The Politics of Street-Level Bureaucracy in Thailand

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A potentially important theoretical and empirical field of comparative inquiry for Southeast Asian specialists is local bureaucratic politics including such factors as local political and governmental behavior, the theoretical developments concerning street-level bureaucracy, and the relationship between the urban policy making process and urban politics. Based on data gathered in Thailand, the general characteristics of local bureaucratic politics are identified and related to a policy perspective that may have general utility for similar studies in other Southeast Asian countries.

Introduction

This paper has two major purposes. First, it attempts to establish local bureaucratic politics as an important theoretical and empirical field of comparative inquiry for Southeast Asian specialists as well as for others concerned with comparative local government. Second, the paper examines the nature of street-level bureaucracy by focusing on the operation of the municipal government system in Thailand.

The research for this paper was conducted in Thailand during 1973, 1974, and 1978. During that time, I examined documents, made observations, conducted interviews, and gathered questionnaire responses from key officials in the Ministry of Interior in Bangkok and from mayors and municipal clerks in Thailand's 118 municipalities. I have presented and analyzed these data extensively else-

where.[1] This paper, however, is less concerned with data analysis than with conceptualizing a phenomenon that is well documented in the case of Thailand but which may not be generally known among students of local government and Southeast Asian politics.

Inputs and Outputs

During the past two decades, most studies on government and politics

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[1] See *Mayors and Managers in Thailand: The Struggle for Political Life in Administrative Settings* (Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1978); "Dimensions of Urban Political and Administrative Behavior: The Role of the Municipal Clerk in Thailand" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1975); "Political Modeling and Generational Impacts in Thai Local Government" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southeast Regional Conference, Association for Asian Studies, Gainesville, Florida, January 20-22, 1977); "Politics of Personnel Administration: Competence and Compromise in Thai Bureaucracy" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for Public Administration, Atlanta, Georgia, March 30-April 2, 1977); and "Central-Local Politics in Urban Thailand (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 3-5, 1977).

were focused on either inputs or out-puts of the widely adopted and high-ly generalized Eastonian model of the political system.[2] Perhaps more ac-curately, until the mid-1960s most students of government were pre-occupied with input questions center-ing on democratic concerns with "Who governs?." Answers to this question have been placed until recently within the dichotomous frameworks of elitists vs. pluralists or bureaucrats vs. extra-bureaucratic institutions. Since the mid-1960s, however, students have more frequent-ly asked questions about outputs of government, in particular, "Who governs, when, where, and with what effects?"[3] More recently, the general systems questions about inputs and outputs have receded as newer questions concerning public policy outcomes[4] and the relationship be-tween politics and policy have gained

prominence.[5] In doing so, questions concerning political participation were given some refreshing new answers which went beyond the rather stale arguments of elitists and pluralists that had tended to confuse the increasing complexity of knowledge with the actual advancement of knowledge. Most of the research and writing in this area was initially con-ducted at the subnational level where theory and empirical research ap-peared to be most manageable. Over-all, students of politics continued to raise questions that might eventually lead to some general explanatory theories of politics as well as to knowledge that is both applied and applicable.[6]

Focus On Input Questions In Thailand

The major writings of Thai gov-ernment and politics have been pre-occupied with questions concerning inputs in government. One reason for this may be that the writers of the 1950s and 1960s were trained in the

[2]David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (New York: John Wiley, 1965); and *The Political System* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953).

[3]Terry Nichols Clark, *Community Power and Policy Outputs: A Review of Urban Research* (California: Sage Publications, 1973).

[4]Thomas R. Dye, *Understanding Public Policy* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972); Yehezkel Dror, *Public Policy Making Re-examined* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1968); Ira Sharkansky (ed.), *Policy Analysis in Political Science* (Chicago: Markham, 1970); Larry Wade and R. L. Curry, Jr., *A Logic of Public Policy: Aspects of Political Economy* (California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1970); Robert L. Lineberry and Ira Sharkansky, *Urban Politics and Public Policy* (3rd ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1978); and James Q. Wilson (ed.), *City Politics and Public Policy* (New York: John Wiley, 1968).

[5]Theodore J. Lowi, "American Business, Public Policy, Case Studies, and Political Theory," *World Politics*, Vol. XVI (July 1964), pp. 677-715; "Decision Making vs. Policy Making: Toward an Antidote for Technocracy," *Public Administration Review*, Vol. XXX, No. 3 (May-June 1970), pp. 314-325; "Four Systems of Policy, Politics and Choice," *Public Administration Review*, Vol. XXXII, No. 4 (July-August 1972), pp. 298-310; "Symposium on Com-parative Public Policy," Special Issue, *Policy Studies Journal*, Vol. V (1977); and Robert K. Yin and Douglas Yates, *Street-Level Governments: Assessing Decentralization and Urban Services* (Massachusetts: D.C. Heath, 1975).

[6]Warren F. Ilchman, *Comparative Public Administration and the "Conventional Wis-dom"* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1971).

major perspectives of American political science, a discipline noted for its focus on questions concerning political inputs and democracy. Another reason may be that given their implicit concern with the prospects of democracy in Thailand, these scholars thought it was important to clarify who participates and who governs. Whatever the reason, we do know that participation in Thai politics is restricted to a very narrow elite, that this elite is associated with the most powerful institutions in society — monarchy, military, and civilian bureaucracies, and that individual and group demands external to government are very weakly "articulated" and "aggregated."[7] According to Riggs' novel conceptualization, Thailand approximates the model of the "bureaucratic polity" wherein government governs in the interests of the governors.

