

The Political Attitudes and Behavior of the Gender Gap: Evidence from Upper Northern Thailand*



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Abstracts

This research investigates gender disparities in political attitudes and behaviors among eligible voters in northern Thailand's Lamphun, Phrae, and Uttaradit provinces, encompassing a population of 2,804,978 identified through the Election Commission's database. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample of 400 participants was determined. Employing Multi-Stage Sampling, the methodology includes Cluster Random Sampling and multi-stage cluster sampling for equitable representation. Questionnaires were used for data collection, and analysis involved descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage, and inferential statistics, specifically the Chi-square test.

The study examines male and female political engagement across various contexts, finding no statistically significant gender differences. Shared interests in politics, concerns about social injustice, and corruption transcend gender, influenced by cultural experiences, economic factors, and education levels. Consequently, both genders have equal opportunities to contribute to the political discourse. Future research should delve into policy implications, generational shifts, and utilize mixed-methods approaches to better understand the complex interactions between gender and political beliefs and behaviors. These findings can inform policy development in Thailand's upper north, promoting gender equality, political engagement, and inclusive decision-making.

Keywords: Gender; Political Attitude; Political Behavior; Upper Northern Thailand

Introduction

The correlation between gender and political views and actions has received increased attention, revealing how gender influences political behavior. Studies show distinct preferences, beliefs, and conduct influenced by social identities and experiences (Lawless and Fox, 2010). Women often prioritize social welfare, healthcare, and education policies, while men focus on national security, crime, and taxation. However, women face challenges in attaining political leadership roles due to stereotypes and bias.

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Research also highlights gender's influence on voting behavior and party affiliation. Women generally have higher voter turnout rates and lean towards left-leaning ideologies, while men tend to align with right-leaning affiliations (Inglehart, and Norris, 2000; Carpini, and Keeter, 1997). In Asia, cultural norms and institutional frameworks contribute to gender disparities in political involvement. For example, in Japan, gender stereotypes hinder women's leadership prospects, while in India, women's empowerment impacts electoral outcomes and policy reforms (O' Brien, and Krauss, 2012; Chattopadhyay, and Duflo, 2004).

Extensive research has been conducted in Thailand regarding the relationship between gender and political attitudes and behavior. Women in Thailand face various barriers that impede their political participation and representation, including gender stereotypes and societal norms (Somchai et al. 2019; Paitoonpong, and Phongpaichit, 2018).

While women's movements and advocacy networks have gained traction, challenges persist in achieving gender equality in politics. The upper northern region of Thailand presents a unique context for studying the gender gap in political attitudes and behavior. The region's distinctive cultural and political characteristics, coupled with its challenging geographical features, make it a significant area for political research. Investigating the gender gap in this region can offer valuable insights into the gender dynamics inherent in politics within upper northern Thailand. Examining the gender disparity in political attitudes and behavior in upper northern Thailand holds significance due to the notable underrepresentation of women in political positions. Gender may also exert a substantial influence on political attitudes and behavior in the area. Investigating these dynamics can aid in identifying factors that restrict women's political engagement in the region and foster increased gender equality within the political sphere (Karppi, and Wongsurawat, 2016; Vickers, and Adnan, 2016; Srithongrung, and Kaewkuekool, 2018).

Moreover, exploring the gender disparity in political attitudes and behavior in upper northern Thailand can provide valuable insights into the wider discourse surrounding gender's role in politics within Thailand and Southeast Asia. By examining the interplay between gender and culture in political engagement, researchers can cultivate a more intricate comprehension of the determinants influencing political behavior in the region (Jiraporn, and Srisuk, 2017).

In conclusion, while disparities in political engagement, preferences, and opinions between men and women exist globally, limited research has focused on the specific context of upper northern Thailand. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the gender gap in political attitudes and behavior in this region, advancing our understanding of gender dynamics in Thai politics.

Objectives of the Research

To study the extent and nature of the gender gap in political attitudes and behavior among residents of upper Northern Thailand.

Research Methodology

This study conducted an extensive literature review of existing documents and research related to election behavior to inform the development of questionnaire items. A questionnaire was formulated and presented to the thesis advisor for feedback, leading to necessary revisions for relevance and comprehensiveness. The study then evaluated the validity and reliability of the questionnaire to ensure it accurately measured the intended variables and produced consistent results. Efforts were coordinated to gather detailed information regarding the sample group for data collection, with sampling conducted according to the specified procedure to ensure representativeness. The data collection process was implemented following the established protocol to gather accurate and reliable data. Finally, the collected data was analyzed, with the thesis advisor reviewing the analysis to ensure its accuracy and alignment with the research objectives.

