Unveiling Gendered Chains:
A Comparative Case Study of Women's Political Representation in Thailand and the Philippines

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Abstract

Thailand and the Philippines exhibit unique challenges for women in public office. Considering the number of women elected in office, the underrepresentation of women in both governments poses a concern. Thus, the main question is, what are the commonalities and differences in women's political representation in Thailand and the Philippines? To answer the inquiry, this study conducts archival research and employs an Intersectional Feminist framework to shed light on the multifaceted ways in which gender norms intersect with women's journeys into politics. The objectives of this study are as follows: (1) To analyze the state of women's political representation including the number of women in elected offices in both countries, (2) to compare and contrast the findings between Thailand and the Philippines to highlight commonalities and differences in women's political representation, and (3) to examine intersecting identities such as affect women's political representation. Using the intersectional approach, this paper found that women's political representation in Thailand and the Philippines is influenced by the inter-relationship of gender, socioeconomic status, and other identities while trying to negotiate space for their inclusion in the practice of politics. With that, this study not only exposes the roots of women's underrepresentation in politics but also calls for transformative change. It highlights the importance of adopting an Intersectional Feminist perspective to challenge existing norms and advocate for meaningful inclusion of women in decision-making processes.

Keywords Women, Political Representation, Patriarchy, Thailand, Philippines

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1. Introduction

Since the start of the 21st century, achieving gender equality worldwide, especially in politics, remains an unmet objective. Gender inequality has proven to be a difficult problem to overcome as it lingers everywhere and is a hindrance to social progress (United Nations, n.d.). While there have been strides in several regions of Asia, women's capacity to engage as decision-makers in politics remains constrained. One may ask, "Where are the women in politics?" Women's political participation is an essential prerequisite for achieving gender equality and genuine democracy. It helps promote the involvement of women in public decision-making and is an avenue that guarantees accountability to women (UN Women, n.d.-a). In recent years, women have been leaving their mark in the field of politics. During the 2016 presidential elections in the United States of America, Hillary Clinton was vying to become the first female president of the country in her race against Donald Trump. While Clinton did lose her campaign, the journey for women to gain the top government posts in the United States did not end there. Just five years later, the country would bear witness to its first female vice president: Kamala Harris. Harris, who won alongside Joe Biden as president, is also known to be the first Black American and South Asian American to be elected to the position (The White House, n.d.). In New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern gained the distinction of being her country's youngest prime minister and was able to create a government with diverse members including women, people of color, indigenous people, and members of the LGBTQ community (Pannett, 2023). Additionally, Ardern's empathetic leadership style and her innovative tactics in handling the COVID-19 situation in her country have been lauded (Friedman, 2020). These women have shown that men are not the only ones capable of leading. Therefore, one must recognize the importance of women and their political representation.

Different cultures often assign specific roles and values to men and women, influencing their perceived roles in political participation. For instance, cultures that emphasize traditional gender roles might discourage women from actively engaging in politics, while others with more progressive values might encourage equal participation. According to Bigler and Liben (2007), the heavy emphasis on gender within our cultural norms strengthens gender stereotypes. Occupational roles are examples of male and female behavior that are derived from culture's traditions. In professions like law enforcement, the military, and politics, there's often a higher representation of men compared to women. Conversely, in care-oriented fields like child care, health care, and social work, women tend to outnumber men (Worthy et al., 2020). With that, this study acknowledges the impact of patriarchal norms that affect women's political participation. Thailand and the Philippines present unique challenges and opportunities for women in public office. Both nations boast rich cultural histories and distinctive trajectories in women's socio-political advancement. Exploring their different historical backgrounds, and political

structures serves as a prism through which to discern the varying degrees of women's agency, access, and representation in politics. With that, this paper aims to do the following: First, it aims to analyze the state of women's political representation, including the number of women elected offices in both countries. Second, it intends to compare and contrast the findings between Thailand and the Philippines to highlight commonalities and differences in women's political representation. Third and lastly, it seeks to examine the underlying patriarchal norms that affect Thai and Filipino women's participation in politics. For the analysis, this paper employs a Intersectional Feminist framework to understand the dynamics of women's political representation in Thailand and the Philippines, focusing on how deeply rooted patriarchal structures impact their participation within diverse historical, electoral, and political contexts.

For the conduct of the study, this study employs archival research for its methodology. Archival research utilizes books, journals, and other records or data available in storage (American Psychological Association, 2018). It involves a wide variety of proceedings to further the analysis of documents and materials including historical documents and digital texts (Ventresca & Mohr, 2002). This type of method was chosen as investigating already existing data concerning women's political representation in Thailand and the Philippines would be the most feasible way to conduct the study. Performing interviews could not be attainable due to the limitations of the researchers' capacity concerning time, location and finance. Grounded in secondary data, this study investigates how pervasive traditional gender norms and identities such as socioeconomic status, religion, and disability interstect and constrain women's participation and representation in political spheres in these two Southeast Asian nations.