Given this traditional focus on political input questions, output questions such as "So what who governs?" or "Does it make a difference in terms of the quantity and quality of governmental outputs who participates or who governs?" have yet to be raised in the case of Thailand. At the same time, the conventional knowledge of Thai government and politics has been challenged on the grounds of faulty conceptualization, inadequate approach-

es, and the lack of systematic empirical data.[8] Furthermore, this knowledge has been based upon macro conceptions of national level politics; the challenges have come from those who have developed explicit theoretical approaches, gathered empirical data, and worked at the more micro subnational levels of government and politics. Because of this latter observation, new questions concerning the nature of subnational government and politics in Thailand as well as elsewhere need to be raised. These questions, which are examined in the rest of the paper, pose a challenge to most students of government and politics. In addition, they present an argument for establishing local bureaucratic politics as an important theoretical and empirical field of comparative inquiry.

Local Bureaucratic Politics

Similar in many respects to national level politics, local politics in Thailand has a distinctively bureaucratic character. For example, at the district level, even though citizens do make demands on elected and appointed officials,[9] decisions concerning policy formation and implementation are made mainly by centrally appointed officials. At the municipal level, although representative institutions exist

[7] Fred W. Riggs, *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966); William J. Siffin, *The Thai Bureaucracy: Institutional Change and Development* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966); David A. Wilson, *Politics in Thailand* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962); and Clark Neher, "District Level Politics in Northern Thailand" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1969).

[8] Ronald L. Krannich, "The Role of the Urban Administrator in Thailand: The Bureaucratic Polity Revisited (paper presented at the annual meeting of Asian Studies on the Pacific Coast, Pacific Grove, California, June 11-13, 1976); and Clark D. Neher, "A Critical Analysis of Research on Thai Politics and Bureaucracy" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, New York City, March 19-22, 1977).

[9] Neher, "District Level Politics in Northern Thailand," *op. cit.*

for popular participation, for the most part, their role is preempted by the dominance of administrative officials who manage municipal government on a day-to-day basis.[10] A similar bureaucratic phenomenon is most likely found at other levels of the Thai government.

The dominance of bureaucracy and bureaucrats in the policy process in Thailand is a phenomenon that exists in many countries regardless of their particular form of government or level of national development. For example, at the federal level in the United States the bureaucracy is an important political force influencing the content of public policy. Indeed, some would argue that institutionally it is by far the most powerful.[11] At the urban level in the United States, the dominance of bureaucrats is even more pronounced.[12] Similar findings

are noted for many other countries at both the national and local levels.[13] Consequently, the notion of an apolitical bureaucracy subordinate to political institutions appears to be more a fiction of democratic theory than a reflection of the empirical realities of complex nation-states.

The question of the relationship between politics and policy, however, was largely neglected in comparative politics until the mid-1970s.[14] It has yet to have an impact on the study of government and politics in Southeast Asia. In essence, this question forces one to treat policies as independent variables which determine or influence the character of politics. It reverses the traditional assumption that politics determines policy outcomes and that who governs makes a difference in terms of policy outcomes. While

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[10] Krannich, *Mayors and Managers, op. cit.*

[11] Francis Rourke, *Bureaucracy, Politics and Public Policy* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1964); John Rehfuss, *Public Administration as Political Process* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973); William Niskanen, *Bureaucracy and Representative Government* (Chicago: Aldine/Atherton, 1971); Aaron Wildavsky, *The Politics of the Budgetary Process* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1974); and Peter Woll, *American Bureaucracy* (2nd ed.; New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1977).

[12] Theodore J. Lowi, "Machine Politics — Old and New," *The Public Interest*, No. 9 (Fall, 1967), pp. 83-89; Robert H. Salisbury, "Urban Politics: The New Convergence of Power," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. XXVI (November 1964), pp. 775-797; Raymond E. Wolfinger, "Why Political Machines Have Not Withered Away and Other Revisionist Thoughts," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. XXXIV (May 1972), pp. 365-398; and Charles R. Adrian and Charles Press, *Governing Urban America* (4th ed.; New York: McGraw Hill, 1972), pp. 228-252.

[13] Lucian W. Pye, *Politics, Personality and Nation Building: Burma's Search for Identity* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1962); Annmarie Hauck Walsh, *The Urban Challenge to Government: An International Comparison of Thirteen Cities* (New York: Praeger, 1969); B. Guy Peters, *The Politics of Bureaucracy: A Comparative Perspective* (New York: Longman Inc., 1978); Michel Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Mattei Dogan, *The Mandarins of Western Europe* (New York: Halsted, 1975); Joseph LaPalombara (ed.), *Bureaucracy and Political Development* (Princeton: University Press, 1963), Ezra Suleiman, *Politics, Power and Bureaucracy in France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), Fred W. Riggs, *Administration in Developing Countries: The Theory of Prismatic Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1964); and Terry Nichols Clark (ed.), *Comparative Community Politics* (New York: John Wiley and Co., 1974).

[14] T. Alexander Smith, *The Comparative Policy Process* (California: ABC/CLIO, Inc., 1975), and "Symposium on Comparative Public Policy."

related to the question of "Who governs?," this question provides a different answer: it depends on the particular policy type, whether it is a distributive, redistributive, constituent, or regulatory policy. When applied to the American federal government, elitist and bureaucratic politics tends to dominate in distributive and regulatory type policies whereas the redistributive policy type best approximates the notion of pluralist politics involving numerous participants.[15]

At the urban level, two contrasting policy issues provide useful examples of the relationship between politics and policy. Since urban renewal is essentially a "free good" — paid by the federal government and ". . . thus not requiring a reallocation of funds away from competing bureaucracies (such as schools and policy)," this issue is largely dominated by the mayor and his top level city administrators in cooperation with federal officials. Public education, by contrast, ". . . is an urban service that many citizens and administrators are continually involved in and care about deeply."[16]   Given the logic of educational policy issues, many participants will get involved. Other policy issues, such as police, fire, water, sanitation, and public welfare will tend to generate their own clienteles and thus their own form of politics. Hence, it is the particular policy type and its cor-

responding policy issue that appear to influence or determine the nature of political participation rather than vice versa. From this perspective, "Who governs?" is not a particularly fruitful research question.

