

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

The main focus of this research, however, was not just to establish that female political elites existed, but, rather, an attempt to discern whether or not they differed significantly, in terms of backgrounds, characteristics, or attitudes and values, from male political elites. In this regard, the study has been particularly rewarding in that the generated data indicated several areas where male and female attributes were significantly different, as well as some where no noticeable differences existed.

#### Family History of Political Activism

It was hypothesized that female parliamentarians are more likely to have a family background of political activism than male parliamentarians. At first, it appeared the original hypothesis should be rejected. However, checks were built into the questionnaire to insure against misinterpretations in reading. The data, from tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 in chapter IV, revealed that only 5.1 percent of the male members of the Parliament had a father or spouse that had run for election to the national government. Of the female members, one-third were from families with a history of such involvement. When all the other members of the male family were included in the total, the 14.4 percent increases to 19.5 percent (14.4 percent + 5.1 percent). Thus, the percentage of male parliamentarians never having had any family members run for the national election is 80.5 percent. On the other hand, only 50.0 percent of the female parliamentarians had never had any family members run for the national election. It is clear that, proportionately, female political

leaders do tend to come from family backgrounds that exhibit more political activism than do their male counterparts (see Table 19).

Table 19  
Combined Family Political Backgrounds

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Combined Family Political Backgrounds	Female		Male	
	Num- ber	Per- cent	Num- ber	Per- cent
Family members did not compete in the national election	6	50.0	181	80.5
Family members did complete in the national election	6	50.0	42	19.5

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$$\chi^2 = 6.80, df = 1, p = .01.$$

Additional findings in this area show (1) the majority of female legislators in Thailand do not acquire their office through what has often been termed "widow's succession,"<sup>1</sup> (2) while family ties with political activities probably have helped involve some female members of the Parliament in politics, it cannot be said this is a necessary

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<sup>1</sup>Cynthia F. Epstein, "Women and Power: The Roles of Women in Politics in the United States," in Access to Power: Cross-National Studies of Women and Elites, eds. Cynthia F. Epstein and Rose L. Coser (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 132.

condition, and (3) family ties, while probably aiding a few of the present members, are no guarantee of political success. The small number of female parliamentarians (N = 12) shows this is not a sufficient condition to insure general advancement to the upper echelons of Thai political life.

### Socioeconomic Status

Male and female members of the Thai Parliament were found to differ significantly in both previous occupation and prior income. While no attempt was made to classify individual social status of various occupations, the differences evident in economic class suggest that, overall, women who enter the Parliament do tend to come from a higher socioeconomic status than the male members (see Table 8). This finding is consistent with studies of other countries. Furthermore, when compared to the population at large, female political leaders tend to come from the middle or upper classes.<sup>2</sup>

### Education

The data for education did not reveal as clear-cut a distinction between male and female legislators as some of the other areas under investigation. This was mainly because 81.2 percent of the Parliament was university graduates or the equivalent. While it was found that, because of the substantially higher proportion of females having obtained advanced degrees (41.6 percent for females and 17.1 percent for males), the average or mean years of education for women did in fact surpass that for men,

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<sup>2</sup>Although here, it should be noted, this was not a unanimous situation.

this difference was not statistically significant.

Clear evidence exists, however, concerning the level of education of the Parliamentarians compared to that of the population as a whole. Most Thais have completed only four years of formal schooling or less.<sup>3</sup> (Mandatory class attendance beyond that level has only been in the law for the past three years.) The findings of this study are thus in full agreement with those that found members of legislative bodies in other countries to be better educated than the general populations they govern.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the generated data show that Thailand holds its own with other countries, such as Chile and Peru, where the overall rates of education in society are substantially higher, in that most (91.7 percent) female political leaders have taken some university training.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Central Statistical Office, Thailand Population Census--Changwad Yala, 1960 (Bangkok: National Economic and Social Development Board, 1960), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Fraser found that ". . . many of the rural teachers in Thailand have little, if any, more education than the first four primary grades which they are expected to teach in village schools." See Thomas M. Fraser, Jr., Economic and Cultural Change in South Thailand, 1956-1966, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup>Jane S. Jaquette, "Female Political Participation in Latin America," in Women in the World: A Comparative Study, ed. Lynne B. Iglitzin and Ruth Ross (Santa Barbara, California: American Bibliographic Center--Clio Press, 1976), p. 68.

