

Global Norms and Local Resistance: The Concentration of LGBTQ+ Groups in Three Southern Thai Border Provinces

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ABSTRACT

In Thailand's three southern border provinces, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, where conservative Malay Muslim values are prevalent, this study examines the acceptance and opposition to LGBTQ+ rights standards. Using a qualitative methodology based on Amitav Acharya's Norm Localisation paradigm, the study finds that local implementation is still difficult because of ingrained religious and cultural resistance, even in the face of national developments like the 2024 Marriage Equality Act. Therefore, to promote acceptance, LGBTQ+ people in these areas use social media, build support systems, and highlight Islamic principles like "Rahmah" (compassion). The results show how LGBTQ+ people modify their expressions in a conservative socio-religious environment while frequently hiding their identities in the face of social opposition, highlighting the intricate relationship between local values and global norms. This study emphasises how crucial grassroots efforts and culturally aware policymaking are to advancing LGBTQ+ inclusion in conservative settings.

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INTRODUCTION

International human rights frameworks like the Yogyakarta Principles, UN resolutions, and civil society initiatives have all supported LGBTQ+ rights in recent decades. Many nations have progressively implemented LGBTQ+ protection laws, particularly those about marriage, anti-discrimination, and gender identity recognition. Adopting these guidelines is still not universal, though, especially in places with strong religious and cultural traditions (O'Flaherty & Fisher, 2007; United Nations, 2021).

About 300 couples registered their unions at a mass marriage registration ceremony hosted by Bangkok's Pathum Wan District Office at Siam Paragon on January 23, 2025. On the same day, 1,754 couples nationwide registered their marriages. Following the passage of the Marriage Equality Act in 2024, which made Thailand the first country in Southeast Asia and the first country in Asia to legalise marriage for LGBTQ+ people through a civil code amendment, this event marked a significant change in Thailand's legal and social landscape. The Act is historic for LGBTQ+ rights in the area, having been passed by parliament with 400 votes in favour and 10 against (Maylisa, 2025).

The larger Southeast Asian context, however, paints a more nuanced picture. As recently as 2022, Vietnam's Ministry of Health declared homosexuality to be an illness. Because of its Catholic majority, the Philippines maintains conservative legal positions on same-sex marriage, abortion, and divorce, despite its seeming LGBTQ+ tolerance. Singapore's constitution limited marriage to heterosexual couples, but it also decriminalised same-sex relationships. Despite ongoing legal and social opposition, the Federal Court of Malaysia declared in 2024 that Kelantan's Sharia legislation, which made "unnatural sex" a crime, was unconstitutional. According to Sharia law, Indonesia, especially Aceh province, still has strong anti-LGBTQ+ laws that include physical punishment (Thai PBS, 2024; Infoquest, 2025).

Thailand's three southern border provinces, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, remain divided over the Marriage Equality Act, even though it symbolises progress at the national level. Strong Islamic cultural norms have shaped these provinces, which are inhabited primarily by Malay Muslims. Muslim representatives from the area opposed the bill once it was passed in December 2022, claiming it went against Islamic law. Muslim MPs from a variety of parties, including the Democrat Party, Phumjaithai, and Prachachat, notably opposed the move. Conservative views have surfaced even outside of the Muslim community; Padipat Santipada, a Christian MP, for example, abstained from voting on religious grounds. (BBC, 2023). There have been instances of symbolic resistance, but no large-scale demonstrations. Some mosques in Bangkok have posted posters that read, "Same-sex marriage is prohibited," while imams in the southern provinces have voiced their objections during Friday sermons. Although the majority of the Muslim community in Southern Thailand challenges the presence and marriage of LGBTQ+, the Marriage Equality Act was passed in 2024, legalising LGBTQ+ marriage. The power of religion cannot counter the power of a country's government or parliament. The hegemonic practice performed by the government is situated in its policy (Waruwu & Mudana, 2018).