This paper, divided into 7 parts, investigates the gender roles that shape women's experiences within the realm of political careers in Thailand and the Philippines. In the first section, the paper provided the outline of the study. In the second section, the study explains the theory of Intersectional Feminism and how it is utilized in the analysis of women's political representation in Thailand and the Philippines. In the third section, the political situation of women in Thailand is discussed in terms of the historical background, the electoral system and election of women in the country, and the direct participation of women. In the fourth section, the state of women's political representation in Filipino society is examined through the historical background, the electoral system and the election of women in the country, and the direct participation of women. In the fifth section, the comparative analysis of women's political representation in Thailand and the Philippines is investigated through the lens of Intersectional Feminist theory. In the sixth section, the future prospects of women's political representation in Thailand and the Philippines are presented. Lastly, in the seventh section, the article will end with its conclusion.

2. The Intersectional Feminism Framework

Focusing solely on gender-based discrimination overlooks the various factors contributing to the marginalization of women impacted by poverty and exclusion, both locally and globally. This includes the impacts of colonization on Indigenous women and the effects of globalization on women in disadvantaged countries. Gender alone is insufficient for understanding the intersection of power dynamics shaping women's experiences (Canadian Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2006). In turn, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality in 1989, which represents the idea that various forms of discrimination and oppression intersect and overlap and creates unique experiences for individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups (Tong & Botts, 2018). Intersectionality, when applied as a theory of feminism, creates a framework that prioritizes the perspectives of individuals facing various forms of discrimination simultaneously and comprehends the depths of inequalities and their relationship within a specific setting (UN Women, 2020). With that, this study employs an intersectional feminism framework through which this paper acknowledges and analyzes how different intersecting factors such as gender, class, ethnicity, and cultural norms influence women's experiences, particularly in terms of political representation.

Intersectional feminism distinguishes itself from other feminist theories like Liberal, Marxist-Socialist, Radical, and Women of Color Feminisms by emphasizing the interconnectedness of various social identities and systems of oppression. While Liberal Feminism focuses on achieving gender equality through legal reforms, Marxist-Socialist feminism analyzes gender oppression through the lens of class and capitalism, and Radical Feminism targets patriarchy as the fundamental source of women's oppression, Women of Color feminism highlights the specific experiences of women of color by addressing the dual oppressions of race and gender (Tong & Botts, 2018). Influenced by the broader traditions of black feminist thought and women of color feminism, Intersectional Feminism integrates the aforementioned perspectives but goes further by recognizing that individuals experience overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and privilege based on a combination of factors, thus advocating for a more comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing inequality. Using Intersectional Feminist Framework (IFFs), social categories like race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and citizenship among others are understood as interconnected and mutually reinforcing, rather than as isolated or independent factors (Canadian Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2006).

In the context of Thai and Philippine women's political representation, an intersectional feminist perspective can provide a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women in these countries. Through this framework, the issues of political representation experienced by women in Thailand

and the Philippines are seen not solely based on gender. Instead, other factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, and regional disparities also play significant roles. Moreover, both economic and social/cultural aspects of inclusion and exclusion are taken into account in relation to citizenship and the formation of nations. Through IFF, problems can be redefined as "failure to include" rather than "failure to integrate" (Canadian Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2006).

3. Political Situation of Women in Thailand

3.1 *Historical Background of Women's Political Participation*

Throughout the dynastic periods in Thailand, Thai culture has favored hierarchical setups and a patriarchal system, where men predominantly occupied influential roles in politics and governance. The embedded representations of gender roles and power dynamics in Thai culture emphasize male leadership over female subservience, as encapsulated in aphorisms such as the comparison to the "hind legs of an elephant," symbolizing men as the forelegs and women as the hind legs. Another illustrative saying is "Wives are like thread and follow the needle," (Jermsittiparsert, 2016), both conveying the notion of women holding an inferior status, subject to the absolute control of their male counterparts (Jose & Alfaro, 2021). Hence, Thai women, regardless of their societal origins, held a lower status than men. On the political front, women, particularly those in the royal court, were often utilized as political tools. In instances of war, a lady of the court might be taken hostage, or she could be compelled to marry someone from another state to achieve specific political objectives (Kaithong & Sawangdee, 2018). Moreover, men, in ancient Thai society, were expected and accepted as heads of the family, while women's roles revolved around taking care of the household (Sopchokchai, 1998). Hence, political roles were primarily confined to men.

Before exposure to Western influence, education for Thai girls, particularly those from upper-class families, primarily occurred within the inner courts of the royal family. Upon ascending the throne as King Rama V, Chulalongkorn westernized Thailand across various domains and emphasized the pivotal role of education in human development, leading to the establishment of a modern school in 1871 that catered to the education of male members of the royal family and nobility's sons. Three years later, a school for upper-class women was established (Kaithong & Sawangdee, 2018). Over two decades later, the initial Thai female students were admitted to Chulalongkorn University, the country's inaugural university. This access to formal education created opportunities for women to receive professional training. Consequently, Thailand witnessed the emergence of upper-class educated women engaging in social and philanthropic endeavors (Sopchokchai, 1998). This involvement marked the start of women's groups as a form of political participation. Additionally, interaction with Western nations

during this era introduced ideas of democracy, equal rights, and liberty to Thai society.

