

Exploring Barriers to Women's Political Representation in Thailand

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Abstract

Gender quotas have proven to be one of the more effective ways of improving women's representation in legislatures worldwide. While extensive literature exists on the efficacy of these quotas throughout Europe, the Americas, and Africa, there is a newfound need to shift focus to gender representation in Southeast Asian nations. This study applies many of the existing theories on gender quotas to existing quotas throughout Southeast Asia, specifically examining the anomaly of Thailand. While Thailand continues to lag behind other Southeast Asian nations, the results of this study hint at the more complex sociocultural forces at play. These findings are consistent with existing theories of women's representation in global legislatures, and suggest that the efficacy of gender quotas is largely dependent on the context of each nation individually. The results of this study hold critical implications for understanding both women's roles in government, as well as the barriers to implementing institutional changes for equality.

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Gender quotas serve as an effective means of electing more qualified women to political offices across the globe. However, institutional, cultural, and historical barriers have the potential to impact the effectiveness of both party-based and constitutional gender quotas. Today, as women continue to gain political prowess, one geographic area continuously appears to lag behind the rest: Southeast Asia. There is no nation where this gender imbalance is more pronounced than Thailand. Though Thailand was one of the first nations in Southeast Asia to grant female suffrage and elect a female prime minister, the Thai parliament remains one of the most imbalanced in the world. While gender quotas throughout Europe, Central America, and Latin America have been well studied, the literature has yet to fully address the Southeast Asian context.

Considering the nature of gender diversity throughout Southeast Asian governments, we must ask: what is the public perception of gender diversity in the Thai government? Would a constitutional gender quota be an effective means of promoting political gender diversity in Thailand? To answer, it is essential to critically understand the strategies implemented by peer nations throughout Southeast Asia as well as the cultural barriers present in Thailand today. After conducting a thorough investigation of the Thai political landscape, we can turn to existing models to examine the effectiveness of a constitutional gender quota. This work seeks to explore the differences in political gender diversity between Thailand and other Southeast Asian nations. Understanding these differences provides critical updates to the body of scholarly work on gender representation and quotas globally.

Gender Quotas and Representation in Southeast Asia

In the last few decades, more than 100 nations and political parties across the globe have introduced some form of gender quota in an attempt to bolster women’s political representation. These gender quotas may exist as party quotas, legislative candidate quotas, or reserved parliamentary seats (Tan, 2016a). While scholars have been examining these gender quotas for many years, few publications have focused on Southeast Asia.

In Southeast Asia, eight out of fifteen countries – Laos, Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Timor-Leste – have altered their national constitutions or political party laws to implement some form of gender quota. However, Tan (2016a) also notes that not all quotas yield the same results. These mixed results throughout Southeast Asia indicate that gender equality in national government is not necessarily dependent on these gender quotas, but rather a combination of factors including electoral competitiveness, enforcement, and cultural attitudes toward women (Tan, 2016b). In an increasingly interconnected world, Southeast Asia has been characterized as having high growth potential economies. However, scholars have identified Southeast Asian nations such as China,

Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as having untapped female potential. (Tatli, Vassilopoulou, and Özbilgin, 2013). Perhaps it is long overdue to again turn to the legitimacy and effectiveness of gender quotas as a strategy to promote untapped female potential in Southeast Asia.

Despite the efforts of Southeast Asian nations who have implemented these gender quotas, the number of female politicians in Southeast Asian governments remains low. No country, with the exceptions of Timor-Leste and Taiwan, have reached 30 percent of female parliamentarians – a critical mass that Tan (2016a) believes to be “the minimum proportion necessary to influence the process and policies” within legislatures. Though women make up half of the population, women in Southeast Asia make up only a fraction of elected positions. As time passes, it remains clear that the glass ceiling within Southeast Asia is certainly intact.

Even with years of rapid socioeconomic developments, Southeast Asia has not seen a fundamental shift in the political situation of women. Many obstacles such as religion and cultural normalities impose unspoken barriers on women throughout Southeast Asia, limiting the number of political opportunities available to them (Iwanga, 2008). The vast majority of Asian nations boast increasingly diverse populations, forcing national governments to consider the best practices to promote and ensure equality. It is important to note that while gender quotas theoretically promote representation for women, Asian nations must also be considering the other institutional barriers to political equality. Beyond the numbers of quotas, women throughout Southeast Asia struggle to gain leverage over their voices and discourse, while cultural practices, such as the normalcy of the matriarchy state, continue to limit political engagement (Fleschenberg and Derichs 2011).

