA: 'Did you not qualify for the first campaign because you couldn't prove your income from before?'

Interviewee B: 'Yeah there was no contract or anything so I didn't qualify for it.'

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[5] Approximately $13,657

They continued telling me that they got a new job working at a restaurant in 2021, and they have an income again. However, they are still in the informal sector, without social security; no contract of employment, gets paid in cash and does not pay taxes. The main take away from this interview is that they were not interested in having social security because it is difficult for them to have a "proper job" because they dropped out of high school and have tattoos all the way down to their hands. I uncovered that they never served in the army, which is mandatory. They never served and therefore chooses to go undocumented; no drivers license, no social security otherwise the government would catch them (Interviewee B, 2022).

*Interviewee B: 'The ones with social insurance were the first ones to actually be able to get help. But those who didn't have it was just **completely overlooked**. Sad reality.'*

TA: 'So the social insurance that people had before the pandemic really saved a lot of people?'

Interviewee B: 'Yeah, especially for those who lost their jobs due to COVID.'

'Interviewee E' also considered themself a freelancer. Before the pandemic they worked for a foreign video production company as a coordinator. However, since they were employed by this foreign company, they never applied for TSS. During the pandemic, the company moved to Europe and 'Interviewee E' was laid off. Though, received compensation from the company but not from the Thai government.

5.1.3 Formal Workers

'Interviewee H' an accountant and 'Interviewee A' an assistant manager, two participants that are considered to be formal employees. I received the same information from both these interviews regarding their experience with social security. Both have not used their social security because they did not lose their jobs during the pandemic. Both were qualified for the G wallet app and use it.

5.2 Perceptions on Lockdown & Curfew

This section will present the participants' perception of lockdown and the curfew. Additionally, uncover how they experienced the policies and if they followed them.

5.2.1 Business Owners

Thailand went into lockdown in March 2020 and there were no international flights bringing in foreign travelers, which negatively affected countless businesses, including 'Interviewee C's' company. 'Interviewee C' fell into a lot of debt and had to temporarily let go of their staff until the pandemic was over.

Interviewee C:'I think that the travel industry where I am in was the worst hit of every branch.'

Their perception of the lockdown was:

*Interviewee C: 'I think that the lockdown was justified in the beginning. Unfortunately, they were slow on easing up the restrictions. But I still think it was the right thing to do. Many countries locked completely down and **we were not 100% locked in**. I think it was in Italy that you couldn't go out. But here you were always allowed to go out, for example walk on the beach… I think they have kind of **laws and rules are meant to break mentality** here'*

'Interviewee C' had more positive comments about the lockdown, relatively neutral about their opinions until the very last sentence. 'Interviewee C' also complied with all the policies except with the alcohol ban. They explained that most of the restaurants continued to serve alcoholic beverages even though it was prohibited to sell it.

Interviewee C: 'You just make sure that you get a different cup instead… I order my white wine, but it's not serving in a wine glass its in a normal cup. And beside it they put a can of lemon soda, which was open and half filled up. The waiter

said you can shake so in case there is some control, by policie. I would say i'm drinking soda becuase this lemon soda looks like white wine.'

Regarding the alcohol ban, Interviewee D had a similar perception, while having a different perception of the curfew:

*Interviewee D: 'I was always able to buy alcohol, expect during the curfew. I don't get the curfew, **it was so stupid**, does the government think that covid comes out at night time only?'*

Concerning the lockdown, he continued to express:

*Interviewee D: '**For the health yes it was good but for the business bad**. In my experience the people could always go out shopping, to the markets, but not allowed to travel to the next province. We always have to wear the mask and if we go to shopping mall, have to write down the telephone number in case someone has covid. Which **I thought was good to report those things**.'*

I asked if they followed the policies even though they did not have a good perception of them:

*Interview D: '**I have to follow otherwise I have to pay fine.** So I followed. There was nothing to do anyways, at least for people my age.'*

Interviewee C had a comparable perception about the malls:

*Interviewee C: 'I still write my telephone number when I go into the shops. I mean, they don't really control if I do or not. But there is a list so you can fill it in. And I think, okay, if they got to know that someone who were there yesterday at the same time as me has reported that they got COVID, then they may call me and warn me. **So I think it's good.'***

Interviewee 'F' and 'G' both thought that the lockdown was good and necessary to protect their parents and children that live with them. Therefore they also compiled with the policies.