In the early 20th century, Thai women began engaging in social and political movements, advocating for suffrage and equal rights. Thailand granted women the right to vote in local elections in 1932, the same year as the Siamese Revolution that transformed the country's political landscape. Even though women obtained voting rights, they were limited to participating in village elections only after 1982 (Bowie, 2010). While achieving female suffrage in national elections is often considered the pinnacle of democratic establishment, obtaining voting rights at the local level has been equally challenging and sometimes occurred after national electoral rights. The initial participation of women in national parliamentary elections post-1932 didn't result from the struggle for female suffrage but marked Thailand's shift from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy (Bowie, 2008).

However, despite being among the pioneering women in Asia to achieve suffrage, their political standing saw limited change. It was not until 1949 that the first woman was elected to parliament. Subsequently, in the 1952 elections, four women secured positions. In 1955, a law mandating parliamentary candidates to be affiliated with political parties was introduced, narrowing the space for women. In the ensuing 1957 election, only one woman was elected (Iwanaga, 2005). Over the five decades from 1949 to 2000, women's representation saw minimal growth, maintaining low participation in electoral politics despite consistently exercising their right to vote.

3.2 Electoral System and the Election of Women in Thailand

While some parts of the Thai government are selected through democratic elections, such as the House of Representatives, local administrations, and the Governorship of Bangkok, the electoral system in Thailand, as outlined in the 2017 Constitution, maintains a constitutional monarchy where the King has authority over the appointment of a regent and possesses the veto power over legislation (Bangprapa, 2017). The executive branch selection process is similar to the 2007 Constitution, with the Prime Minister chosen from the House of Representatives and appointed by the King (Constitutionet, 2021). The legislature comprises a bicameral National Assembly, consisting of a House of Representatives with 500 members, where 350 members are directly elected and 150 members are elected from party lists, and a Senate with 200 members, appointed as dictated by Organic Act on Installation of Senators (Constitutionet, 2021).

There have been significant institutional and cultural advancements that have facilitated women in Thailand to pursue political leadership roles. Some political parties, such as the Democrat Party, the Future Forward Party (now Move Forward Party), and the Action Coalition Party, have implemented voluntary gender quotas, which encouraged women to run as party list candidates. However, only a small number of political parties choose to implement an electoral quota to ensure

equal representation of women and men candidates. Since the quota is not obligatory, parties do not have a strong motivation to enforce it, as they perceive it as increasing the expenses associated with political activities (Sinpeng & Savirani, 2022). In 2021, constitutional amendments in Thailand changed the voting system, notably increasing the number of single-member constituency seats from 350 to 400. These seats are determined through a first-past-the-post voting system, where the candidate with the highest number of votes in each constituency wins. Additionally, the amendments reintroduced a dual-ballot system, allowing each voter to cast two ballots—one for a preferred constituency candidate and another for a political party (Jatusripitak, 2022).

The Royal Thai Government, recognizing the need for enhanced gender equality, implemented a set of ambitious "MDG-Plus" targets to surpass international agreements and further advance human development. Specifically, one of Thailand's MDG-Plus targets aimed to double the proportion of women in national parliament, local government bodies, and executive positions within the civil service by 2006. This commitment was originally established in the Ninth Women's Development Plan for 2002-2006, reflecting the government's dedication to fostering greater women's participation in political and decision-making roles (United Nations, 2006). At this point, it is evident that Thailand fell short of achieving the MDG-Plus target for gender equality. From the parliamentary election in February 2005 until the present, the opportunity to double the proportion of women MPs in Thailand has not materialized. Aside from that, Thailand does not have specific legislation mandating quotas or measures for women's representation and participation in politics. The representation of women in politics is generally governed by electoral laws and political party regulations.

3.3 Women's Direct Participation in Thailand

Women in Thailand hold positions across various levels of government, including parliament, local administrative bodies, and ministerial roles. In the late 1990s, several new institutions were established, marking a significant transformation in the country's political landscape. The 1997 constitution stands out as a crucial milestone in Thailand's democratization, leading to substantial changes in the parliament and electoral system (Iwanaga, 2005). Notably, this constitution has laid the groundwork for gender rights, with Article 30 explicitly stating equal rights for both women and men. This marks an initial stride toward providing women with increased opportunities in the predominantly male-dominated political sphere. However, women's representation remains below the desired level. With that, this segment delves into the state of direct political participation among women in Thailand, encompassing candidacy in elections and occupying administrative positions that facilitate decision-making and policy formulation at both national and local levels.