This policy perspective developed by Lowi is by no means without its critics.[17] Its major critics have difficulty in developing empirical theories based on what appears to be an arbitrary classification of policy types. Nonetheless, this perspective raises some new and interesting questions which were heretofore absent in comparative politics and in the study of Southeast Asian politics. It is a perspective that suggests that elitist and bureaucratic interpretations of participation in Thailand may be oversimplifications of complex and differing policy type phenomena. In the final analysis, this new policy perspective applied to national and local politics in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, or the Philippines may provide very similar answers to what may be some universal patterns of political behavior.

Street-Level Bureaucracy

Also working at the subnational level and following Lowi's policy

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[15]Randall Ripley and Grace Franklin, *Congress, the Bureaucracy and Public Policy* (Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1976).

[16]Douglas Yates, "Urban Government as a Policy Making System," in Louis H. Masotti and Robert L. Lineberry (eds.), *The New Politics* (Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1976), p. 238.

[17]George D. Greenberg, Jeffrey A. Miller, Lawrence B. Mohr, and Bruce C. Vladeck, "Developing Public Policy Theory: Perspectives from Empirical Research," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. LXXI, No. 4 (December 1977), pp. 1532-1543; B. R. Rakoff and G. F. Schaefer, "Politics, Policy, and Political Science: Theoretical Alternatives," *Politics and Society*, Vol. I, No. 1 (1970), pp. 51-77; and Francesco Kielbug, "Do Policies (Really) Determine Politics? And Eventually How?" Special Issue, *Policy Studies Journal*, Vol. V (1977), pp. 554-569.

perspective into new theoretical and empirical directions are Lipsky and Yates. Both have converged on a Lowi-derived policy perspective that may lead to a new theory of street-level bureaucracy and the urban policy making process. As outlined in this section, this new theory may have important implications for students of Southeast Asian politics in that it raises some new questions and develops a new perspective which may lead to reinterpretations of as well as fruitful research directions on Southeast Asian politics.

Lipsky, recognizing the basic bureaucratic character of urban government, has attempted to develop a theory of the political behavior of urban bureaucrats in interaction with their clients. He terms the urban bureaucrat a "street-level bureaucrat" because he is a public employee whose work is characterized by the following three conditions:

(1) He is called upon to interact constantly with citizens in the regular course of his job;

(2) Although he works within a bureaucratic structure, his independence on the job is fairly extensive. One component of this independence is discretion in making decisions; but independence is not limited to discretion. The attitude and general approach of the street-level bureaucrat toward the citizen may affect the individual significantly;

(3) The potential impact on citizens with whom he deals is fairly extensive.[18]

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[18]Michael Lipsky, "Toward a Theory of Street-Level Bureaucracy," in Willis D. Hawley *et al.*, *Theoretical Perspectives on Urban Politics* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 197.

In seeking to inquire into the common elements of organizational life in urban bureaucracies, Lipsky is concerned with answering the following question: "What behavioral and psychological factors are common to such bureaucratic roles as teacher, policeman, welfare worker, lower court judge?"[19] In doing so, Lipsky focuses attention on the distinctive political behavior of urban bureaucrats.

Following very similar theoretical lines, Yates notes that there is a new tradition of urban political analysis. Breaking through the traditional community power debate, Yates examines the urban policy making process from the perspective of mayors and high-level administrators who must deal with urban problems on a day-to-day basis. Departing from theories of political decision-making at the national level (rational analysis and incrementalism), Yates attempts to account for the intricacy, uncertainty and instability which appear to be distinctive characteristics of the urban policy making process. Lipsky's street-level bureaucrats occupy a central position in Yates' analysis. In asking the question "What makes city government different from other levels of government?" Yates identifies twelve distinctive characteristics which provide the basis for developing a model of the urban policy making process:

(1) The basic function of urban government is service delivery. In particular, urban services are daily, direct and locality-specific. These services, fire and police protection, garbage collection and public education, are delivered to particular people, in particular

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[19]*Ibid.*, p. 196.

neighborhoods, everyday . . . . Citizens can immediately tell whether or not a service has been "delivered" . . . urban services are distinctly *tangible* and *visible;*

(2) In addition, urban service delivery often involves a street-level relationship between citizens and public employees that is not only direct but *personal;*

(3) Unlike pure public goods like national defense or national parks, urban services tend to be highly "divisible" — they can easily be divided (in quantity and quality) between different individuals, blocks or neighborhoods. Indeed, one of the most familiar citizen complaints in city government is that a particular block or neighborhood is receiving inadequate services — not receiving its fair share;

(4) What is more important, there is enormous variation in individual needs and demands for city services. More precisely, service demands may vary from individual to individual on a block, from block to block and from neighborhood to neighborhood;

(5) Another distinctive feature of urban services is that evaluation of service delivery by both citizens and public employees tends to be highly subjective (in part because the service relationship is often personal and individual);

(6) These diverse, fragmented citizen interests have produced a bewildering array of street-level community organizations that seek to give voice to one neighborhood demand or another;

(7) The formal system of political representation in the city is notably weak. City councils are typically ineffectual — both in representing local interests and in making policy. City councilmen are often part-time, unpaid officials with little or no staff assistance;

(8) Because service delivery lies at the heart of city government and because service delivery involves at root an ongoing "service relationship" between citizens and street-level bureaucrats, city politics has a distinctively bureaucratic and administrative character. That is, the demands of citizens and community organizations are focused on urban administrators beginning with the mayor;