The purpose of this study is to investigate how local sentiments in Thailand's three southernmost regions differ from international LGBTQ+ norms. The study examines how strongly religious and culturally conservative cultures adapt, modify, or fight global discourses on LGBTQ+ rights using Amitav Acharya's Norm Localisation paradigm. *"How have LGBTQ+ norms been adopted in the three Muslim-majority provinces of Southern Thailand?"* is the main research question that drives this investigation.

METHODS

The researcher will examine the behaviour change-related aspects of various human groups. A qualitative technique is employed in this study. Bryman (2016) states that qualitative research is distinguished by its sensitivity to social and cultural contexts, its emphasis on understanding social phenomena from the perspective of individuals being examined, and its use of words rather than numerical data in both data collection and interpretation. The lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people in Thailand's three southern border provinces, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, characterized by strong Islamic religious and cultural values, were investigated in this study using a qualitative methodology. The study used two primary data sources to have a thorough grasp of LGBTQ+ adaptability in this setting.

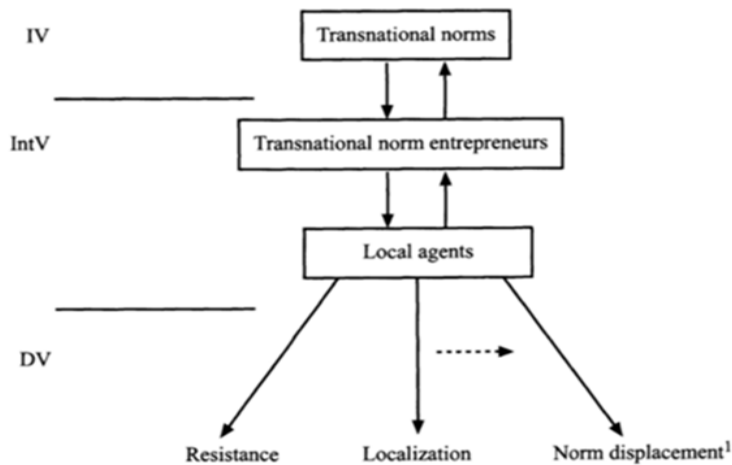
1. In-depth Interviews: Conducted online to protect informants' safety and comfort in delicate cultural and religious contexts. Informants received a briefing and gave their informed consent before taking part.
2. Document Analysis: To offer a wider context and triangulate conclusions, additional information was gathered from research papers, news stories, laws, academic literature, media content, and social media posts.

Three different LGBTQ+ informants from the southern provinces were chosen for the study using purposive sampling. How individuals negotiate international norms in a conservative Islamic setting was documented using a descriptive-interpretive methodology. Consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were among the ethical norms that were rigorously adhered to.

The conceptual framework of standards translation created by Professor Amitav (2004) serves as the basis for this study. It offers a methodical basis for comprehending how global norms are reinterpreted within local socio-cultural contexts and a critical viewpoint for examining the role of global norms in local pressures in Thailand's three southern border provinces. The proactive process by which local stakeholders absorb, reinterpret, and modify international norms to conform to dominant cultural, religious, and social values is known as standards translation, according to Professor Acharya. One of three possible results could result from this standards translation process:

1. The process by which the global norm fully replaces the local norm.
2. Norm adaptation, in which local values are modified to fit the global norm.
3. Rejecting norms, in which case, current norms are maintained unaltered.

The integration of local and worldwide initiatives to promote equal rights for gender, religion, race, and belief with local values is the main emphasis of this study. Three Southern Thai border provinces served as the backdrop for this study.



Picture 1: Internalisation Process of Acharya's Concept
Acharya (2004, p.254) [source]

Historical ambivalence regarding gender roles and differing levels of tolerance toward non-heteronormative identities are two of the many elements that influence how gender diversity norms are interpreted and integrated in Thailand's three southern border provinces. By legitimising the movement inside the community's cultural framework, the process of local norm conversion, especially when spearheaded by powerful local players fighting for LGBTQ+ rights, can function as a catalyst for wider social acceptance. Even though LGBTQ+ rights are becoming more widely acknowledged, local communities may find it difficult to conform to international human rights standards because of deeply ingrained religious and cultural beliefs. However, equality-promoting civil society initiatives can be crucial in changing public perceptions and upending ingrained ideas about gender and sexuality.