5.2.2 Informal Workers

'Interviewee B' lost their job due to the lockdown. As covered in 5.1.2, they had no social security and did not receive any CHP from the government. 'Interviewee E' eventually lost their job as well and did not have TSS, however found work as a freelancing photographer. Their perceptions of the lockdown and curfew amounts to:

*Interviewee B: 'It was practically just a **fake lockdown** because you weren't allowed to leave the house. But instead of leaving the house, people would just end up partying at home, throwing house parties, with like 20-30 people inside. There was nothing really regulating the laws that they were implementing like the lockdown the curfew. **It was all just a smokescreen**, you know, pretending to have a lockdown, but in reality it's nothing like that at all.'*

*Interviewee E: 'So I guess me personally, the travel restrictions screwed me over. That was probably t**he only restriction that held**.'*

'Interviewee B' did not comply with the policies, besides wearing a mask in public.

5.2.3 Formal Workers

Interviewee 'A' and 'H' were both able to work during lockdown and did not lose any income. Their perception of the lockdown was:

Interviewee A: 'I think it would be it would have been a good idea if they implemented it properly, which they didn't. They couldn't control the people and

*what they did and did not do. So you know Thai law is just not very strict at all. So nobody really follows it. And I think that's like one of the biggest reasons why the **lockdown was a complete fail**... The officers, if you bribe them, they don't care what you do. It's just everyone does what they please. **It's bad governance**, I would say.'*

*Interviewee H: '**Only good in the beginning** when we felt unsafe, but once we understood the virus we were still in lockdown and then it was unnecessary.'*

Their perceptions on the curfew:

*Interviewee A: 'A lot of people just didn't care. They were still meeting up and drinking alcohol in large groups even though you couldn't leave your house past curfew. **They couldn't implement what they wanted to do properly.**'*

*Interviewee H: 'Bad. **It doesn't stop the virus**, it only stops people from partying and protesting.'*

I asked if they followed the policies:

*Interviewee A: 'No. In the beginning I stuck to the curfew and the lockdown. I started to realize that it was all just for show and there were **no real consequences** to going out after curfew. After that I remember I drove home from a friend's house after 10 pm multiple times. They made it seem much more strict on the media than it really was at all. Never once was I stopped on the roads after being out after curfew. Nobody really cared about anything. So it was much more lenient than they made it out to be.'*

Interviewee H: 'Yes I wore the mask, I kept the distance and follow the curfew.'

5.3 Perceptions of the Government

This section highlights the participants perception of the government. In section 1.1 I mentioned that I was not going to investigate the political state of Thailand, which I will not; however during the coding phase I discovered that it was one of the biggest themes I encountered. It was intertwined, and it had to be recognized, therefore perceptions of government had to be covered. I can analyze this without doing an in-depth exploration into Thai politics.

5.3.1 Busniess Owners

Whilst conducting the interview with 'Interviewee A', we discussed both their family business, which went bankrupt, and their position in the formal sector as an assistant manager, therefore they appear in both sections. In section 5.1.1 they expressed that their family supermarket did not receive any compensation.

TA: 'Do you think that the Thai government was looking for reasons not to qualify someone?'

Interviewee A: 'Yes, I think they were. Whatever they could avoid, they would avoid.'

Same question to 'Interviewee F':

*Interviewee F: 'I don't know how to explain it but I think there are too many problems, when people want something done one way, the government does something else and don't listen. They don't fix the direct problem, **they separate us**. The way they decide who gets help and who does not is wrong. People work hard and save money in their bank, for the retirement, but have to use that money during covid because **we have too much money in the bank so the government does not help**.'*

Several participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the government and how they handled the pandemic.

*Interviewee D: 'Honestly, **I do not trust them**.'*

They continued:

*Interviewee D: 'The inter-provincial travel ban was also stupid. I became a monk during this time and my family was not allowed to come because they lived in a different province, if they come they have to quarantine for 14 days, **so unnecessary.**'*

When I first asked 'Interviewee C' what their perception was on the NPIs, they replied with:

Interviewee C: 'Very controversial, very controversial question.'

First, I was taken aback, worried that I had upset them. Due to Thailands strict lèse-majesté laws, often times discussing the government can be just as taboo. Since his reign, the prime minister has issued new laws, where they can arrest those who criticise the government. However they chuckled afterwards and continued with:

Interviewee C: 'I think they could have released the restrictions on inbound international travllers. The government destroyed much of my branch. They don't seem to understand that western travllers often need to book in their vacation months ahead of time.'

They continued with perceptions that contrasted the other participants as well.

*Interviewee C: '**I was impressed** by their vaccination plan, so many are vaccinated. However, as usual they were a bit late with getting that started, but I have to say **I am proud of Thailand**, even though sometimes I do think that the government is a bit closed minded.'*

'Interviewee G' had nothing negative to say about the government. They complied with the policies and received money from the government to open their business. They were not affected negatively.