(9) Mayors are distinctive as American political executives because of their proximity to their constituents (which paradoxically makes it easier to "fight city hall" than the state house or the White House); their daily involvement in the administrative details of service delivery; and because of the public presumption that the mayor is directly responsible, accountable for street-level service problems. Presidents take credit for their foreign policy accomplishments, and governors may focus on and take credit for their new highways and community colleges. But the men in city hall are the custodians of the sidewalks. They are the "dirty workers" of American government who must deal everyday with the most ordinary and personal needs of their constituents;

(10) But if mayors are the primary target of citizens' service demands, they are not in a structural position to control service delivery within their "own" administration. For mayors operate in a political system of deeply fragmented authority and fragmented administration;

(11) What is less frequently noted but equally important is the vertical fragmentation of public control within city bureaucracies. That is, given the discretion that urban bureaucrats possess in the street-level service relationship, it is difficult for administrators "downtown" to exercise strong control over urban services. This lack of bureaucratic control over the service relationship is evident in recurrent outbreaks of police corruption as well as in the repeated allegations of police brutality and

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abuses (of power) by teachers and social workers. What is most important about the decentralization of discretion and administrative judgment in urban bureaucracy is that it grows out of the distinctively individualistic character of street-level service delivery;

(12) Finally, urban policy making is deeply fragmented by the conflicting authority and policy jurisdictions of national, state and city governments.[20]

Taken together, these characteristics present an image of a fragmented urban political system. This fragmentation "grows out of the very nature of urban services."[21]

Although Lipsky and Yates directly relate these perspectives to the urban situation in the United States, I find many of their observations to be pertinent in explaining various facets of urban politics in Thailand. In particular, they are important in explaining the relationship of mayors with administrative officials. This is a relationship that involves the politics of street-level bureaucracy.

Mayors And Managers In Street-Level Bureaucracy

Students of Thai municipal government are quick to evaluate the behavior of elected and appointed officials as well as prescribe remedies for curing the ills that supposedly beset municipal government. Representative of such evaluation and prescriptions is Samphawngen's conclusion:

Most executive council members behave like politicians rather than

executives. They are more interested in gaining power, benefits, and building political groups than in good administration. . . .

Municipalities at present still do not provide the services they should. This is because the executive council and assembly members do not behave democratically; instead, they attempt to use their political authority to oust each other, until the result is that the central government must appoint new executive council and assembly members for the people. This is done in order to keep municipalities away from politics, so that municipal administration can be conducted orderly and with discipline.[22]

This is an "administrative" view of urban government. As such, it raises some important questions concerning the position, role, and behavior of mayors in relation to administrative officials.

Paradoxical Position and Mayoral Behavior

The administrative view of urban government, as represented by Samphawngen, suggests that a mayor occupies a paradoxical position in Thai municipalities. On the one hand, in the eyes of many key municipal, provincial, and central administrative officials, a mayor is expected to behave like a professional administrator. He should follow the rules and regulations and avoid playing politics with the people's business. On the other hand, since a mayor occupies a political position, he must depend on support from both the electorate and assemblymen if he desires to re-

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[20] Yates, "Urban Government as a Policy Making System," *op. cit.*, pp. 241-244.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 244.

[22] Chaiaphon Samphawngen, "Amnat la naathii khong palad tesaban" (The Authority of the Municipal Clerk) (unpublished M. A. thesis, The National Institute of Development Administration, Bangkok, 1968), pp. 86-88. My English translation from Thai.

tain his position. To do so, he must respond to public demands.

How does a mayor survive in the political arena when he must also meet the expectations and demands of the administrative arenas at the central, provincial, and municipal levels? In short, he plays politics with both the electorate and assemblymen as well as officials within the three administrative arenas. By doing this, he becomes involved in a struggle for political life within both the political and administrative arenas. The optimal relationships of a mayor vis-a-vis both the political and administrative arenas are diagrammed in Figure 1. Since demands on municipal government usually are greater than resource capabilities, a mayor attempts to limit the number of demands as well as maintain and expand his supports within the political arena by acquiring whatever resources he can from the administrative arenas. These resources are usually in the form of public policy outcomes. As a result of this type of exchange behavior on the part of a mayor, administrators are quick to label most mayors as "politicians" and accuse them of "playing politics with municipal officials."[23]

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[23]The illustration of relationships between the political and administrative arenas in Figure 1 is similar to a political systems model; however, in this case the political arena is separate from a relatively closed administrative arena. Thus government does not operate according to an equilibrium model of inputs, conversions, and outputs. Instead, the political and administrative arenas are involved in struggles to penetrate each other. Policy outcomes are not viewed as resulting from external demands being processed through a political system, but they result from the interactions between the political and administrative arenas. These arenas lie at the core of the urban political system in Thailand.