Thailand operates as a constitutional monarchy with King Maha Vajiralongkorn serving as the reigning monarch and head of state. During post-1993, women held positions across various levels of government, including parliament, local administrative bodies, and ministerial roles. This marks an initial stride toward women's increased opportunities in the predominantly male-dominated political sphere. However, women's representation remains below the desired level. In its executive branch, men have predominantly dominated throughout Thai history, with Yingluck Shinawatra being the only exception as the first female Prime Minister. Yingluck was elected into office in 2011 and made history by becoming the first woman to hold the position (Kate, 2011). Despite her success as a businesswoman, Yingluck's rise to power is notable within the context of a broader pattern of male dominance in Thai politics. Moreover, in terms of the Thai cabinet, there are 34 ministers from six parties with 29 men and 5 women after the 2023 General Election (Morris & Nguyen, 2023).

As for the upper house, the Senate in Thailand is not directly elected by the public; instead, its members are selected by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) and appointed by the King. This method of appointment has been part of the political landscape, particularly after the 2014 coup d'état. As of 2023, there is a notable gender disparity in the composition of the Thai Senate. Out of the 250 senators, only 26 are women, accounting for 10.40% of the total (The Nation, 2023). The House of Representatives, on the other hand, is composed of 500 members where 350 members are directly elected by constituents through a first-past-the-post voting system in single-member constituencies, while the remaining 150 members are chosen from party lists. In the 2023 election, there has been a notable improvement in the representation of women in parliament compared to the previous elections in 2019. Out of the total 500 seats in parliament, 96 are now held by women, which translates to a representation of 19 percent, marking a significant increase (Suwannarat, 2023). However, despite the positive increase in the number of women elected to parliament in the 2023 elections, men maintain a significant majority within the House of Representatives.

In the judiciary branch, a historic milestone was achieved when women concurrently assumed the two most senior positions in Thailand's largest court system, the Courts of Justice, in October 2020. Breaking gender barriers, this momentous occasion witnessed a woman becoming the President of the Supreme Court for the first time, and only the second time a woman assumed the presidency of the Appeal Courts (Bishop, 2022). While the concurrent appointments were a notable step towards gender inclusivity, the broader representation within the judiciary still leans heavily towards men.

In terms of women's political participation at the local level, there has been a shift in women's engagement in fostering local communities and villages. Historically, this responsibility was entirely assumed by men, but now there's a notable increase in women's involvement in local development initiatives.

However, the representation of women in higher positions within provincial and local governments remains notably lower. In the 2019 General elections, there was just one female governor among the 76 provinces, constituting only 1.32%. Female Chiefs of Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAO) stand at 8%, and for Sub-district Administrative Organizations (SAO), the representation of female leaders accounts for 6.45% (UN Women, n.d.-b). This data highlights the disparity in women's representation in higher-level administrative roles despite their increasing involvement in community development at the grassroots level.

However, despite some success stories in Thai politics, women continue to encounter various forms of discrimination. According to Ruengrawee Pichaikul, director of the Gender and Development Research Institute, women in Thai politics still face various obstacles, including sexual violence and online harassment. She cites an alarming incident where a male candidate digitally altered a female opponent's image onto a nude model to tarnish her reputation and undermine her popularity. Pichaikul emphasizes that many women face cyberbullying, particularly on platforms like Facebook. Moreover, she notes that during the 2019 election, political parties exacerbated the situation by objectifying women, prioritizing physical attractiveness over intellect and the advocacy they represent (Nachemson, 2023). The National Seminar on Promoting Women's Leadership and Political Participation in 2018 also affirms that gender inequality and discrimination persist in Thai society and politics. Women experience sexual remarks, defamation, privacy violations, intimidation, threats, hate speeches, and other forms of violence, making a political career unattractive and instilling fear in women considering entering politics (UN Women, n.d.-c). It is also important to note that most Thai women who participated in political and economic activities belong to the upper class. According to Sinpeng and Savirani (2022), women who come from political families may have an edge in seeking political leadership, although success is uncertain. Elite women politicians who indicated encountering no obstacles in their path to becoming political leaders typically have close connections to political parties. These women belong to political dynasties or hold significant roles in the business and media sectors (Sinpeng & Savirani, 2022). Moreover, financial resources have become a deciding factor as election campaigns in Thailand, despite limits set by the National Election Commission, are expensive. Women, lacking financial means, often face obstacles due to these circumstances. While there is limited reliable data on campaign fund usage under the new system, it is probable that significant funds are required for a candidate to succeed (Iwanaga, 2005). Lastly, female candidates have faced difficulty in winning voter approval due to some stereotypes related to the theme. According to Iwanaga (2005), some female parliamentarians faced challenges in being perceived as credible and were frequently targeted with demeaning comments and derogatory remarks. To win over voters, they needed to prove their capabilities and exhibit traditionally masculine qualities.

4. State of Women's Political Representation in Filipino Society

4.1 Historical Background of Women's Political Participation in the Philippines

The Philippines has its fair share of history to tell when it comes to its women and their political participation. It is important to note that during the pre-colonial era of the country, women played an important role not just in politics but in society as a whole. Before the arrival of the Spanish campaign in the Philippines, the babaylan played a major role in the community. The babaylan were female mystical healers who carried political and social power (Hega et al., 2017). The role was perceived as an equal to the datu (chief) and can be given to transgender people and gay men (Ildefonso, 2023). The babaylans served as proof of the reverence that was given to women at the time, but their dominance was wiped out with the arrival of the Spaniards (Limos, 2019).