Data collection

The study focused on eligible voters in three provinces located in the northern region of Thailand: Lamphun, Phrae, and Uttaradit. The Election Commission's database provided the necessary information to identify the eligible voter population in these provinces, which was found to be 2,804,978.

The researchers employed a comprehensive data collection process using a probability sampling technique known as Multi-Stage Sampling. This approach was chosen to ensure representative samples from the dispersed population residing in different areas of the provinces.

Initially, Cluster Random Sampling was employed to identify clusters of voters within each province. This accounted for the dispersed nature of the population. Subsequently, a multi-stage cluster sampling approach was implemented. This involved randomly selecting two to four districts per province, followed by random selection of 2-4 sub-districts per district, and finally, 2-4 villages per sub-district.

To ensure fairness and representativeness in the sample, Simple Random Sampling was used. This provided an equal chance for each sampling unit to be selected as a representative of the overall population. By employing this rigorous sampling technique, the study aimed to capture the diversity and nuances of political attitudes and behaviors among eligible voters in the northern region of Thailand.

This detailed research process ensured that the collected data accurately reflected the perspectives and behaviors of the target population, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

Table 1: Population and sample

Province	Population	Calculation method	Sample
Lamphun	290,702	$\frac{290,702 \times 400}{857,743}$	136
Phrae	294,629	$\frac{294,629 \times 400}{857,743}$	137
Uttaradit	272,412	$\frac{272,412 \times 400}{857,743}$	127
Total	857,743		400

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using a computer program to process SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) by utilizing statistical values for data analysis which are frequency and Chi-square Test.

Research Results

Table 2: General information of respondents

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	187	46.8
Female	206	51.5
LGBTQ	7	1.8
Education		
Lower than primary school	5	1.3
Primary school	87	21.8
Junior high school	22	5.5
High school	149	37.3
Diploma	58	14.5
Bachelor's degree	76	19.0
Higher than bachelor's degree	3	0.8
Occupation		
Government service or state enterprise	18	4.5
Farmer	88	22.2
Wage Labor	43	10.8
Business owner	68	17.1
Business-firm Employee	53	13.4
Student	82	20.7
Retired	17	4.3

Gender	Number	Percentage
Unemployed	17	4.3
Others	11	2.8

The survey encompassed 400 participants, with females constituting the majority at 51.5% (206 individuals), followed by males at 46.8% (187 individuals), and the LGBT community at 1.8% (7 individuals). Regarding educational attainment, the largest proportion of respondents, accounting for 37.3% (149 individuals), had completed high school or an equivalent level of education. This was trailed by 21.8% (87 individuals) who held a bachelor's degree from a college or university. Other educational backgrounds encompassed individuals with a diploma or equivalent (19%), those who completed junior high school (14.5%), individuals with an elementary school education (5.5%), and those with a postgraduate degree (0.8%). A small fraction, comprising 1.3% (5 individuals) of respondents, did not pursue any formal education.

In terms of occupation, most respondents were engaged in farming, comprising 22.2% (88 individuals) of the total participants, followed by students at 20.7% (82 individuals). Other occupations reported by respondents included employment in private companies (13.4%), ownership of private businesses (13.4%), working as general contractors (10.8%), holding positions in government or state enterprises (4.5%), being retired (4.3%), not being currently employed (4.5%), and various other occupations (2.8%).

Table 3: The relationship between gender and political attitude and behavior

Political attitude and behavior	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Exercising the right to vote			
Vote	181 (98.4%)	198 (98.0%)	379 (98.2%)
No vote	3 (1.6%)	4 (2.0%)	7 (1.8%)
	$X^2 = 0.66$ df = 1 Sig. = .797		
Party policy monitoring level			
Low	91 (49.7%)	119 (58.6%)	210 (54.4%)
Medium	59 (32.2%)	50 (24.6%)	109 (28.2%)
High	33 (18.0%)	34 (16.7%)	67 (17.4%)
	$X^2 = 3.464$ df = 2 Sig. = .177		
News tracking level to discuss and exchange ideas.			
Do not follow the news	128 (68.8%)	156 (77.2%)	284 (73.2%)
Follow the news	58 (31.2%)	46 (22.8%)	104 (26.8%)
	$X^2 = 3.491$ df = 1 Sig. = .062		