Most mayors find themselves in a situation that requires great political skill. However, lacking the necessary skill to manipulate the complicated administrative arenas, many mayors complain about the inherent difficulties encountered in performing their roles. Indeed, 97.7 percent of the mayors believe that the municipal government is too centralized and needs greater autonomy vis-a-vis the provincial and central administrative arenas.[24] Because of the numerous administrative controls placed upon municipalities, mayors feel they have little decision-making latitude to perform their representative and leadership roles. For many mayors, their position becomes a political liability because of the nature of the urban policy making process.
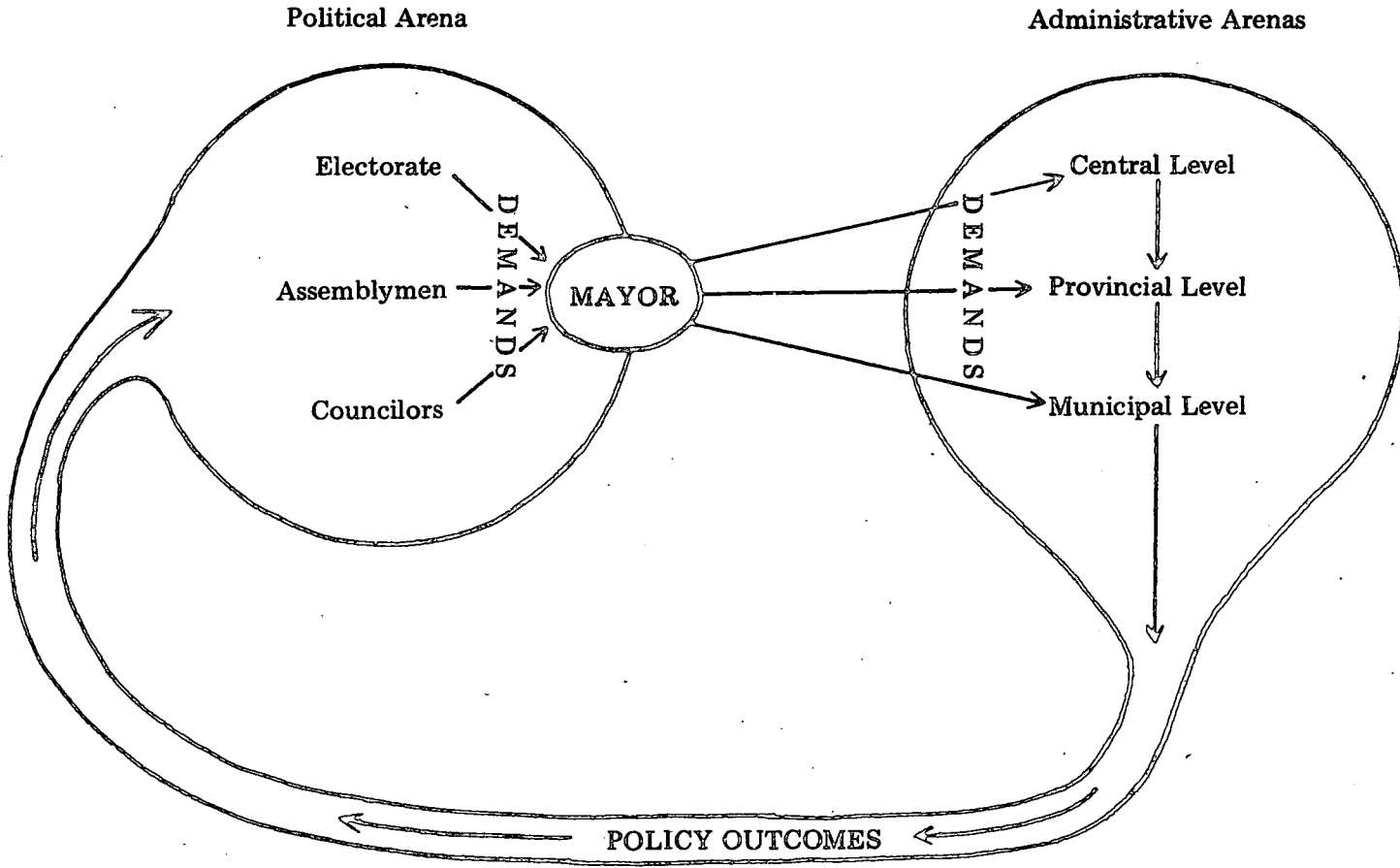
Urban Policy and Politics in Thailand

As suggested by Lowi and Yates, the relationship between policy and politics is important for explaining urban political phenomena. In the case of Thailand, I find the urban policy process differing in many respects from the policy process at the national and intermediate levels of government. These differences help explain why mayors become involved in a particular style of administrative politics.

Four of Yates' twelve distinctive characteristics of the urban policy making process are particularly pertinent to Thailand. Comprising a

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[24]The 97.7 percent response rate is derived from an analysis of 44 mayors' responses to the following agree-disagree questionnaire item: "Municipal government is too centralized; it should be given more autonomy."

Figure 1. Relationship of Mayors to
           Political and Administrative Arenas

Political Arena

Administrative Arenas

Electorate

Assemblymen

Councilors

DEMANDS

MAYOR

DEMANDS

Central Level

Provincial Level

Municipal Level

POLICY OUTCOMES

model of urban policies and politics in Thailand, each characteristic is a major difference between the urban policy making process and the policy making process at other levels of government. Appropriate examples place each within the framework of the Thai urban setting.

First, urban governments deliver street-level services that are daily, visible, and locality-specific, such as street paving, garbage collection, street lighting, and market cleaning. Since these are visible services which place local citizens in direct contact with city officials, residents are aware of them and thus usually are able to evaluate the quality of service delivery.

Second, given the street-level nature of urban service delivery, demands and resulting political controversies center around the character of service delivery, for example, demands for certain services in different neighborhoods, or complaints about the quantity and quality of service delivery. Indeed, many mayors observe that they are continuously bombarded by citizen complaints and demands for improved service delivery. They also note that such citizen behavior is much less pronounced — often absent — at the district and provincial levels of government.

Third, street-level services are delivered by street-level bureaucrats. These bureaucrats are a combination of central government appointed managerial officers — municipal clerk, assistant municipal clerk, chief accountant, engineers — and locally recruited personnel that staff the lower echelons of the municipal administrative organization. Because of the prominent role of these bureaucrats

in daily service routines, they give the urban policy process a distinctively bureaucratic and administrative character. They also complicate the role of the mayor by involving him in the daily administrative details of service delivery. Moreover, he is dependent on street-level bureaucrats whose actions should limit the number of demands that arise from the street-level.