Even though the southern border provinces have yet to fully adopt LGBTQ+ norms, Acharya's (2004) paradigm for norm localisation provides important insight into the slow and dynamic process of normative change. Localised normative frameworks may eventually evolve as a result of the interplay between local beliefs, lobbying initiatives, and changing societal attitudes. This viewpoint not only clarifies the processes underlying social change, but it also emphasises the value of locally based participation in global discussions through collaborations with both domestic and foreign groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Thailand's three southern border provinces, LGBTQ+ and gender equality norms have changed

A complex interplay of political, cultural, religious, and communal factors has influenced how gender equality norms—particularly, particularly LGBTQ+ rights—have been adapted in the southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Thailand's legal pluralism is illustrated by the 1946 Act on the Application of Islamic Law in Certain Matters, which exempts Muslim family law in some provinces, despite the country's notable legal advancements, such as the 2025 Equal Marriage Act. In areas with strict conservative and religious values, there is significant opposition to the spread of global norms like LGBTQ+ rights. Wiener (2020) asserts that norms are socially formed and can be challenged by behaviours that go against ingrained ideas. LGBTQ+ Pride celebrations serve as a kind of proactive resistance by raising awareness, challenging accepted wisdom, and encouraging inclusivity via cultural expression. Even while Thailand has seen success at the national level, not everyone has benefited equally from these developments. LGBTQ+ people in the southern provinces continue to negotiate their identities despite social pressures, and social networks are essential for preventing isolation and promoting slow progress.

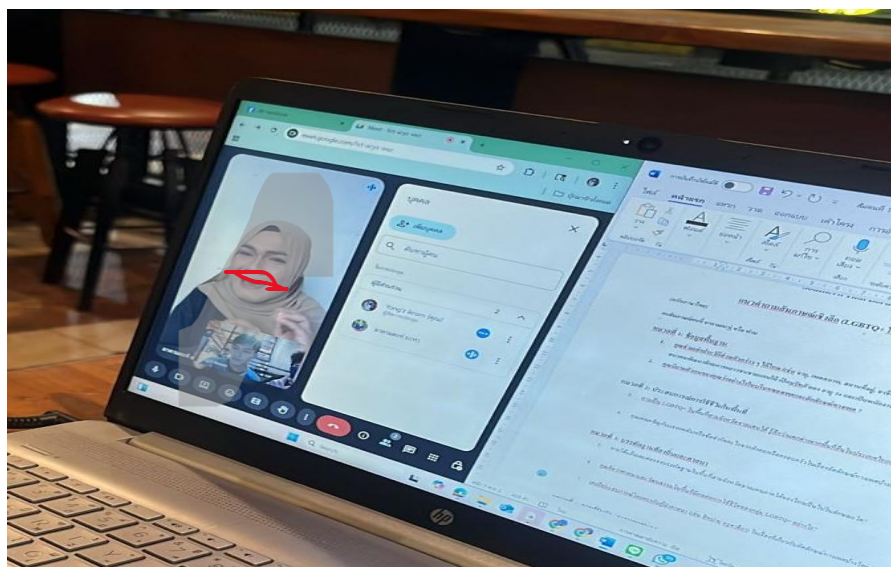
LGBTQ+ people's experiences in Thailand's three southern border provinces show a calculated adjustment to deeply ingrained cultural and religious standards. Madame Dah, the first interviewee, acknowledged that her identity was considered “wrong” by religious standards, but she chose to live with dignity within the framework of her faith. While

Interviewee 3, Olive, silently upheld the idea of "*I am who I am*," keeping a low profile, Interviewee 2, B, highlighted "*boundaries*" and "*moderation*" as instruments for harmonious cohabitation.

Instead of directly questioning social norms, all three respondents show a tendency to modify or reinterpret their own expressions to conform to them. This flexible strategy is in line with Acharya's theory of "*Norm Localization*," which holds that people can survive with dominant cultural and religious norms by adapting global values, like LGBTQ+ rights, to local situations.