The status of women during the Spanish occupation of the Philippines was severely relegated compared to the pre-colonial times. Their main purpose was to serve as child bearers and they did not engage in political activities as these were considered exclusive to men (Santos, 1991, as cited in Aguja, 2013). The eventual arrival of the Americans did not make things any better. The exploitation of women became rampant as it was made to be legalized and institutionalized (Agustin, 1987). However, the women of the Philippines were not so easily silenced even under colonial rule. The women in the Katipunan and Malolos (a city in the province of Bulacan) helped in the future consciousness-raising among women (Santos, 1991, as cited in Aguja, 2013).

At this juncture, one may be pondering as to how the Filipino women are involved in a more modern form of government. In the Philippines, women were granted the right to vote in the year 1937. However, this was not without its obstacles. The Constitution of 1935 specified that suffrage would only be extended to women if 300,000 of them were in favor of it during a plebiscite (Hega, 2003). Filipino women leaders rallied women from all sectors and were able to have 447,725 women vote "yes" to suffrage (Umali, 2021). This part of history is a prime example of how Filipino women are willing to fight for what is their right. In modern times, notable women have been involved in political positions and/or events. To name a few: Corazon Aquino's rise to the presidency not only made her the first female Filipino president, but it also marked the end of Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s dictatorship. Another remarkable woman is Leila de Lima. She has been put to jail by former president Rodrigo Duterte as she is known to be a vocal critic of Duterte's "war on drugs" but has recently been released on bail.

4.2 Electoral System and the Election of Women in the Philippines

The electoral system of the Philippines is quite simple. The country has adopted a plurality system wherein the candidate with the highest number of votes wins the position they are running for (Wong, 2022). Elections occurring within the

Philippines will allow citizens to choose a president, a vice president, 12 senators, 300 lower house legislators, and approximately 18,000 officials across various islands (Petty, 2022). While the country practices such an electoral system, Philippine politics is dominated by men. Data from election years from 1998 to 2013 exhibit that more men participate and win in the elections than women (Commission on Elections, n.d., as cited in Rodriguez, 2016). Moreover, the combination of the "first-past-the-post" electoral system in the Philippines and the absence of strong political parties hinders women from participating in politics. Without party discipline and established rules within parties, the consideration of internal party procedures for the inclusion of women in the party's candidate list is not even possible (Encinas-Franco, 2021). To address the issue of the lack of women in government, the Philippines passed Republic Act No. 9710, or "An Act Providing for the Magna Carta of Women" in 2009. One of its provisions is to increase the number of women in third-level positions in government to reach a "fifty-fifty" gender balance in the year 2014 (Congress of the Philippines, 2009). By January 2014, women began to take up approximately 42% of third-level positions in government which is still short of its fifty-fifty gender balance goal. (Philippine Commission on Women, n.d., as cited in Rodriguez, 2016).

4.3   Women's Direct Participation in the Philippines

The Philippines has mostly evolved past the Spanish colonial mindset of having women stay at home and let them only serve as child bearers. The country has a reputation for adopting a liberal and progressive Constitution, where Article II Section 14 acknowledges the role of women in nation-building (Hega, 2003). Notably, Republic Act 7192 is dedicated to the acknowledgment of the role of women in developing the nation. It provides benefits such as setting aside funds for women's activities, assuring the involvement of women in the development process, and removing gender biases. Fortunately, women have served and are serving in the Philippine government. According to an article by the Civil Service Commission (2020), their inventory of government human resources has shown that females compose 50.88% of the overall 1,728,641 government workers while males only comprise 49.12%. However, it should be said that the same article notes that the men hold first-level positions while the women are in second-level positions.

The Philippine national government consists of three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. In the Philippines' history, only two women have had the honor of holding the highest position in the land as president. These two being Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Fascinatingly, both of these women rose to the presidency after the revolutions. Aquino became the first female president of the country in 1986 after ousting the dictator, Ferdinand Marcos Sr., through the People Power Revolution (Alexander, 2019). The second woman who would become president was Arroyo, who gained presidential powers in 2001 during the aftermath of the EDSA II Revolution which saw the impeachment trial

of President Joseph Estrada (Council of Women World Leaders, n.d.). In the vice presidency, three women have been able to serve in that position: Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Leni Robredo, and Sara Duterte. For cabinet ministers, women make up 26% (Abad, 2023). However, it should be noted that women as cabinet officials usually hold areas that are associated with females including health, tourism, and social welfare (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2018).

In the legislative branch of the Philippine government, the Senate and the House of Representatives fall under it. In numbers, there shall only be 24 senators and there are no more than 250 seats in the House of Representatives unless fixed by law (Official Gazette, n.d.-b). Currently in the 19th Congress, seven out of 24 senators are women, namely: Loren Legarda, Risa Hontiveros, Nancy Binay, Pia Cayetano, Imee Marcos, Grace Poe, and Cynthia Villar. With this, the Senate still consists of men as the majority. Data has shown that while men have indeed dominated Congress since 2001, there has been an increase in the number of women from the years 2004 to 2016 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016, as cited in UP sa Halalan, 2019). It expounds that women had the highest percentage of members in the Senate in 2013 with 33.3% and the House of Representatives in 2016 with 28.6% compared to previous years.