Yet few mayors are in control of the street-level bureaucrats who often create new and unexpected political issues. This is clearly indicated from numerous interview and questionnaire responses. Many mayors complain that their administrative subordinates are largely responsible for the greatest number of citizen complaints. When these officials fail to perform their jobs properly, new citizen demands are likely to be forwarded to the mayor. For example, the street-level bureaucrat may fail to report a broken water main or defective street lighting. Consequently, the mayor receives complaints from local citizens because these services are inadequate on a particular day in a particular neighborhood. The mayor, in turn, may attempt to resolve this problem by paying more attention to the administrative details of service delivery. He may seek greater control over these officials so that fewer unexpected demands will occur. This action, however, will often lead to conflicts with street-level bureaucrats over their prerogatives to deliver specific services. These conflicts center on who has the proper authority and responsibility to supervise street-level bureaucrats — the locally elected mayor or the centrally appointed municipal clerk.

Further evidence of this weak

control over street-level bureaucrats is found in the formal discipline proceedings of the Ministry of Interior. To a large extent, these discipline cases represent extreme attempts, initiated after all other measures have failed, to regain control over municipal officials. For example, hundreds of complaints against municipal officials are reported to the Ministry of Interior each year. Of these, approximately 200 to 300 become formal discipline cases which are processed through the center-level Municipal Personnel Committee. Based upon an examination of over 300 discipline cases for the years 1970-74,[25] it appears that the typical case involves the failure of a municipal official to perform his duties according to the expectations of the mayor or other officials. The most frequent charges are negligence, avoiding responsibilities, and disobedience. The general impression suggested by these cases, which is supplemented by interview and questionnaire data from mayors and municipal clerks, is that many municipalities experience great difficulty in maintaining control over their street-level bureaucrats.[26]

A final and fourth characteristic of the Thai urban policy process is its dependence upon both resources and cooperation from provincial and central administrative units. This is

[25]I examined these discipline cases in the Discipline and Capability Section, Division of Local Affairs, Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior, Bangkok, during 1973-1974.

[26]For a rare public display of examples of these discipline cases, see Ministry of Interior, *Pramuan panhaa le neew patibat ngan tesaban (Compilation of Municipal Problems and Operations)* (Bangkok: The Fourteenth Annual National Municipal League of Thailand Conference, 1973).

because of the interrelated nature of street-level services and the fragmented nature of authority over specific urban services. For example, municipalities are responsible for maintaining law and order, but they do not have their own police forces. The enforcement function is performed by a special unit of the provincial police force. This situation is even further complicated because the police are relatively autonomous of the provincial governor and the Ministry of Interior. Because of the structure of national level politics, the Police Department, while under the formal authority of the Minister of Interior, is informally aligned with key military factions. Consequently, the Minister of Interior and the provincial governors lack the power to control the police. Since many municipal services depend on law enforcement (particularly traffic control and enforcement of building and sanitation codes), a mayor must have the cooperation of the provincial police. However, as we shall see shortly, unless a mayor has a close personal relationship with the police chief, he receives little or no cooperation.

There are numerous other examples of the interrelated and fragmented nature of urban government in Thailand. A prime example involves water and electrical services. As in the case of police services, water and electricity are not provided by municipal governments; they are functions of provincial authorities — a fact few local citizens know. In addition to disrupting these specific services, laying water mains and extending power lines affect the traffic flow and may disrupt municipal garbage collection and street maintenance services in certain neighborhoods. As a result,

many citizens complain to the mayor about the inconveniences caused by the disruption of services. In response to these complaints, the mayor tries to explain that the municipality is not responsible for these problems. In the meantime, the mayor will place political pressure on officials in other administrative units to correct the problems which are causing complaints and misunderstanding. In this manner, a mayor becomes involved in administrative politics with the police chief, governor, or heads of the provincial water or electrical authorities.

Another example is one frequently used by mayors and municipal clerks to illustrate their difficulties in getting central level approval as they complain about the excessively centralized nature of the municipal system. A mayor may decide to respond to demands for increased garbage collection services. Since the local revenue base will not support the purchase of additional garbage trucks, the mayor must request a special subsidy from the Ministry of Interior. But such request often take a minimum of ten months for approval. In the interim, more complaints will undoubtedly arise from the street-level. In the meantime, however, the mayor may try to make the central administrative units more responsive by placing political pressures on key officials within the Ministry. A common practice is to "pull strings" (wing ten) by using old school ties within the Ministry, or by asking a member of the national parliament to telephone the proper officials in the Ministry of Interior to expedite requests for subsidy.

Central administrators, in response to such pressures, feel that the mayor is playing politics by interfering with the normal channels of communication and authority. But the mayor's lobbying effort often results in quick approval of the subsidy which in turn limits the number of street-level demands concerning the need for increased garbage collection. In the end, an effective mayor skillfully uses his political position to make the administrative arenas more responsive to his primary political arena.

Political Vulnerability and Expectations

Mayors encounter many difficulties in their relationships with municipal, provincial, and central officials. A common feeling among mayors is that the multiplicity of central rules and regulations limits their authority to the point where they become increasingly vulnerable within the local political arena. Street-level demands outnumber their legal and resource capabilities to take action. As a result, opposition within the assemblies may coalesce into new majorities which will oust the mayor.

Aware of the political vulnerability of the mayoral position, a mayor often circumvents standard procedures to make the administrative arenas more responsive to his needs. In doing this, a mayor accomplishes two related goals: (1) greater control over both the political and administrative arenas; and (2) increased autonomy for his municipality. At the same time, a mayor becomes involved in a vulnerable game of administrative politics which requires a delicate maneuvering of personnel to win various combinations of policy games at the local level. Losing in these games may mean rejection by the

electorate, assembly, governor, and/ or central officials.

Mayors develop expectations for coping with their rather complex political and administrative environment. A newly-elected mayor, for instance, expects to do a better job than his predecessors. Since 70 percent of mayors have business backgrounds, they initially conduct municipal government on the basis of business practices. But experience in the day-to-day operations of municipal government changes these optimistic expectations into either frustrations or realistic strategies for administrative politics. The effective

mayor must learn somehow to penetrate the relatively closed nature of the bureaucracy to accomplish his political goals.