In Thailand's three southern border provinces, sexual variety is becoming more apparent despite rigid religious and cultural standards. The active involvement of LGBTQ+ media personalities like Madame Dah, a well-known transgender influencer, and civil society organisations like Look Sao Peace, which assists LGBTQ+ youngsters in the area, as well as international norms, has an impact on this. The media and LGBTQ+ influencers play a crucial role in creating networks and questioning societal norms in conservative settings. These performers offer forums for depiction and discussion, drawing on Antje Wiener's thesis that norms are socially produced and subject to contestation. In areas where acceptance remains low, their presence fosters community and support networks for LGBTQ+ individuals while promoting inclusivity and gradually shifting social perceptions.

In her initial interview, Madam Dah described the "Luk Riang" group as a safe space for LGBTQ+ individuals and other marginalised people. Without using religion as a justification for exclusion, "Luk Riang", a local youth and community group, provides support and inclusiveness. This demonstrates how grassroots organisations, as opposed to NGOs or government entities, can promote LGBTQ+ acceptance. In areas where acceptance is still low, this kind of localised support can foster community networks, encourage inclusivity, and challenge prevailing norms. As an illustration of a community-based "Safe Zone" that develops naturally from within rather than being imposed by outside groups, Madam Dah mentioned the "Luk Riang" group. Such places serve as "breaks between norms" for LGBTQ+ people like her, enabling genuine self-expression without explicitly challenging inflexible societal and religious systems. Regarding the idea of norm localisation, these Safe Zones can be seen as areas of transition where international standards about sexual diversity are progressively incorporated into local settings, reducing direct opposition to dominant regional ideals.



Picture 2: May 2025 interview with the informant (also known as Madame Dah).

The informant permitted the picture to be used in the study's research report.

In the southern border provinces of Thailand, Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani, where the majority population is Muslim and firmly upholds Islamic values, the acceptance of LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality norms continues to be a delicate and complicated topic. Despite Thailand's notable advancements, such as the expected adoption of marriage equality in 2025, difficulties still exist in several areas. According to Article 66 of the Marriage Equality Bill, Islamic (Sharia) law takes precedence over civil law in family and inheritance disputes involving Muslims in the southern

regions. As a result, Islamic marriage contracts still have the upper hand, and these groups are not always subject to the state law requirement that weddings be registered.

There is clear religious and political resistance to the Marriage Equality Bill, especially from the Pracha Chat Party, which is very powerful in Southern Thailand and believes the bill goes against Islamic teachings. LGBTQ+ people in the three southern border provinces are under societal and religious pressure to hide their gender identity and fit in with the standards. Transgender women, for instance, are supposed to conform their looks to religious standards (Maylisa, 2024). However, many LGBTQ+ people overcome these limitations by embracing regionally approved forms, such as highlighting human dignity and compassion, values acknowledged in Islam.

According to Acharya's (2004) Norm Localisation concept, which was applied to this study, which is based on primary interviews and secondary materials, illustrates that universal norms need to be translated and modified to local cultural and religious settings, with local actors mediating the process. It does this by drawing on Acharya's (2004) idea of Norm localisation. Southern Thailand's LGBTQ+ and gender equality standards are reframed to avoid being in direct opposition to Islamic principles. As an example of Acharya's ideas of "partial acceptance" and "*localised adaptation*," Madam Dah accepted her religious deviation but decided to express it in secure places while following religious customs during ceremonies. By negotiating international norms through commonplace behaviours, vocabulary (*such as "moderation," "live well"*), and mediated identities, informants like Madam Dah, B, and Olive served as norm interpreters. This case study confirms that continuous local negotiation and reinterpretation, rather than top-down legal frameworks, are the source of norm internalisation in the southern border provinces.