Under the judicial branch of the Philippine government lies the Supreme Court and the lower courts (Official Gazette, n.d.-a). Two women have been able to serve as chief justice of the country. The first woman to hold the chief justice position is Maria Lourdes P.A. Sereno who was appointed by the late President Benigno Aquino III in 2012. The other and second woman who was able to get in the position is Teresita de Castro who was appointed in 2018 by Rodrigo Duterte.

At the local level, the numbers are still in favor of the men compared to the women. In 2016, women formed the minority 23.2% became mayors, 19.8% became vice mayors and 21.4% were councilors as compared to their male counterparts (PSA, 2016, as cited in David et al., 2019). Regrettably, even with women at least being present in the government, it is still an underrepresentation of their voices. The Philippine government at the local level is still vastly dominated by men. The country still has a long way to go regarding women being proportionate or even outnumbering men.

The experiences of Filipino women in power have been well documented and are not painted in a good light. A prime example would be the chaotic dynamic between then Vice President Leni Robredo and the former president, Rodrigo Duterte. Robredo has never gotten along well with the president she served under. Duterte called Robredo a "scatterbrain" who could not be trusted with state secrets and fired her from her post as the head of his drug war less than three weeks after being appointed (Al Jazeera, 2019). The former vice president has been a known critic of Duterte's war on drugs due to the number of deaths (Reuters, 2019). There is no shortage of instances of misogyny in their tenure as president and vice president. Duterte has teased Robredo about a supposed "boyfriend" (Gonzales,

2016), admitted to staring at her knees during cabinet meetings (Ramos, 2016), and described her as "weak" (Mariano, 2018). Unfortunately, even Robredo's family was not exempted from the attacks. During her 2022 presidential campaign, Robredo's eldest daughter became a victim of being tied to fake sex videos that were spread through social media (Lalu, 2022). On the other hand, Sara Duterte, the current vice president of the country and daughter of Rodrigo Duterte, presents herself in a different way than Robredo does. Duterte portrays herself as a tough kind of leader, which is contradictory to the feminine display that is associated with Robredo. However, this has not spared her from the existing misogyny in the country. She has been ridiculed for her masculine image, her being a rape survivor, and was even told by her father not to join the presidential race as it is "not a job for women" (Regalado, 2022). Another major female political figure in the Philippines who would be subjected to misogynistic attacks would be former Senator Leila de Lima. As a fierce critic of Duterte's war on drugs, de Lima has been a target of the former president. Duterte has publicized de Lima's relationship with her driver/bodyguard and attempted to intimidate her by releasing a supposed "sex tape" of the two (Ranada, 2016). What is more bizarre and fouler about the situation are the comments and events that came after it. Former Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez has been noted to say that he had no qualms about displaying the supposed private video between de Lima and her driver if it proves their relationship (Cepeda, 2016). While no video was shown during a congressional inquiry, narrations of it still popped up despite De Lima saying that it had nothing to do with the accusations that she is connected to illegal drugs (Elemia, 2016).

The struggle of women in being elected to government positions stems from varying factors. One of which comes from the differing acceptance from social classes. When asked if women are as capable as men in performing as President of the Philippines, the class in most agreement with the statement are those from the poorest in socioeconomic status (Mangahas, 1998, as cited in Macapagal, 2006). It was found out that the lower one goes in the socioeconomic classes, the more likely that class is to be in agreement with the statement (Mangahas, 1998, as cited in Macapagal, 2006). The reason for this being that perceptions are hinged on the subjective meaning which one connects to a situation (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, as cited in Macapagal, 2006). In another study, women politicians are regarded as "weak" in solving issues (Aguilar, 1990, as cited in Macapagal, 2006). The study adds other insights on women politicians include being unable to bear a crisis, being unable to make the "tough" decisions, inability to perform well due to possible pregnancy, and more. Other challenges include insufficient funds to campaign and the lack of established connections with political leaders, and competing with others who have a substantial national reputation (Aguilar, 1990; Cuanan-Angsioco, 2000, as cited in Choi, 2018). Historically, in the year 2004, two women political parties went up against 64 party list groups where the women's party, Gabriela, won a seat in the House of Representatives for the first time and has since held on to two seats

since 2007 (Choi, 2018). On the other side of the conversation, coming from an elite socioeconomic background proves to be advantageous for Filipino women entering into politics. Family ties have been a crucial aspect for a woman's political career, which also undermines their role to represent (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2008, as cited in Choi, 2018). In the Philippines' 14th Congress, 15% of the congresswomen were wives of previous congressmen (Choi, 2018). However, as a recent study would show, women politicians have been able to transcend some of these obstacles. Critically, in recent years, more Filipino women enter into politics even without being related to male politicians by their own efforts and excellence (Salvador, 2017).