Political attitude and behavior	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Persuading others to exercise their right to vote			
Persuade	116 (64.8%)	135 (66.8%)	251 (65.9%)
Do not persuade	63 (35.2%)	67 (33.2%)	130 (34.1%)
$\chi^2 = 1.74$ df = 1 Sig. = .677			
The influence of government policies to reduce social inequality, such as gender equality, LGTBQ			
Low influence	30 (16.0%)	29 (14.1%)	59 (15.0%)
Medium influence	35 (18.7%)	46 (22.3%)	81 (20.6%)
High influence	122 (65.2%)	131 (63.6%)	253 (64.4%)
$\chi^2 = 0.91$ df = 2 Sig. = .633			
The influence of government decentralization policies			
Low influence	13 (7.0%)	16 (7.8%)	29 (7.4%)
Medium influence	38 (20.3%)	38 (18.4%)	76 (19.3%)
High influence	136 (72.7%)	152 (73.8%)	288 (73.3%)
$\chi^2 = 0.28$ df = 2 Sig. = .869			
The influence of the government's anti-corruption policy			
Low influence	8 (4.3%)	8 (3.9%)	16 (4.1%)
Medium influence	25 (13.4%)	27 (13.1%)	52 (13.2%)
High influence	154 (82.4%)	171 (83.0%)	325 (82.7%)
$\chi^2 = 0.48$ df = 2 Sig. = .976			
The influence of government policies on the persistence of the monarchy			
Low influence	41 (22.7%)	52 (26.3%)	93 (24.5%)
Medium influence	47 (26.0%)	54 (27.3%)	101 (26.6%)
High influence	93 (51.4%)	92 (46.5%)	185 (48.8%)
$\chi^2 = 0.48$ df = 2 Sig. = .976			

Upon evaluating the survey findings, the statistical analysis revealed that there was no notable statistical distinction between males and females regarding their political attitudes and behaviors. Both genders exhibited comparable levels of interest in political matters, involvement in political activities, and shared concerns regarding policies addressing social inequality and corruption. Based on the results of the study conducted in upper northern Thailand, it can be inferred that gender has minimal influence on political attitudes and behaviors. The analysis of various political issues revealed that both males and females exhibit similar perspectives and concerns, indicating a lack of significant gender-based variation in political engagement and participation. These findings suggest a promising scenario where individuals of all genders can equally contribute to the political discourse in the region.

The New Body of Knowledge

The evolving body of knowledge in the specific context of upper northern Thailand illuminates a distinct perspective on the role of gender in shaping political attitudes and behaviors. This research has unveiled a unique confluence of cultural, economic, and educational factors that collectively contribute to the absence of significant gender-based disparities in political engagement within the region.

Cultural dynamics in upper northern Thailand play a pivotal role in fostering gender-neutral political attitudes. The local emphasis on gender equality, stemming from cultural practices and beliefs, creates an environment where both men and women actively participate in political matters. Unlike in other regions of Thailand, the patrilineal system exerts less dominance, granting women greater autonomy and participation in public activities. The influence of Buddhism further reinforces gender equality, as the religion values individual actions over gender, enabling women to hold influential positions within society.

Economic factors also contribute significantly to the similarity in political attitudes between genders. The prevalence of engagement in the agricultural sector and small businesses by both men and women results in comparable economic conditions. This shared economic landscape fosters common concerns, particularly regarding land rights and resource access, aligning their political views and behaviors. The economic similarity thus acts as a unifying force, mitigating the potential for political polarization arising from economic inequality.

Education, too, emerges as a factor reinforcing gender-neutral political attitudes. The parity in educational opportunities between men and women in upper northern Thailand, primarily focusing on basic and secondary education, ensures a consistent level of educational attainment. This educational equality encourages the development of common viewpoints and concerns regarding access to schooling and related government policies. While education typically influences political engagement, the equivalent educational levels among genders in this region minimize its potential role as a source of gender discrepancies in political beliefs and behaviors.

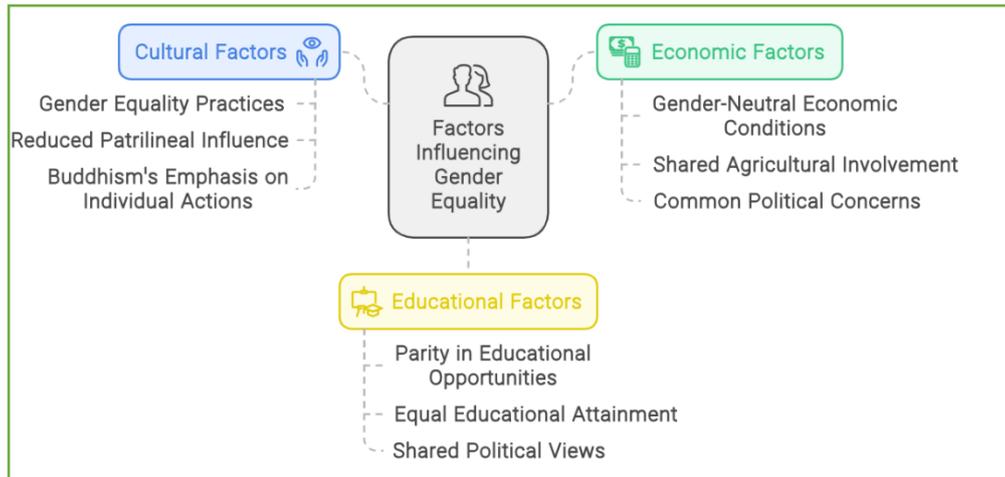


Figure 1: The new body of knowledge

In conclusion, the research findings underscore that gender does not serve as a significant differentiator in political engagement and participation in upper northern Thailand. The convergence of political perspectives and concerns between men and women can be attributed to a multifaceted interplay of cultural, economic, and educational factors. The absence of gender-based disparities suggests a more inclusive political landscape, paving the way for equal participation from both genders.

