

# A Comparative Study of Women's Leadership in Family Businesses: Insights from Indonesia and Thailand

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study compares women's leadership in family businesses in Indonesia and Thailand, focusing on succession dynamics, board diversity, cultural norms, and institutional support. This study aims to understand how cultural and institutional contexts shape women's opportunities to assume leadership roles in family enterprises.

**Research Methodology:** A qualitative comparative analysis was conducted using secondary data from Scopus- and SINTA-indexed journals, regional surveys, and institutional reports. The analysis applied a thematic framework informed by role congruity theory, resource-based view, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and institutional theory, with data triangulation ensuring credibility.

**Results:** Indonesian family firms are strongly influenced by patriarchal norms, informal succession, and weak institutional support, which limits women's leadership. In Thailand, succession is more formalized, institutional support is stronger, and women's visibility in governance is greater. However, in both countries, women's representation does not always ensure their authority.

**Conclusions:** This study concludes that women's leadership is shaped less by capability than by governance practices and institutional frameworks. Thailand provides a more enabling context, whereas Indonesia reflects stronger cultural resistance.

**Limitations:** This study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and its focus on only two countries.

**Contributions:** This research enriches management, gender studies, and entrepreneurship by offering Southeast Asian comparative insights and practical implications for policymakers and family-business leaders.

**Keywords:** *Comparative Analysis, Family Business, Succession Dynamics, Southeast Asia, Women's Leadership*

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## 1. Introduction

Family-owned businesses play a pivotal role in the economies of Southeast Asia, accounting for a substantial share of private enterprises, employment, and intergenerational wealth creation. In countries such as Indonesia and Thailand, these businesses are not only economic entities but are also deeply embedded in cultural and familial structures (Ramadani, Hisrich, Anggadwita, & Alamanda, 2017). Despite their importance, leadership within family firms is often transferred along traditional, male-preferential lines, leaving women underrepresented in strategic decision-making roles, especially at the executive level (Harymawan & Nismara, 2022).

In Indonesia, cultural expectations surrounding gender roles continue to pose substantial barriers to women's leadership. Although Indonesian women are increasingly visible in entrepreneurship and higher education, they frequently encounter a "double bind" pressure to fulfil traditional familial duties

while also being expected to demonstrate exceptional competence to be considered viable leaders ([Ramadani et al., 2017](#)). Moreover, leadership succession in Indonesian family firms tends to be informal and heavily influenced by patriarchal values, limiting opportunities for daughters to inherit leadership positions, regardless of merit. Thailand presents an interesting contrast. While also shaped by hierarchical and collectivist traditions, Thailand's societal norms exhibit greater acceptance of women in leadership roles.

Institutional support, such as women's business associations and government-led gender inclusion initiatives, has contributed to increasing the visibility of female successors in Thai family firms ([Games & Sari, 2023](#)). Thai women entrepreneurs benefit from a relatively more enabling ecosystem, even though structural gender inequalities persist. This study compares Indonesia and Thailand not only because of their shared regional and cultural frameworks but also because of their diverging trajectories in female leadership within family businesses. Indonesia, with its predominantly patriarchal and Muslim-majority population, provides a lens into how traditional norms hinder women's participation in leadership succession.

In contrast, Thailand, with its Buddhist cultural foundation and more inclusive institutional environment, offers a counterpoint that highlights possible pathways to gender-equitable leadership. While previous studies have examined women in leadership or family business governance in isolation, there remains a lack of comparative research that integrates cultural, institutional, and gendered dimensions within Southeast Asian family firms. This research addresses this gap by conducting a qualitative comparative analysis of women's leadership in family businesses across the two countries. It investigates key themes, including succession dynamics, leadership styles, cultural barriers, and institutional support, thereby contributing a nuanced understanding of how gender and tradition intersect in shaping leadership outcomes in ASEAN family enterprises.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Succession Dynamics, Board Diversity, Cultural Factors, and Institutional Support

Succession dynamics remain a critical lens for examining gendered leadership opportunities in family businesses, as succession decisions determine who truly holds power across generations. In Indonesia, female heirs are often sidelined in favor of male successors, even when women possess strong educational backgrounds and are committed to the business. [Ramadani et al. \(2017\)](#) found that Indonesia's entrenched patriarchal norms systematically limit daughters' succession paths, despite their demonstrated leadership potential. Meanwhile, a broader regional analysis by [Sukamdani \(2023\)](#) confirms that in all four ASEAN countries studied—Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand—succession typically remains within family lines, with a prevailing preference for male heirs. However, the literature on Indonesia offers deeper insights into these dynamics than that on other countries ([Sukamdani, 2023](#)).