Overall, Tan (2016a) highlights how only 19 percent of parliamentarians in Asia are women – compared to 23.1 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, 25.7 percent in Europe, and 27.5 percent in the Americas. Cultural norms will not be erased overnight. The most pragmatic institutional step to promote political equality throughout Southeast Asia, is through the implementation of gender quotas. The effectiveness of gender quotas is contingent on other factors such as the electoral and party systems, but perhaps most importantly: the sociopolitical will to comply (Tan, 2016a).

Gender Barriers and Representation in Thailand

The Thai context is one that demands further scholarly work. Despite national proposals, Thailand has yet to alter their constitution to allow for gender quotas in their national government. Currently, Thailand has a voluntary party quota system. As of 2020, Pak Prachatipat, the Democratic Party, is the only political party to establish a gender quota for their candidates, stating that 30% of their candidates must be female. Considering the nature of this voluntary quota, scholars are left to posit the barriers that keep women from

obtaining national office in Thailand.

As of January 2019, women made up a mere 5.4 percent of parliamentary seats. Examining the 2019 Thai general election, only eight of the 68 ministerial candidates were female. For women in ministerial positions globally, Thailand ties for last place, at zero percent (Babe, 2019). In many ways the Thai narrative seems contradictory. In 1932, Thailand became one of the first nations in the world that granted women the right to vote (Bowie, 2010). Yet, women are underrepresented at all levels of Thai government. Yingluck Shinawatra, a woman, was prime minister from 2011 to 2014, however, there has not been a female in that position since. (Pletcher, 2019)

Existing literature indicates that culturally, Thailand still adheres to traditional gender roles in most settings (Paris et. al, 2009; De Jong, Richter, Isarabhakdi, 1996). However, traditional gender roles have not held women back from voting, nor did they hold back Yingluck Shinawatra from obtaining the highest position in Thai national government. Scholarly literature cannot rely on gender roles and tradition to be the basis of this explanation.

Alternatively, Bjarnegård (2009) offers a new theory: homosocial capital. Sociopolitical networks throughout Thailand continue to be male dominated because homosocial capital, a political capital only accessible to men, is necessary for electoral success. Bjarnegård elaborates that at the root of homosocial capital is access to resources, and a psychological desire to cooperate and network. While cultural norms cannot alone explain the lack of electoral success for women in Thailand, they can explain the phenomenon of homosocial capital.

The theory of homosocial capital has long been rooted in Thailand, even outside of the government setting. Business and social networks throughout Thailand remain heavily gendered. When asked, male politicians and business owners throughout Thailand explain that to maximize their success, they recruit networks of others who are already in strategically advantageous positions (Bjarnegård and Kenny, 2014). When men in power continuously recruit other high-positioned men, women become completely excluded from the upper tier of Thai society.

Today, women in Thailand make up a large portion of the workforce. As Bangkok continues to grow into a global hub of business, the scale of gender discrimination and institutional barriers women face become more apparent (Lawler, 1996). When homosocial capital continues to factor into the decision-making processes of business elites, women will never be able to climb the social ladder in Thai business or government. As Thai women confront the systematic barriers to enter the political sphere, they are placed in a bind. Confronting these barriers will only further exclude women from politics. Accommodating the barriers by adopting masculine rhetoric and political strategy only leads to disempowerment in the political arena. (Iwanaga and Suriyamongkol, 2008). It is clear, the Thai government needs to

implement institutional changes such as a constitutional gender quota, if they ever intend to break down the barriers that homosocial capital has placed between women and elected office.

Understanding the Effectiveness of Gender Quotas

When it comes to understanding the effectiveness of gender quotas on governments across the world, much of the literature fails to include Southeast Asian nations. Research on Latin American nations has found that gender quotas have been an effective means of reducing corruption and electing female legislators (Schwindt-Bayer, 2018). African countries such as Uganda and Rwanda have consistently met targets for women's presence in their national assemblies after enacting constitutional quotas (O'Brien, Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo, 2012). It's abundantly clear: gender quotas are an effective means of achieving gender representation in national offices. However, gender quotas are often an over-simplified solution to a complex issue rooted in years of culture and tradition. Perhaps this is why Southeast Asia continuously lags behind other nations and Thailand has yet to implement a constitutional gender quota.