Moving forward, recommendations for future research emphasize the need to explore the policy implications of these gender-neutral political attitudes, investigate potential generational variances, and adopt a mixed-methods approach to delve deeper into the complex dynamics between gender and political behaviors. These avenues of inquiry aim to provide nuanced insights for policymakers, researchers, and advocates striving to foster gender equality and inclusive democratic practices in the region.

Discussion of Research Results

This study aimed to explore the gender gap in political attitudes and behavior in upper northern Thailand, enhancing our understanding of gender dynamics in Thai politics. The findings indicate that gender is not a significant determinant of political attitudes and behaviors in this region. Individuals, regardless of gender, exhibit similar perspectives and concerns on various political matters. This suggests that gender does not differentiate political engagement and participation in upper northern Thailand. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon:

1. Cultural factors in the upper northern region of Thailand foster gender-neutral political attitudes and behaviors among males and females. Local cultural practices and beliefs promote gender equality, granting women more autonomy and involvement in public activities compared to other regions in Thailand (Phongpaichit, and Baker, 1998). Women's active participation in agricultural practices and their significant economic role in the region contribute to a stronger voice in decision-making processes that impact communities and households. This cultural background cultivates an environment of gender-neutral practices,

leading to parallel political perspectives between genders. Additionally, Buddhism, widely practiced in Thailand, contributes to gender equality and women's empowerment by valuing individuals' actions over their gender, enabling women to hold influential positions within society (Phongpaichit, and Baker, 1998).

2. Economic factors also play a role in shaping similar political attitudes and behaviors between genders in upper northern Thailand. Both males and females are largely engaged in the agricultural sector or small businesses, leading to comparable economic conditions and shared concerns regarding land rights and resource access (Pimdeee, and Chantavanich, 2007). Economic equality contributes to the absence of significant gender-based differences in political outlooks within this context.

3. Gender parity in the educational system of upper northern Thailand encourages the development of common viewpoints and anxieties about issues in education, such as access to school and related governmental policies (Somboonkulavudi, 2019). While education impacts political attitudes and behaviors, equivalent levels of education among men and women in the area suggest it may not be a substantial source of gender discrepancies in political beliefs and behaviors.

In summary, gender does not significantly influence political attitudes and behaviors within the specific context of upper northern Thailand. Both males and females demonstrate similar perspectives and concerns on a range of political issues, suggesting that gender does not serve as a differentiating factor in political engagement and participation in this region.

Conclusion

This article explores the political orientations and behaviors of individuals in upper northern Thailand, covering dimensions such as physical exercise, voting patterns, party policy monitoring, news consumption for discussion, and attitudes towards social inequality, government policies, anti-corruption measures, and the monarchy. Through statistical analysis, no significant gender disparity in political attitudes and behaviors was found. Shared cultural practices, economic factors, and education contribute to gender-neutral attitudes, resulting in convergent political perspectives between genders. The dominance of the patrilineal system is less pronounced in northern Thailand, promoting women's autonomy. Buddhism promotes gender equality, and similar economic engagement fosters common concerns. Comparable education levels shape parallel views on education and government policies. Overall, gender does not notably impact political attitudes and behaviors in upper northern Thailand, suggesting potential equal participation from both genders in the region's political landscape.

Suggestions

These research recommendations aim to extend our understanding of the connection between gender and political involvement in upper northern Thailand, providing valuable insights for advancing gender equality and inclusive democratic practices.

The suggested avenues are 1) further exploration of policy implications arising from gender-neutral political attitudes and behaviors in upper northern Thailand is warranted. This research should inform policies and initiatives aimed at fostering gender equality and inclusive decision-making processes. 2) Investigate the political attitudes and behaviors of young individuals in the region to uncover generational variances in gender and political engagement, providing insights into future trends and guiding initiatives to empower young people in political processes. 3) Adopt a mixed-methods research approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between gender and political attitudes and behaviors in upper northern Thailand. Integrating survey data with in-depth interviews or focus groups would provide a deeper insight into the underlying motivations and experiences of individuals.

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