5. Comparative Analysis

Comparing the roots and the current status of women's political engagement in the Philippines and Thailand reveals both parallels and distinctions. When considering the historical position of women, it becomes evident that in earlier times, Filipino women experienced a more egalitarian standing in society, whereas Thai women occupied a subordinate social position, largely influenced by cultural and religious factors. On their respective electoral systems, Thailand and the Philippines are distinct with the former's King having major influence on its elections while the latter is dependent on its citizens in electing officials. Nonetheless, both countries attempted to solve gender disparity issues in their respective governments through different solutions. One of the goals of Thailand's MDG-Plus was to increase the percentage of women in government, whereas the Philippines' Republic Act No. 9710 aimed to increase the number of women in third-level positions in government. However, the number of women elected in both countries proves that these solutions did not succeed. Lastly, on women's direct participation, a few notable women in both Thailand and the Philippines were able to break through the gender glass ceilings to hold positions at a national level in their country's respective governments. However, at a local level, there is a sizable difference in the proportional gap between the men and the women in office.

While the underrepresentation of women in the political sphere is seen as a result of patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes, it is important to note that women experience multiple burdens which also hinder them from joining the political arena. By utilizing the lens of intersectional feminism framework, the underrepresentation of women in political bodies cannot be attributed to a single cause. Women in most political systems face three obstacles when trying to secure a seat in parliament: eligibility, selection, and election. The process of recruiting lawmakers depends on individuals who are both interested in politics and have the means to participate, willing to run for office, and ultimately chosen by decision-makers as candidates for election (Norris, 1997, as cited by Iwanaga, 2005). In terms of eligibility, this study found that women in both countries share similar challenges

- they lack the financial resources needed to engage in politics. Election campaigns are expensive, and women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face greater hurdles in gathering the necessary funds. Women, like Yingluck Shinawatra from Thailand, and Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo from the Philippines, who came from political families or elite backgrounds have a significant advantage due to established connections and resources.

In terms of selection, women have been hesitant to participate in electoral politics due to their perception of the political environment. A woman's perspective on politics is crucial if she is considering running for office. In Thailand, there is a common belief that women are too morally upright to engage in the "dirty" game of politics (Iwanaga, 2005). In the Philippines, there are pervasive stereotypes that women are unable to make tough decisions or perform well due to potential pregnancy and other gendered assumptions about their abilities (Aguilar, 1990, as cited in Macapagal, 2006). These assumptions have been used as a rationale by females to avoid entering the political arena. Moreover, the process of selecting potential candidates also involves choosing individuals by the party. In Thailand, political parties, like the Democrat Party, the Future Forward Party (now Move Forward Party), and the Action Coalition Party, have implemented voluntary gender quotas to encourage women to run as party list candidates. However, these quotas are not mandatory, resulting in limited enforcement. The political party system in the Philippines poses a barrier to women's participation in politics for several reasons. Firstly, the "first-past-the-post" electoral system used in the country tends to favor larger, more established parties, making it difficult for smaller or newer parties – which may be more supportive of gender equality – to gain traction. Additionally, the lack of well-developed political parties in the Philippines means that there may be limited opportunities for women to access the resources and support necessary to run for office, which result to a minimal impact on increasing women's representation (Sinpeng & Savirani, 2022). Lastly, in terms of election, gender stereotyping creates obstacles for women attempting to be elected because voters discriminate against female candidates. According to Iwinaga (2005), discriminatory gender stereotypes held by voters can hinder the success of female candidates. Women politicians in the Philippines are regarded as "weak" (Aguilar, 1990, as cited in Macapagal, 2006), while women in Thailand are seen as secondary or subordinate sex and only men are seen as the leaders of society (Tantiwiramanond & Pandey, 1987). These voters' stereotype view of gender has a negative impact for female entry in politics.

Although women in the Philippines and Thailand face unique forms of discrimination and challenges, it is evident that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds in both countries are disproportionately marginalized. These women not only grapple with economic inequalities but also encounter gender-based discrimination that limits their political representation. According to Jose and Alfaro (2021), the economic transformations in Thailand and the Philippines at the

end of the 19th century created a dual impact on women, benefiting middle-class women while further exploiting working-class women. This economic disparity meant that middle-class women could leverage their socio-economic advantages to gain political representation, while working-class women remained marginalized. In a patron-client system, where individuals or groups with power and resources provide support and protection to those with less power in exchange for loyalty and service, the lack of resource allocation exacerbates women's underrepresentation. In numerous instances, women have faced challenges winning elections due to their limited involvement in patronage politics. To secure victories, women often need to depend on the predominantly male-dominated network (Iwanaga, 2005). In turn, most of the successful female candidates in Thailand and the Philippines are frequently connected to the patronage system through political relationships established by their own family and their husband's family.

Although the contribution of women from influential families or elite class was in government.