5.3.2 Informal Workers

'Interivewee E' was more shy to discuss how they perceived the government, which I respected. However, I did ask if they had followed the policies, which they happily answered. I made it very clear to all my participants that they were welcome to answer which ever question they feel comfortable with and they do not have to answer if they do not wish to do so.

Interviewee E: 'I followed the policies in the beginning. I could still go to work, when I had work but then I lost my job and I realised no one took the alcohol ban and curfew seriously.'

TA: 'Do you think that the government did as much as they could to help those people struggling economically?'

*Interviewee B: 'No, they just half-assed everything. They didn't try enough. Those people that did get compensation, they were put through so many obstacles that you have to pass in order to finally get that money. And it's not like you get all the money at once. It's like they were paying it in instalments to you. And **they just half-assed it, they didn't try hard enough**.'*

TA: 'I See. Did it look like they were trying? Regarding these campaigns?'

*Interviewee B: 'Yes. Exactly, they were like, "oh, we'll give you 15k". Then when you do apply for it, and you do qualify for it. They're like," Oh, but you're only going to get 3k because of X,Y, Z." **They made it seem all lovey dovey**, like walking through a field, but once you actually try and get that money it's like so much more complicated than that. **It's like they don't want you to get the money.**'*

I noticed they had a rather strong negative perception. I thought this was very interesting, so I continued to talk about the government with Interviewee B. They did not come across as shy about their opinions, as some other

participants were, so I kept digging; asked why they think the government implemented the curfew. Just as 'Interviewee D', they also thought it was a "stupid idea" (Interviewee B, 2022).

*Interviewee B: 'People who are backing the Prime Minister obviously have a lot of power because the Prime Minister has The King that supports him. And they don't give a shit what they do. They just step all over the people to do whatever they please. Because The King supports the Prime Minister so much. Especially because of the protests they were trying to stop the protests because many people don't like how Thailand is being governed. So it would **make sense why they made a curfew, then people could not protest all night**.'*

When I asked about their perception of the government:

*Interviewee B: 'It's just we all have the same thought. Which is actually, our generation, think it's **just a fucking joke**… No. You know what? **There's no words to describe our government.'***

TA: 'Can I quote you on that?'

*Interviewee B: 'Yeah, there's too much wrong that **I can't pinpoint one single thing.**'*

I felt the need to ask for permission to quote them on everything once again. As mentioned earlier in Thailand they have lèse majestè, I wanted to make sure they knew what they were saying and that it was completely consensual for me to write this in my thesis.

5.3.3 Formal Workers

'Interviewee A' was more vocal about their perceptions on the government than 'Interviewee H'.

TA: 'How would you describe the Thai government's effort in combating the pandemic?'

*Interviewee A: 'There was already distrust in the government before the pandemic, the pandemic only made it a few times worse. Seeing that they were **incapable of tackling the problem** at hand in an efficient or successful manner just proved they should not be in charge of anything, let alone a country's governing body.'*

When asked the same question to 'Interviewee H', they seemed to have a completely different perception compared to 'Interviewee A':

*Interviewee H: '**Good effort,** they tried to stop people from dying and help poor sick people for free and took care of them.'*

'Interviewee A', previously mentioned that the media made it seem more strict than it was in reality, therefore I wanted to see what 'Interviewee H' thought about the media representation of the pandemic, since we uncovered earlier that 'Interviewee D', whom had strong negative perception of the policies and government; followed the policies because he thought he would be in trouble if they were caught.

TA: 'Would you say the policies were more lenient than the news reports made them out to be?'

*Interviewee H: 'No, it was exactly like the news reports. **I trust the government during the pandemic**.'*

6. Discussion

One of the main takeaways from the analysis, showed how important it was to be protected by social security during the pandemic; which protects not only the economy but also the people. If there were more people in Thailand covered by TSS before the pandemic, perhaps the economy could have had a quicker recovery and reduced the socio-economic impact. TSS has the potential to protect people from being in a vulnerable state.

Furthermore, the analysis has also uncovered that some Thais do not want help from their government, due to the vast amount of distrust they have in the system. 'Interviewee F' is a business owner and is registered in the Thai system, however does not have TSS, because of two points. One, it is not available to them as a business owner; and two, if it was available they wouldn't accept it due to the resentment towards the government. Comparably, 'Interviewee D' has the same belief. They pay their taxes and that is all. In section 3.1, I indicated that the growing distrust in governments which emerged from the pandemic separates the people within a society. It is noteworthy that point out that 'Interviewee F' explained that the way the government decided who deserves their help is not right because it separated them.