To examine the Thai context, this paper applies existing theories of gender quotas to Thailand. Specifically, O'Brien and Rickne (2016) explain that the presence of constitutional gender quotas increases the likelihood of appointing female leaders and increases the number of qualified female candidates, however these women remain unlikely to gain reelection in the future. Applying both Bjarnegård's (2009) theory of homosocial capital and O'Brien and Rickne's (2016) theory of gender representation to Thailand, we can predict four primary findings:

1. Nations with legislated gender quotas are more likely to have a higher proportion of women in political office than nations with voluntary party quotas or no quota system at all.
2. The effects of gender quotas on women holding parliamentary seats are independent of their effects on women holding ministerial positions.
3. Thailand's lack of a legislated gender quota only reinforces the gendered nature of homosocial capital needed for political success.
4. Without a legislated gender quota, Thailand will continue to lag behind peer nations throughout Southeast Asia and globally, satisfying the tenets of O'Brien and Rickne's model.

Method

To collect data, the area of Southeast Asia needs to be defined. For the purpose of this research project, we will turn to Frederick and Leinbach (2018) who explain that Mainland Southeast Asia contains Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Laos), Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Vietnam, and Singapore. Insular Southeast Asia contains Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam (Brunei), Timor-Leste, Indonesia, and the Philippines. For the purposes of our data analysis, we will be comparing these eleven countries. While there are many geopolitical means of defining Southeast Asia as a region, these eleven nations are consistently regarded as composing Southeast Asia. With the exception of Timor-Leste, ten of these eleven countries make up ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

To measure women’s representation throughout Southeast Asia, data was collected on the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments as well as the proportion of ministerial positions held by women. The scope of this project focuses on the barriers women throughout Southeast Asia face while entering politics. Examining parliamentary seats provides critical insight into the barriers women in Southeast Asia face, as these seats are attained before climbing to ministerial positions. After examining trends in parliamentary seats, attention shifts to women holding ministerial positions. While existing gender quotas in the region only apply to legislative positions, exploring ministerial positions alludes to the power of homosocial capital. It is important to consider how the capital gained in parliament may provide the necessary boost to gain ministerial positions in the future. Examining both parliamentary and ministerial positions provides a comprehensive view of women in politics throughout Southeast Asia.

Data

All of the data collected for this analysis comes from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and was made accessible through the World Bank. Using the World Bank’s data tools, data on the eleven aforementioned countries was collected. Initially, we can turn to the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women throughout Southeast Asia.

To analyze the differences in parliamentary seats between Thailand and other Southeast Asian nations, a series of two proportion Z tests were conducted. The mean proportion of parliamentary seats held by women was calculated using the seven years of data presented in Table 1. While data was available for ten of the eleven countries, data for Brunei Darussalam was unavailable for all years before 2016. This should be taken into account when considering the nature of the comparison between Thailand and Brunei Darussalam. This method of statistical analysis was chosen because of the breadth of the data set as well as the independence of the eleven nations. Ultimately it was found that women hold statistically significantly fewer seats in national parliaments in Thailand than Cambodia, Indonesia, the

Table 1: Proportion of Seats Held By Women in National Parliaments (%)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Thailand	15.8	6.1	6.1	6.1	4.8	5.3	16.2
Brunei Darussalam*	–	–	–	6.5	9.1	9.1	9.1
Cambodia	20.3	20.3	20.3	20.3	20.3	20.0	20.0
Indonesia	18.6	16.9	17.1	17.1	19.8	19.8	17.4
Lao PDR	25.0	25.0	25.0	27.5	27.5	27.5	27.5
Malaysia	10.4	10.4	10.4	10.4	10.4	13.9	14.4
Myanmar	6.0	5.6	12.7	9.9	10.2	10.2	11.3
Philippines	27.1	27.3	27.2	29.8	29.5	29.5	28.0
Singapore	24.2	25.3	23.9	23.8	23.0	23.0	23.0
Timor-Leste	38.5	38.5	38.5	38.5	32.3	33.8	38.5
Vietnam	24.4	24.3	24.3	26.7	26.7	26.7	26.7

*Data for Brunei Darussalam was unavailable for 2013-2015

Lao PDR, the Philippines, Singapore, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam.