It is evident from interview and questionnaire responses that many additional expectations constitute problems for mayors. The first set of expectations consists of several unexpected problems mayors encounter at each level of government. As indicated in the selected open-ended questionnaire responses on Table 1, most of these problems relate to the distinctively bureaucratic and administrative character of urban policy. These data suggest that at the muni-

Table 1. Unexpected Problems Mayors Encounter

Selected Open-ended Questionnaire Responses*

A. Municipal Level Problems

(1)   I must rely on the permanent officials to conduct the work and retain this position. But these officials divide into factions of former mayors and attempt in every way to oppose my policies.
(2)   Difficulty in directing municipal officials.
(3)   Signing an excessive number of official papers; consequently, I have little time to plan policies or improve work.
(4)   Citizen complaints about electricity and water which are not municipal government responsibilities.
(5)   Unskilled, incompetent, lazy, and dishonest municipal officials.

B. Provincial Level Problems

(1)   I must always report to the police and request their permission to lay water pipes along the streets.
(2)   Conflicts with other administrative units; in particular, conflicts with policemen who are supposed to arrest those who violate municipal ordinances.
(3)   Lack of cooperation from other governmental units.

C. Central Level Problems

(1)   Must always request permission from the Ministry of Interior; this is the reason that municipal work gets done so slowly.
(2)   The multiplicity of confusing and outdated government regulations; I can't do anything.
(3)   Lack of control over government land, purchasing procedures, and city planning.

*Question: "Since becoming mayor, what problems have you experienced that you did not think would arise or would be so difficult to solve?"

cipal level many officials divide into factions, resist the directives of the executive council, and are incompetent, lazy, and dishonest. At the provincial level, mayors experience great difficulty in obtaining co-operation from the police and a few other administrative units. At the central level, mayors note that the overall centralized nature of the municipal system is the key problem. Excessive centralization creates a maze of regulations which prevents mayors from taking action, causes delays in receiving approval to implement plans, and limits mayors' authority to make local decisions.

After a short period in office, most mayors learn that conducting municipal government is not like running a private business. Instead, they must become skilled in using influence and persuasion to get things done within the administrative arenas. In contrasting their business experiences with government work, many mayors note that in business the boss can issue orders to subordinates with the expectation that they will follow his direction or be fired. However, government work is different. Subordinates, aware that their superiors change frequently and that discipline procedures are cumbersome, often resist orders. Consequently, most mayors feel compelled to "satisfy" *(awcaj)* municipal officials by using subtle persuasion. Accordingly, in reference to municipal government work, 76.2 percent of the mayors agree that "In order to get work done, a superior has to 'satisfy' subordinates rather than order them."[27]

The second set of expectations involves relationships between mayors and specific individuals. After identifying the most important sectors and individuals affecting their work, mayors provided a personal evaluation of each relationship. In doing so, they provided data for constructing a role-set model which, when extended, provided an evaluation of key role-set relationships of mayors. Based upon this model, as identified in Figure 2, mayors maintain their best relationships with councilors (+4), municipal clerks (+3), and governors (+2). Their worst relationships are with the police (−4) and newspaper reports (−4). All other relationships fall somewhere between these two extremes, tending toward neutral and positive relationships.[28]

A third set of expectations involves specific problems arising from the relationship with each individual within the mayoral role-set. In interview and open-ended questionnaire responses, mayors identify several problems they experience with each of the four key role-set actors within the administrative arenas: central officials, governors, police and municipal clerks. Their major problems

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[27]The 76.2 percent response rate is based upon an analysis of questionnaire responses from 44 mayors.

[28]Numerical weightings are derived from ranking aggregate scores for each relationship and then creating intervals of four on an eight-point scale. With 24 mayors providing these evaluations, the aggregate scores range from 53 for councilors to 80 for both newspaper reporters and police. Since completing this role-set analysis of Thai mayors, a similar study has appeared on American mayors. While it utilizes an "interorganizational" framework which emphasizes network maintenance of mayors, my role-set approach is closely related to this framework. See John P. Kotter and Paul R. Lawrence, *Mayors in Action: Five Approaches to Urban Governance* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974).

