

POLITICAL ELITES IN THAILAND : A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
MALE AND FEMALE PARLIAMENTARIANS

The aims of the research are (1) to identify, from the existing literature, the major themes dealing with women in politics; (2) to use these as a basis for formulating hypotheses; (3) to generate original data on the backgrounds, characteristics, attitudes, and values of the members of the 1979-1983 Thai Parliament; (4) to identify and define the similarities and differences between males and females in terms of the above variables; and (5) to test the derived hypotheses by using data generated by this study.

The analysis is divided into two major sections: (1) the search for areas where correlations existed, or did not exist, between sex of respondent and variables designed to measure backgrounds and characteristics; and (2) the search for correlations, or lack thereof, between sex of respondent and variables designed to measure "liberal" versus "conservative" attitudes, along with values on political, economic, and social issues.

Several strong correlations are found between sex of respondent and such variables as history of political activism, income, and age. Different scales of "urbanness" produced conflicting results between "objective" and "subjective" measurements. This raises one possible explanation for the high level of disagreement over this variable in the literature.

No positive correlations are found between sex of respondent and liberal attitudes in any of the three issue areas. Contrary to previous findings, a moderate correlation is found to exist between sex of respondent and conservative attitudes and values on social issues. Female political elites tend to be more conservative than their male counterparts.

While the theoretical and statistical analyses are designed to provide information on all members of the Thai Parliament, the major thrust is on discerning differences and similarities based on the sex of the respondent. The importance of the study lies in its being the first of its kind to look at female political elites in Thailand.