Table 2: Mean Number of Parliamentary Seats Held By Women, Compared to Thailand

	Quota Type	Mean	Z	p
Brunei Darussalam	No Quota	8.45	0.072	0.9444
Cambodia**	No Quota	20.21	6.2613	< 0.0001
Indonesia*	Legislated	18.10	5.0008	0.0003
Lao PDR**	Not Yet Legislated [†]	26.43	9.1992	< 0.0001
Malaysia	No Quota	11.47	1.5921	0.1373
Myanmar	No Quota	9.41	0.5466	0.5947
Philippines**	Legislated	28.34	10.0233	< 0.0001
Singapore**	Party Quotas	23.74	7.9977	< 0.0001
Timor-Leste**	Legislated	36.94	13.2359	< 0.0001
Vietnam**	Legislated	25.69	8.85	< 0.0001

* indicates significance at the $p=0.001$ level, ** indicates significance at the $p=0.0001$ level

[†]The Lao PDR has legislation promoting gender representation, but has yet to legislate an official quota

Examining Table 2, we see that Thailand on average has a lower proportion of women in parliament than all other Southeast Asian nations. Specifically, Thailand had a statistically significantly lower proportion of women in parliament than Cambodia ($z=6.2613$, $p < 0.0001$), Indonesia ($z=5.0008$, $p < 0.0003$), the Lao PDR ($z=9.1992$, $p < 0.0001$), the Philip-

piners ($z=10.0233$, $p < 0.0001$), Singapore ($z=7.9977$, $p < 0.0001$), Timor-Leste ($z=13.2359$, $p < 0.0001$), and Vietnam ($z=8.85$, $p < 0.0001$).

Additionally, it is important to take note of the Lao PDR’s unique quota system. Rather than having a legislated quota similar to peer nations such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, or Vietnam, the Lao PDR has comprehensive nondiscrimination legislation. While there is a current proposal to enact an official quota, the Lao PDR does not currently mandate any proportion of parliamentary seats be held by women. However, Table 2 suggests that their robust nondiscrimination legislation acts in a similar manner to other legislated quotas throughout Southeast Asia.

The second component of this analysis turns to women in ministerial positions. Using data from the World Bank database, the initial analysis conducted with parliamentary seats can be repeated on the proportion of women holding ministerial-level positions.

Table 3: Proportion of Ministerial Positions Held By Women in National Parliaments (%)

	2012	2014	2015	2016	2018
Thailand	8.7	8.3	4.2	11.1	0
Brunei Darussalam	0	0	0	0	0
Cambodia	4.9	4.7	7	9.1	9.4
Indonesia	11.4	11.8	22.9	25.7	23.5
Lao PDR	11.5	11.5	10.3	7.4	11.5
Malaysia	6.5	6.3	5.7	8.3	18.5
Myanmar*	–	2.6	5.3	5	3.7
Philippines	18.2	16	20	25	10.3
Singapore	0	5.9	5.6	5.3	16.7
Timor-Leste	23.1	11.8	12.5	18.8	18.2
Vietnam	29.1	9.1	9.1	4.2	4

*Data for Myanmar was unavailable for 2012

Turning to differences in ministerial positions, a secondary series of two proportion Z tests were conducted. The mean proportion of ministerial positions held by women was calculated using the five years of data present in Table 3. Though data was available for all countries in the analysis, the World Bank dataset did not collect data for the years 2013 and 2017. Additionally, data for Myanmar in 2012 was unavailable. Overall, the data suggests that women in Thailand hold statistically significantly fewer ministerial positions than Indonesia, the Lao PDR, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste.