Normative Discussion and Rebuttal in Southern Thailand's Three Border Provinces

Due to strict religious and cultural restrictions, LGBTQ+ Muslims in the border provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat in Southern Thailand have a difficult time expressing who they are. Because of the significant differences between these areas and the rest of the nation, negotiating LGBTQ+ rights is especially difficult. The legalisation of same-sex marriage by 2025 is one of Thailand's national LGBTQ+ rights advancements; however, implementation in these regions is still difficult. To properly negotiate societal and religious expectations, LGBTQ+ people respond by utilising adaptation methods, such as culturally relevant language that highlights compassion and human dignity, values that align with Islamic beliefs.

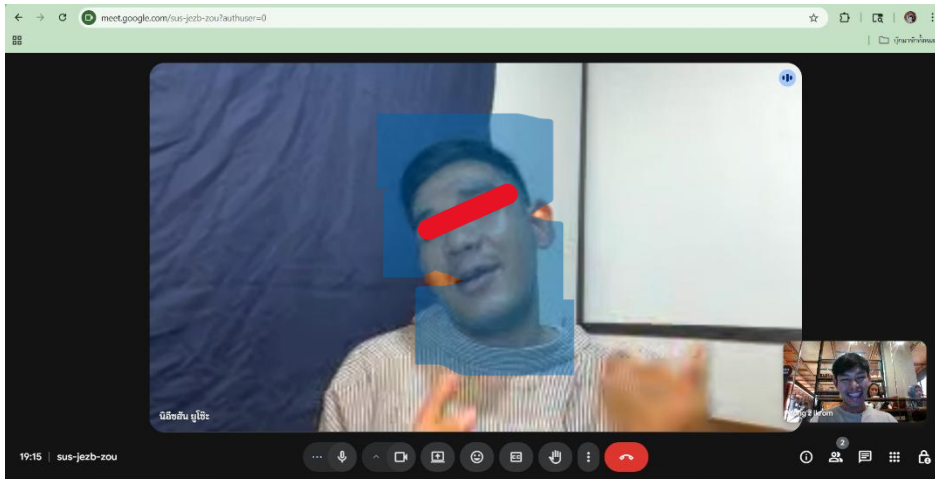
LGBTQ+ individuals are often seen as deviating from heteronormative expectations rooted in faith and traditional gender roles in Thailand's three southern border provinces, where religious and cultural values are strongly upheld. Sexually diverse communities create space for LGBTQ+ existence through dialogue, cultural adaptation, and the Islamic concept of *rahmah* (compassion), while avoiding open criticism of religious teachings or leaders. While others use body language and clothing to communicate their identities solely to close friends and family, others subtly display their identities on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok without questioning orthodoxy.

One prominent LGBTQ+ figure on social media in the southern border provinces is Madame Dah. "*Living as LGBTQ+ here is sensitive, but I'm rarely criticised because those who know me accept this as my true self*," they say. In a similar vein, the majority of those who know Madame Dah welcome Fan, her other identity. (BBC Thai, 2022). Interviews revealed that the community responded with gentle religious warnings rather than outright opposition. Thailand's marital equality bill was also criticised for conflicting with Islamic principles. As stated by the secretary of the Narathiwat Islamic Committee in an interview with BBC Thai, while Muslims may tolerate some social changes, same-sex relationships remain contrary to Islamic teachings and are therefore prohibited.

Two different strategies for negotiating social norms were identified by the interviews. Madam Dah steered clear of conflict and instead asserted her individuality by calm resilience, in contrast to Interviewee B, who responded to criticism like "*that's wrong*" by demanding understanding. Both participated in a nuanced "negotiation of norms," changing their expressions and actions to conform to their views without resorting to overt defiance. "*I don't argue, but I disagree with those who call us wrong*," B underlined. All I ask is understanding. Don't deprive yourself, but adapt. A type of non-confrontational resistance is shown in his strategy of "*speaking softly*," "*using reason*," and "*staying*

visible." Although he acknowledged some limitations within Norm localisation, he maintained that LGBTQ+ people should be understood, especially in the absence of complete public acceptance.