Figure 2. Role-Set Relationships
of Mayors*
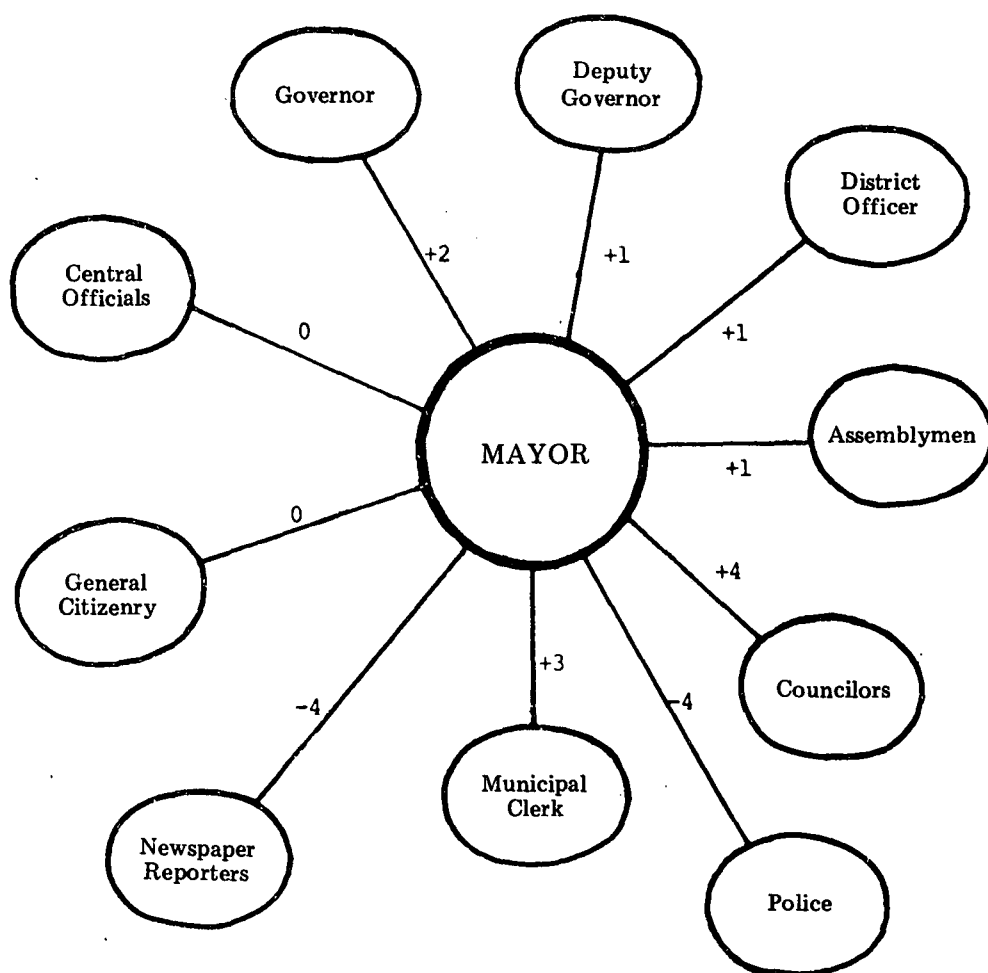
*The aggregate role-set model and corresponding ratings of mayors' relationships were derived from self-evaluations. Mayors were given a checklist of various groups and individuals they considered important to their jobs. They were then asked to evaluate their relationship with each group or individual according to a five-point rating scale, ranging from "excellent relationship" to "terrible relationship." After analyzing their responses, the data was arranged on an eight-point scale which indicated various degrees of positive (o thru +4) and negative (0 thru -4) relationships.

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with central officials relate to autonomy, authority, and communication. Most mayors feel that there are too many central rules and regulations to follow. They claim that the existing communication channels retard responses to local problems that require immediate action. Although mayors maintain relatively positive relationships with governors, they have similar complaints concerning the slow process of communication and the need to request permission from the province over matters that should be within their decision-making realm.

The mayor-police relationship is the most negative of all relationships between mayors and officials in the administrative arenas. While mayors view the police as important to their role, they are also considered to be the most uncooperative, unresponsive, and corrupt officials. According to mayors, the police fail to arrest violators of municipal ordinances, fail to provide effective traffic control, and fail to respond to the mayors' requests for cooperation. An even greater problem in many municipalities is that the police are involved in corruption that affects the municipal treasury. A common example involves pocketing the municipal slaughterhouse fees. Since these fees are a major source of municipal revenue, such corruption negatively affects the total income of municipalities. In most municipalities surveyed, executive council members, municipal clerks, and chief accountants relate similar stories of police corruption. Accusations are usually supported by statistical data. For example, in one municipality, a councilor compiled statistics on the relationship between population increases and the number of animals slaugh-

tered. These figures indicate that over a ten-year period, population had increased by 70 percent, but the number of animals reported to have been slaughtered declined by 50 percent! The councilor attributed this inverse relationship to police corruption.

While mayors report having relatively positive relationships with their municipal clerks, there are numerous difficulties underlying the mayor-municipal clerk relationship. Mayors were asked, both in interviews and through questionnaires, to evaluate the weak and strong points of their municipal clerk as well as to identify what things municipal clerks do that dissatisfy mayors and councilors. Most frequently, mayors cited the clerk's avoidance of responsibilities, currying favor with superiors at the provincial and central levels, playing politics with subordinates, resisting the mayor by manipulating the rules and regulations, and being uncooperative, incompetent, and dishonest.

From the perspectives of mayors, the nature of the policy making process deeply involves them in the politics of street-level bureaucracy. For them, urban politics not only involves maintaining good relationships with local citizens and members of the municipal assembly but managing street-level bureaucrats at the municipal level and other types of bureaucrats at the provincial and central level. However, it is the behavior of street-level bureaucrats that has the greatest impact on the political behavior of mayors.

Future Implications

Throughout this paper, I have at-

tempted to focus attention on the importance of studying local bureaucratic politics. Its importance is emphasized in theoretical developments concerning street-level bureaucracy and the relationship between the urban policy making process and urban politics. To date, however, these perspectives have been confined to the examination of urban government and politics in the United States.

It is a basic premise of this paper that these new perspectives have general utility for examining local bureaucratic politics in Southeast Asia. In supporting this position, I have examined four distinctive characteristics of the urban policy making process which define local bureaucratic politics in Thailand. While the data are derived from an examination of the municipal government system in Thailand, the generalizations characterizing local bureaucratic politics are related to a policy perspective that may have general utility for examining similar political phenomena in other Southeast Asian countries. If local bureaucratic politics is to become an important theoretical and empirical field of comparative inquiry for Southeast Asian specialists, then I suggest that this field begin examining local political and governmental behavior by raising questions similar to those which I have examined thus far. Most important, this field should begin by asking "How does the local policy making process and local politics differ from the policy making process and politics at other levels of government?" Second, what is the impact of street-level bureaucrats on the urban political process? Third, given the severely constrained resources of local governments, does it make a difference who governs in terms of the quantity and quality of governmental outputs? Finally, what can be done in order to improve the quantity and quality of governmental outputs? These questions should provide an initial baseline for discussing the legitimacy of studying local bureaucratic politics in Southeast Asia.