6. Future Prospects

From an Intersectional Feminist perspective, the prospects for women's political participation in Thailand and the Philippines involve challenging and dismantling patriarchal structures to create a more inclusive and equitable political landscape. Here are potential directions based on Intersectional Feminist principles:

Advocacy for Gender-Inclusive Policies

Placing women's issues in the backseat is not beneficial to anyone. There is a need to continuously clamor for women's rights in both Thailand and the Philippines. Intersectional feminism emphasizes the need for affirmative action and gender-inclusive policies. Future efforts should involve advocating for and implementing measures such as quotas or affirmative action to ensure a more balanced representation of women in political positions. These policies can help counteract historical inequalities and provide women with the opportunities needed to participate actively. Based on the fifth Sustainable Development Goal of Gender Equality, the description of its targets includes the end of discrimination against women and the assurance of full participation and equal opportunities for women in leadership (United Nations, n.d.). Gender-inclusive policies create avenues for gender-balanced management and take gender perspectives into regard when it comes to governmental decision-making and processes (Penang Women's Development Corporation, n.d.). However, it should be stated that the policies are to be specifically tailored to women and not take on a "one size fits all" approach. As such, this will ensure that women are being genuinely represented in all political affairs. Citizens in both Thailand and the Philippines can start conversations as to how more women are needed in their governments for their voices to be heard. Whether it is through face-to-face talks or online discussions, people must keep

talking about the issue at hand to keep constant attention to it. As the clamor for proper solutions grows louder and becomes more urgent, those who do have the power to create reforms for the benefit of women have to listen to what the people are saying.

Empowerment through Education and Resources

Future prospects include initiatives to empower women through education and improved access to resources. Investing in women's education, providing training in leadership skills, and ensuring equal access to financial resources can contribute to a more level playing field, allowing women to overcome barriers to political participation. Education should be made even more accessible to all citizens of Thailand and the Philippines, especially for women and children. A report has shown that in the year 2022, literacy rates for adult females were 92.4% in Thailand, which is lower than most other ASEAN countries such as Brunei (96.3%), Singapore (95.9%), Indonesia (94%), Vietnam (93.6%), Malaysia (93.5%) and most notably, the Philippines (98.2%) (The Asian Development Bank, n.d., as cited in Thai PBS World, 2023). In the case of the Philippines, there is no difference between the educational status of men and women but there are discrepancies in urban and rural areas concerning the number of government schools and the peace situation (Hega, 2003). On solutions, Thailand needs to prioritize women in education by making their paths attainable. Affirmative action may be considered to increase the number of women in the educational system, thus increasing their literacy rate. The Philippines, while already having a remarkable literacy rate for women, must increase the number of government schools to further make education obtainable for all. The safety of all students must also be considered to ensure that they are learning peacefully, given that there may be danger zones in certain areas of the country. In addition to making education accessible, schools and universities should also give a premium to women and gender studies. It would help greatly in making students sensitive to gender and knowledgeable in that field. Education is not only an avenue for women to get better jobs, but it is also a powerful tool in giving them the importance that they should have in society.

7. Conclusion

Using the intersectional feminist framework, this paper found that women's political representation in Thailand and the Philippines is influenced by the inter-relationship of gender, socioeconomic status, and other identities while trying to negotiate space for their inclusion in the practice of politics. The intersectional analysis of the enduring influence of patriarchal norms and the marginalization of women from lower classes in both Thailand and the Philippines reveals a common thread of systemic barriers to women's participation in politics. In the Philippines, where local "big men" have historically prevailed over politics and government institutions, the struggle of women in attaining elected government positions arises

from multiple intersecting issues related to social class, gender perceptions, economic barriers, and historical-political dynamics. In predominantly Buddhist Thailand, by contrast, women have faced unique challenges due to the tumultuous history of democratic movements, military coups, and popular uprisings that have occurred in the past three decades. Women are discouraged from entering politics due to the lack of gender sensitivity in political parties, high campaign costs, the necessity of extensive networks, and the harsh public scrutiny of female politicians.

Intersectional feminism emphasizes the importance of addressing diverse needs and perspectives within the female population. Simply increasing the number of women in political office is insufficient if they do not represent the full spectrum of women's experiences. Elite women, though influential, may not adequately represent the interests of marginalized women. Therefore, there is a critical need for structural and institutional changes that empower all women, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or other identities. While this study has set its limits on only focusing on the situations in Thailand and the Philippines, it can still serve as a reminder for feminist movements worldwide that the job is not yet done. The intersection of economic inequalities and gender discrimination of women in Thailand and the Philippines creates a "gendered chain" that has been holding women back for years. The gendered chain of discrimination restricts women's ability to exercise their rights and participate as equal members of society. This systemic exclusion reinforces cycles of inequality, where women from marginalized backgrounds struggle to break free from intersecting barriers that impede their advancement and representation. Hence, there is still much work to do to elevate the status of women to be equal to men. Addressing this complex issue requires a multifaceted approach that challenges patriarchal norms, promotes economic empowerment, reforms political institutions, and ensures inclusive policies that uplift all women, regardless of their intersecting identities.

8. Acknowledgements

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