All business owners except 'Interviewee G' fell into a lot of economic troubles during the pandemic. 'Interviewee G' was able to receive help because they cooperated with the government and linked their shop with the G Wallet app. She did not have 500,000 baht in the bank account, she was considered a 'poor person' in the governments eyes. The other business owners, with the exception of 'Interivewee F' relied on foreign clients. Therefore when governments around the world cancelled international travel, and there were no inbound flights to Thailand, these businesses became vulnerable. TSS should include a type of social protection to business owners that includes more than a tax reduction on the company. Because TSS works in the way where an employer and an employee both put in money to the employees' TSS account. They ought to pave a new system for all types of people in the economy. Just as 'Interviewee C' said "Thailand is very pro-employees"; conversely, Thailand should favor all people in the economy. In this sense, business owners are overlooked and could be seen as informal work due to the fact that they do not have a consistent income and do not have to same security as their employees, therefore falls into a vulnerable category.

Interviewee 'A' and 'B' did not follow any of the policies and went out on several occuations whilst the curfew was active. 'Interviewee D', even though they had a negative perception of the policies, nevertheless, followed the policies. Interviewee 'A', 'B', 'D', were the most candor. They were so disappointed in the government and the policies and did not trust them at all. The only difference is

that 'Interviewee D' followed the policies. I believe they were scared of the consequences. Many of the older participants said that if they left the police will catch them. Whereas Interviewee 'A' and 'B' and 'E' went out and nothing happened. The pattern here is that these three participants are all under the ages of 30 and are my youngest interviewees while 'Interviewee D' is over 60 years old.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, negative perceptions of the government caused a negative perception of the NPIs.'Interviewee C' was least negative about the government and policies even after losing everything. This confirms that their neutral attitude about the government reflect their perception towards the NPIs. All the participants were affected by the lockdown, but two of them did not have a negative experience with it. This would be Interviewee 'G' and 'H'. This may be due to the fact that they were not put into a vulnerable position, 'Interviewee G' benefited from the government aid and nothing had changed for 'Interviewee H' they continued as normal.

Keeping the research question in mind; the pandemic revealed the cracks and instability of the Thai institutions and played a huge role in how Thai people perceived the COVID-19 policies. There were more negative perceptions of the NPI's compared to the positive perceptions. Thai people perceived the lockdown to be good in regards to the health of the people, however thought the lockdown was too long. There were also many contradicting perceptions on the other policies, such as the curfew and alcohol ban. All participants had corresponding answers, they all thought the curfew was a bad idea and it was a designed to stop the pro-democracy protests. It was a more of a strategy to control their citizens rather than limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Reflecting back to the theoretical framework (Figure 1) and the hypotheses presented in section 3. Those who were *not* brought into a vulnerable position, had positive perceptions of the NPIs and believed that the government was going good work to protect their citizens. Whilst those who were unfortunate during the pandemic and fell into debt, lost their job and income, had negative perceptions of the NPIs. If we consider the business owners to be categorised as

'vulnerable' or 'informal' then this confirms both hypotheses. The ones that are excluded from the 'vulnerable category' are 'Interviewee A', being a formal worker; 'Interviewee G' benefited from the government and 'H' also a formal worker. However, 'Interviewee A' is a special participant that fell into both categories of business owner and formal worker. They were drastically affected before they joined the formal sector, which could explain why they had such strong negative perceptions of the government and the NPIs; because they lost the family business during the pandemic and now has to support their family.

Considering the findings in this thesis, future research on how people perceived NPIs around the world can be looked into further, perhaps with larger sample size to obtain clearer insight. It is helpful to all governments and NGOs to understand what they can improve on and what they can learn from other countries. For example, the 'Let's Go Halves' programme could perhaps be introduced in other countries during a crisis. COVID-19 will not be the last pandemic the world will face.

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Appendix 1: Participant List

Interviewee A: 01/05/2022, Assistant manager, B.Sc. in Psychology, 23

Interviewee B: 03/05/2022, Singer now waiter, dropped out of 9th grade, 26

Interviewee C: 04/05/2022, Entrepreneur, Folk high school, 71

Interviewee D: 07/05/2022, Manages housing projects, graduated high school, 63

Interviewee E: 08/05/2022, Photographer, dropped out of 10th grade, 22

Interviewee F: 08/05/2022, Shop owner, B.Sc. in Business Management, 50

Interviewee G: 09/05/2022, Shop owner, B.Sc. in Administration, 44

Interviewee H: 10/05/2022, Accountant, B.Sc. in Accounting, 51