"Religion may not endorse LGBTQ+ identities, but it doesn't teach us to despise them either," said Olive (pseudonym), the third respondent, to promote reconciliation. Instead of directly challenging religious standards, Olive used reinterpretation strategies to discreetly question exclusionary beliefs by highlighting ideas like "*competence fosters acceptance*" and "*religion does not hate*." This tactic, which uses alternative values (such as merit or aptitude) to negotiate admission, indicates a reinterpretation of norms. "*They will accept us if we prove capable*," Olive declared. In this case, LGBTQ+ integration depends on proving their worth within the community's preexisting framework, a type of localised adaptation that puts practicality ahead of conflict.



Picture 3: May 2025 interview with the informant (also known as B).
The informant permitted the picture to be used in the study's research report.

Islamic customs and regional cultural values interact intricately while negotiating LGBTQ+ standards. According to Antje Wiener's (2020) theory of normative contestation, norms are socially produced and can be contested by defying or criticising accepted norms. This contestation, whether assertive or defensive, is essential to advancing LGBTQ+ identities in conservative settings. Traditional standards and newly emergent LGBTQ+ rights frequently clash within sociocultural networks. Through local customs, the visibility of LGBTQ+ people can operate as hostile leverage, upending long-held views. The "quod omnes tangit" principle, which holds that impacted groups, including LGBTQ+ populations, need to be included in making the rules that govern them, is consistent with this. Although there is still symbolic opposition to the Equal Marriage Act, the Muslim minority in Thailand has not yet organised widespread opposition. For instance, several mosques in Bangkok have displayed banners that urge respect for Islamic law and declare that "*Same-Sex Marriage is prohibited*." In contrast, a more subdued but enduring form of opposition is seen in the southern border provinces, where imams often denounce same-sex couples in their Friday sermons.

Due in part to the impact of international standards on local Muslim groups, Thailand's three southern border provinces do not categorically oppose sexual variety. Traditional religious and cultural frameworks are gradually altered by these standards, which are manifested in social values, consumption patterns, and dress codes. According to a 2007 study by Jittiyaphan, Muslim youth in these provinces have been deviating from stringent religious beliefs as a result of globalisation, and this tendency is probably going to continue. Additionally, this change makes it more difficult to respond to global standards for sexual diversity, leaving local communities without a cohesive position. Others exhibit uncertain acceptance, while others oppose. Important Elements Affecting LGBTQ+ Acceptance:

1. Strict Interpretations in Islam. Following strict religious traditions, the Malay Muslim majority in these areas frequently rejects LGBTQ+ identities as being incompatible with Islamic teachings.
2. Pressures from Culture and Identity. Due to the strong ties between Malay Muslim identity and traditional beliefs, non-conforming sexual expressions are stigmatised. LGBTQ+ people experience prejudice in the workplace, in schools, in the medical field, and in places of worship.

3. Resistance and Negotiation. Despite obstacles, LGBTQ+ communities use grassroots networks, campaigning, and social media (such as TikTok influencers) to create safe spaces. However, prevailing cultural and religious standards continue to limit their attempts.

A complicated interaction between religious and cultural standards shapes the acceptance of LGBTQ+ people in the border provinces of Southern Thailand. These norms, which have their roots in Malay-Muslim traditions, frequently encourage opposition to sexual variety since heteronormative standards are reinforced by sociocultural networks. In a situation known as contentious conformity, where local groups actively oppose LGBTQ+ rights on moral grounds, this conflict can stifle LGBTQ+ expression and foster hostility. Issues Facing LGBTQ+ People:

Religious Restrictions: Because of conservative interpretations of Islam, many people are forced to hide their identities out of concern for social rejection.

Limited State Intervention: Although government organisations support human rights, the private and delicate character of religious organisations limits their ability to take certain measures.

Cultural Barriers: Despite grassroots initiatives, the establishment of safe places is hampered by strong Islamic and Malay cultural links.