Examining Table 4, we see that Thailand on average has a lower proportion of women holding ministerial positions than every other Southeast Asian nation with the exceptions

Table 4: Ministerial Positions Held By Women, Compared to Thailand

	Quota Type	Mean	Z	p
Brunei Darussalam	No Quota	0	0	0
Cambodia	No Quota	7.02	0.2513	0.2871
Indonesia**	Legislated	19.06	1.8285	< 0.0001
Lao PDR**	Not Yet Legislated [†]	10.44	2.2396	< 0.0001
Malaysia	No Quota	9.06	0.4846	0.1392
Myanmar	No Quota	4.15	-1.8554	0.9999
Philippines**	Legislated	17.9	2.1218	< 0.0001
Singapore	Party Quotas	6.7	0.0394	0.4649
Timor-Leste**	Legislated	16.88	2.2078	< 0.0001
Vietnam	Legislated	7.1	0.2336	0.3007

** indicates significance at the $p=0.0001$ level

[†]The Lao PDR has legislation promoting gender representation, but has yet to legislate an official quota

of Brunei Darussalam and Myanmar. Specifically, Thailand has a statistically significantly lower proportion of women in ministerial positions than Indonesia ($z=1.8285$, $p < 0.0001$), the Lao PDR ($z=2.2396$, $p < 0.0001$), the Philippines ($z=2.1218$, $p < 0.0001$), and Timor-Leste ($z=2.2078$, $p < 0.0001$).

With this thorough investigation into the difference in women’s representation in Southeast Asian parliaments, significant results were reached. First, it’s important to note that the type of quota has a strong correlation to proportion of seats held by women. This is most evident when considering the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women. Nations with legislated quotas have the highest proportion of seats held by women, significantly higher than both Thailand and other peer nations with voluntary party quotas or no quota system at all. Second, it is worth considering how many nations with significant differences in parliamentary seats that did not reach significant differences in ministerial positions. This hints at the independence between parliamentary and ministerial positions.

Additionally, it was hypothesized that without gender quotas, Thailand will continue to lag behind peer nations throughout Southeast Asia and globally, satisfying the tenets of O’Brien and Rickne’s model. We were able to conclude that Thailand, is in fact, lagging significantly behind many peer nations throughout Southeast Asia, suggesting that the forces in O’Brien and Rickne’s model are certainly at play.

Discussion

First, it was hypothesized that nations with constitutional gender quotas are more likely to have a higher proportion of women in political office than nations with voluntary party quotas or no quota system at all. Examining Table 2 and Table 4, we were able to conclude that this was true. Nations with legislated quotas consistently had higher proportions of women in both parliamentary and ministerial positions than Thailand as well as other nations with voluntary party quotas or no quota at all.

Additionally, we predicted that the effects of gender quotas on women holding parliamentary seats are independent of their effects on women holding ministerial positions. Comparing Table 2 to Table 4, we found this to be true. Specifically, Cambodia, Singapore, and Vietnam all had a statistically significantly higher proportion of women holding parliamentary seats than Thailand, but did not have a significantly higher proportion of women holding ministerial positions than Thailand. We can attribute this difference to nature of gender quotas in general. Legislated quotas do not apply to appointed ministerial positions, nor do voluntary party quotas. This finding also hints at Bjarnegård's theory of homosocial capital. Gaining a parliamentary seat provides women with a necessary, but not sufficient, amount of homosocial capital to climb to elevated ministerial positions. Just because a nation has a gender quota in place, does not necessarily indicate that women will gain full political equality. Examining Table 4, we can see that this is certainly the case. Nations such as Vietnam have a legislated quota in place, yet do not see large proportions of women holding ministerial positions. While gender quotas promote political representation in legislatures, these effects are largely independent of the effects of the quotas on ministerial positions.

It was hypothesized that without a legislated gender quota, Thailand will fall behind other Southeast Asian nations in terms of gender diversity in national parliaments. The findings of this study not only support our initial hypothesis, but allude to the nature of Bjarnegård's theory of homosocial capital as well as the tenets of O'Brien and Rickne's model.

First, Thailand's inability to catch up to other Southeast Asian nations when it comes to women's representation in national parliaments hints at the forces of homosocial capital. It is important to note that the proportion of women holding seats in the Thai parliament took a significant hit in 2014, and numbers remained low until 2019. Perhaps this is because Yingluck Shinawatra was removed from office in May of 2014, indicating how the downfall of one powerful woman in Thai politics could spell disaster for others as well. This theory is backed by Bjarnegård (2009), as he explains that homosocial capital is rooted in access to electoral resources. When Shinawatra was removed from office, women in Thai politics lost the small amount of homosocial capital they had gained with the election of a female prime minister. Thus, a period of male-dominated politics began. Following Shinawatra's removal from politics and the loss of homosocial capital for women in government, men became the only politicians able to gain electoral success. Women were excluded from the political process, explaining the severe dip in women's representation from 2014-2018. Bjarnegård's

theory serves as one of many explanations for the lack of female electoral success in Thailand.