### Age

Of all the variables included in this study, sex and age are most closely correlated. This finding, that female legislators tend to be younger than their male counterparts, is consistent with the findings of the studies of legislators in other countries.

Furthermore, because age was so closely identified with the sex of the legislator, it proved a useful control on other relationships--such as education.

### Rural-Urban Background

While there had been a great deal of agreement in the literature concerning the aforementioned variables, the degree to which urbanness is related to political participation was a subject of great controversy. This researcher has found that such disputes are, generally, simply due to differences in operationalizing the terms under consideration. Because the disagreements were evident even where "political participation" had been defined as Milbrath's top level (as it has been for the purposes of the present study), it was assumed the conflict most probably resulted from a failure to agree on an operational definition of the terms "urban," or "urbanness." In assessing this problem, two possible points of contention were identified. One area occurred when scholars did not agree on what size population was necessary before its inhabitants could be designated as urban. The second area surfaced when it became evident that this very act of "designation" was something quite apart from other research designs attempting to determine the degree of "urban orientation" exhibited by the study populations. The very idea of "degrees" of urbanness suggests it is not an either/or

proposition (i.e., not necessarily a distinct choice between either "rural" or "urban"). But if rurakness-urbanness is a continuum, and not two separate classes easily distinguished by whether or not they fall on a particular side of an arbitrary cutoff point (e.g., 2,500 population), and if, in addition, it depends on the respondents' "orientation," then it is entirely possible that urbanness is not a quantitative variable, a trait to be attributed to others, after all. Instead, it becomes a qualitative variable, similar to "favorableness of opinion,"<sup>6</sup> that depends on attitudes and values, or subjective criteria.

As any attempt to offer a definitive answer to this paradox lies outside the scope of the present study, it was decided to install controls in the questionnaire to help determine whether or not the scales designed to determine the size of birthplace and residence were, in fact, viable instruments to measure urban orientations. It was found that they were not. Considerable differences were evident between the objective and subjective measures. Using less than 5,000 people as a cutoff for the measurement of size of residence, .5 percent was classified as rural; on the other hand, 17 percent of the respondents reported residing in a rural area on the subjective measure (see Table 13). Using less than 5,000 people as a cutoff for the measurement of size of birthplace, none was classified as rural (see Table 11), but 38.6 percent of the respondents reported being born in a rural area on the subjective measure (see Table 14). There was no noticeable difference

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<sup>6</sup>John H. Mueller, Karl F. Schuessler, and Herbert L. Costner, Statistical Reasoning in Sociology (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), p. 12.

between males and females in their subjective rating for area of residence (see Table 13). A greater number of men than women subjectively reported being born in a rural area despite there being no reported rural births on the objective measures. The data did not support the original hypothesis concerning urban/rural differences according to sex.

### Values and Attitudes

Finally, it was hypothesized that female parliamentarians tend to be more liberal than male parliamentarians in their perceptions of major problems and solutions. It has been asserted in several previous works, both on Western democracies and on developing countries, that female political elites tend to be more liberal than their male counterparts, especially on the "social" issues. The single most significant finding to emerge from the data in this study, however, was that Thailand simply does not appear to fit the patterns observed in other countries. In all the three issue areas, there is never more than a 4 percent difference between men and women. Moreover, the data suggest that rather than being more liberal than male counterparts, female parliamentarians in Thailand actually appear to be more conservative in the area of social problems.

In all, the major goals of this research have been fulfilled. Data were generated that enabled the hypotheses to be tested. It is hoped that the research findings will prove useful to future studies in a variety of subfields in the discipline. Several conclusions of this research seem to conflict with those of previous studies in political systems other than Thailand. Whether this conflict is due to the present results being Thai-specific or to some other cause is not known at

this point, but the existence of the conflict indicates that there are areas where future research is needed.