Socio-Cultural Networks' Function: According to Antje Wiener, social interactions play a fundamental role in shaping norms; therefore, local networks are crucial in either promoting or opposing sexual diversity. These networks, which function under official governmental structures, represent conflicts between conventional wisdom and the developing rights of LGBTQ+ people worldwide. They can either challenge or uphold established norms through competitive advocacy, as they are enmeshed in larger meaning structures. As dynamics within these networks shift, influenced by both regional traditions and global movements, perceptions of LGBTQ+ rights in the area may gradually evolve.

LGBTQ+ acceptance is significantly impacted by deeply ingrained Malay-Muslim norms in the border areas of southern Thailand. These norms are reinforced by religious instruction, community customs, and strict gender roles. Deviating from accepted gender norms can result in shame, discrimination, and even forceful "therapy" attempts since it is frequently perceived as a violation of cultural and religious values. While some families choose to "reform" their identities by sending their LGBTQ+ children to religious schools, others experience exclusion in healthcare, education, and employment. Systemic hurdles still exist even though LGBTQ+ visibility is increasing (for example, in sex work). **Strategies and Difficulties in Negotiating Acceptance.** **Non-Aggressive Lobbying.** Example (Madam Dah): Expressing oneself on TikTok while highlighting Islamic Rahmah (compassion) without openly opposing religious authority. Example (B): Expressing disapproval of anti-LGBTQ+ discourse ("*It's wrong*") without resorting to direct conflict, demonstrating practical compromise. And Example (Olive): Using merit ("*ability leads to acceptance*") and reinterpreting religious principles (e.g., "*Islam doesn't teach hate*") to support inclusiveness. **Two Realities:** Although self-expression is safe on online platforms, discrimination is nonetheless glaring offline. **Sociocultural Networks: Obstacles and Opportunities.** **Obstacles:** LGBTQ+ rights are frequently opposed by families, schools, and religious organisations. **Opportunities:** Alternative negotiating venues are created by influencers, online communities, and youth organisations like "Look Sao Peace".

The Silent Revolution of Norm Localization. In the area, LGBTQ+ people practice norm localization, which is a subtle challenge to heteronormativity through context-specific safe spaces, selective visibility, and reinterpretation. This case study provides insights into comparable religiously conservative environments by highlighting how oppressed people deal with oppressive regimes without resorting to overt rebellion.

LGBTQ+ groups adjust to regional traditions

Non-normative gender expression is frequently viewed in these provinces as being in opposition to Islamic morality. To deal with this, LGBTQ+ people use communication techniques that highlight Islamic-approved principles like human dignity and compassion (Rahmah), which ease tensions within the community while reaffirming their identities.

Flexible Expression of *oneself, contextual adaptability*. To live without sacrificing her identity, Madam Dah purposefully alters her appearance (for example, by not wearing wigs or cosmetics to religious gatherings). This illustrates norm localisation, which aims to match local expectations with global LGBTQ+ expression. Translation: "*Madam Dah adapts to the context without abandoning her true self.*" *Equilibrium Adaptation*. According to Olive (pseudonym), "*We adjust to fit in, but not until it hurts.*" Balance is the key to happiness. This involves leveraging media, support networks, and the environment to negotiate acceptance without confrontation. Through subtle, daily resistance, these strategies show how LGBTQ+ people reinterpret global norms (such as gender expression) to conform to local religious-cultural frameworks, promoting inclusion.

According to Interviewee B, "Adapt to fit in, but not at the cost of your comfort," highlighting moderation and harmonious coexistence with regional customs. His strategy is a reflection of how LGBTQ+ people strategically navigate their identities in conservative cultures, making the necessary adjustments to fit in while upholding their boundaries.



Picture 4: May 2025 interview with the informant (also known as Olive).

The informant permitted the picture to be used in the study's research report.

LGBTQ+ people must use sophisticated adaptation techniques to balance their identities with dominant social norms in conservative Muslim communities. Local LGBTQ+ Muslim Ali (pseudonym) told BBC Thai that while his family never specifically prohibited him from being himself, they did advise him to keep his identity private. By presenting in a stereotypically masculine way, he avoids bringing attention to himself and restricts his revelation of same-sex relationships to close friends. As a result, societal rejection has decreased. Through public service, some LGBTQ+ people are accepted by the community. Not everyone, meanwhile, had Ali's experience; some must leave home to live truly after experiencing rejection from family (BBC Thai, 2024).