Second, we can turn to the first tenet of O'Brien and Rickne's (2016) model: the notion that constitutional gender quotas increases the likelihood of appointing qualified female leaders. While the data provided by the World Bank cannot assume any causality between quotas and qualifications of female leaders, it does suggest a strong correlation. The nations with constitutional gender quotas in place: the Lao PDR, Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Timor-Leste, have the highest level of statistical significance when comparing the proportion of seats held by women in their national parliaments to Thailand. We can infer to a degree, that the presence of these constitutional quotas may be one driving force in the election of women to national parliaments.

Finally, O'Brien and Rickne explain that the women elected in nations with constitutional gender quotas in place are unlikely to gain reelection in the future. In many ways this tenet relates to Bjarnegård's theory of homosocial capital, suggesting that women struggle to gain reelection because they lack the homosocial capital that men have in electoral politics. While this study did not necessarily address the reelection of women in these Southeast Asian nations, the data highlights how institutional barriers prevent women from gaining parliamentary seats in the first place. In conjunction with homosocial capital, these are the same institutional barriers that will prevent the continued reelection of women into the future.

Conclusion

The results of this study present several implications that must be considered. Perhaps most importantly, this study highlights how not all gender quotas yield the same effects. Nations with legislated gender quotas promote gender equality more than countries with voluntary gender quotas embedded within the constitutions of specific political parties. Thailand falls into the latter category. While Thai political parties have attempted to implement gender quotas, the sociocultural environment of Thailand mitigates any impact that these quotas may have on a much larger scale. Southeast Asian nations with legislated quotas are the same nations that had the highest proportion of parliamentary seats held by women, these are the countries that highlighted the greatest statistical difference compared to Thailand.

Second, we need to consider how many of these legislatures have little, if any, independent power. Legislation proposed in parliaments will still need to pass through the hands of cabinet members, ministers, and heads of state. Considering the independent nature of ministerial and parliamentary positions, it is not unreasonable to assume that the vast majority of these higher positions are held by men. While women in parliament are more likely to promote pro-women legislation, this legislation will still need to pass through the hands of

men before ever being enacted. The nature of homosocial capital reinforces this. Men will continue to pool the homosocial capital needed to climb to higher positions, while women will continue to circulate through lower, parliamentary positions. While gender quotas are an effective means of promoting political representation, they continue to rhetorically label men as the ‘normal’ while women remain the ‘other.’ As O’Brien and Rickne posit, women elected in states with quotas are not likely to be reelected, perhaps due to their lack of homosocial capital.

Additionally, we must also consider the limitations presented within this study. This study intended to have a significant portion of field research conducted in Bangkok, Thailand. Without the field research portion, the data presented in this study cannot necessarily lend itself to any significant claims of causality. While we can see significant correlations between women’s representation and the presence of gender quotas, it is nearly impossible to determine any sort of causation. Moving forward, this study would benefit significantly from field interviews and surveys of Thai citizens. Specifically, it would be interesting to further explore the second tenet of O’Brien and Rickne’s model to determine whether quotas increase the pool of qualified female candidates for parliament. It would be interesting to explore the Thai perception of female politicians in the past and present. Did Yingluck Shinawatra’s time as prime minister also bring in a new field of qualified female parliamentarians? Future studies may seek to address these limitations.

Overall, we cannot downplay the role that gender quotas play worldwide. These institutional attempts at promoting gender equality in national government are a critical first step that must be taken on a global level. Institutional policies such as quotas may never be able to mitigate the centuries of cultural foundation that bar most women from office, but they certainly open the doors to more women running for these positions. As focus shifts to Southeast Asia, we can see a unique set of sociocultural circumstances. Though Thailand continues to lag behind other Southeast Asian nations, we cannot deny the progress that they have made thus far. Thailand led the fight for women’s suffrage for most of Asia in the early Twentieth Century, and remains one of only a few nations in the area to elect a female prime minister. Yes, progress needs to be made, but to do so, we need to better understand the barriers that prevent it.

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