Madam Dah, a 31-year-old transgender woman who identifies as sexually varied, resides in Yaha District, Yala Province. Even though LGBTQ+ identity is a delicate subject in the region, she said in an interview with BBC Thai that people who are aware of and supportive of her dual identity, "Madam Dah" as her public persona and "Fan" as her legal identity, rarely criticise her. She made it clear that her religious convictions and her self-expression are compatible. According to Islamic conventions, she presents herself as a man at religious gatherings. Social acceptance is still unequal in spite of her attempts to strike a balance between identity and faith (Chaiyos, 2022). LGBTQ+ people frequently rely on supportive relationships with family and the community to seek acceptance, even while their identities deviate from social norms. The importance of family, friends, partners, and healthcare professionals in the health and well-being of sexually varied people is highlighted by research on the "4Ps" paradigm. Strong social ties can lower health risks by acting as negotiating leverage with regional cultural norms. The Book Group in Pattani Province, which provides a secure environment for young women of all gender identities, is one real-world example. Through the inclusion of families in inclusive events like soccer matches, the program fosters acceptance and understanding among family networks.

Social, cultural, and religious networks interact to influence the existence and acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities in Thailand's southern border areas. These networks serve as both support and control mechanisms. Open gender expression is frequently suppressed by family and community institutions that are based on rigid Islamic rules, yet acceptance may happen when people are respected or make valuable contributions to the community. With interpretations of Islamic teachings ranging from strict rejection to moderate acceptance, religious leaders have a considerable impact on societal sentiments. Though some LGBTQ+ people intentionally localise their identities by incorporating traditional rituals and religious values, cultural identity, which has its roots in Malay Muslim traditions, can frame LGBTQ+ identities as threats.

Peer networks and online communities offer alternative spaces for solidarity and self-expression, connecting LGBTQ+ individuals in Thailand's southern provinces with broader national and international movements. While the 2024 Marriage Equality Act and numerous Pride celebrations have highlighted progress at the national level, these developments have not been fully reflected in the southern border provinces, where Islamic cultural beliefs remain dominant. This approach exemplifies Acharya's concept of Norm localisation, wherein global norms—such as LGBTQ+ rights—are adapted to fit local cultural and religious contexts. Rather than rejecting their identities or the cultural environment, LGBTQ+ individuals engage in a broader process of “adapting without abandoning identity”, navigating a highly conservative socio-religious landscape with resilience and creativity.

CONCLUSION

Using the Norm Localisation framework (Acharya, 2004), this study examines the localised acceptability and resistance to international LGBTQ+ rights norms in the southern border provinces of Thailand: Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Due to ingrained cultural and theological resistance within the largely traditional Malay Muslim community, implementation in the South is still restricted despite national legal advancements, such as the 2024 Marriage Equality Act. Using social media, referencing Islamic principles like *Rahmah* (compassion), and joining local organisations like "Look Sao Peace" are among the adaptation tactics LGBTQ+ people use to establish safe spaces within socioreligious boundaries. Strict interpretations of Islamic law, the enforcement of gender roles, and the absence of legal recognition under Muslim family law are the main causes of resistance.

The findings underscore the need for a multifaceted approach that incorporates culturally sensitive policymaking, rights-based education, and interfaith dialogue to advance LGBTQ+ inclusion in conservative regions. This study further demonstrates how ongoing negotiations between conservative and progressive actors influence the localisation of global norms, particularly in contexts where religious and cultural values are deeply entrenched. Future research should investigate the impact of digital globalisation and the role of Muslim youth in transforming social attitudes toward LGBTQ+ rights in southern Thailand. Such inquiries would contribute to a deeper understanding of how generational change and online connectivity may catalyse shifts in norm acceptance and cultural reinterpretation.

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