More recent findings reinforce these observations: [Yantono and Ardianti \(2024\)](#) showed that Indonesian female successors often relied on resilience, educational capital, and family support to sustain their firms during the COVID-19 crisis, but succession processes remained largely informal and gender-biased. In Thailand, contrasting evidence emerges from PwC's Family Business Survey (2023), which reported that next-generation inclusion programs and structured mentorship provide relatively better opportunities for women to participate in succession, although trust gaps from incumbent leaders persist. This suggests that while Indonesian women succeed through personal effort and adaptability, Thai successors benefit from more formalized, albeit imperfect, mechanisms of succession planning.

Board gender diversity is closely tied to governance quality and innovation outcomes. Drawing on the Resource-Based View by [Barney, Wright, and Ketchen Jr \(2001\)](#), diverse boards are strategic assets, contributing to competitive advantage through varied perspectives and leadership styles. [Harymawan and Nismara \(2022\)](#) analyzed 868 publicly listed Indonesian firms and found that while gender-diverse boards positively affect innovation, especially R&D efforts, the impact is significantly diminished in family-owned companies. This suggests that family-controlled governance cultures often resist female participation, even when evidence suggests that such inclusion benefits the firm. Although [Sukamdani](#)

(2023) study does not systematically quantify board-level diversity, it underscores that gender inclusion remains peripheral in most ASEAN family business literature, with limited emphasis on women in governance roles across the region.

In Thailand, data from the Thailand Family Business Survey by [PwC \(2019\)](#) report that 26% of senior management roles and 31% of next-generation leadership positions are held by women, implying greater structural openness, even if explicit board-level diversity remains under-documented. [Marpaung, Koto, Shareza Hafiz, and Hamdani \(2022\)](#) examined 144 Indonesian family firms and concluded that female directors had little measurable impact on ROA or ROE, reflecting structural barriers to their influence. Conversely, [Tonoyan and Boudreaux \(2023\)](#) found in a multi-country emerging market study that gender-diverse ownership structures correlate with higher innovativeness through R&D investment, suggesting significant untapped potential if cultural and governance barriers are reduced. These studies highlight the paradox: while Indonesian women are increasingly present in board structures, their contributions are often limited, whereas Thailand demonstrates more openness at management levels but still faces governance bottlenecks.

Cultural norms profoundly influence gender roles in business succession and leadership. In particular, Indonesian culture, especially in traditional family businesses, assigns daughters supportive rather than leadership roles, rooted in patriarchal expectations. This is corroborated by [Ramadani et al. \(2017\)](#), who emphasize that daughters face significant resistance when aspiring to leadership positions. [Sukamdani \(2023\)](#) supports this insight by noting that succession tends to replicate existing cultural hierarchies, including male-preferential traditions across ASEAN nations. Thailand, while similarly hierarchical, exhibits more flexible cultural patterns that increasingly accept women's public and economic participation. Broader social trends in Thailand, including higher female educational attainment and workforce participation, suggest a cultural environment more receptive to women's leadership ([Sukamdani, 2023](#)). Both countries demonstrate higher power distance, reflecting deference to authority, yet Indonesia scores higher on masculinity, suggesting stronger traditional gender role expectations ([HofstedeInsights, 2023](#)).

Recent findings by [Tjahjana et al. \(2024\)](#) further underline that Indonesian women's leadership aspirations are strongly influenced by family responsibility, assertiveness, and networking, highlighting that cultural and social capital play crucial roles in shaping leadership opportunities. In Thailand, although cultural acceptance of women in leadership is relatively higher, [PwC \(2023\)](#) reported that incumbent leaders remain hesitant to transfer ultimate authority to female successors, showing that cultural flexibility does not always translate into institutionalized leadership succession. Institutional support refers to formal mechanisms, such as mentorship programs, business networks, training initiatives, and gender-inclusive governance structures, that enable female leadership. [Ramadani et al. \(2017\)](#) point out that without formal training or networking platforms, women must rely on informal familial goodwill to emerge as leaders. Conversely, [Sukamdani \(2023\)](#) highlights that across ASEAN countries, Thailand stands out for having more established formal support policies and networks that encourage female participation in family businesses.

[PwC \(2019\)](#) underscores this by showing that structured programs and public-private initiatives effectively support female successors. In Indonesia, however, institutional backing remains limited, requiring women to rely heavily on social networks and informal support. A recent study by [Purba, Sitorus, and Ompusunggu \(2025\)](#) demonstrated how Indonesian women entrepreneurs in Batam leveraged social capital to increase household income and community well-being, reinforcing the importance of grassroots institutional support. In Thailand, by contrast, [PwC \(2023\)](#) highlighted that although formal institutional mechanisms are more advanced, gaps persist in translating these into actual gender-equitable leadership outcomes. These findings highlight that while Indonesia relies on informal and community-based support, Thailand benefits from more structured policies, although implementation remains inconsistent.

## **2.2. Analytical Framework**

These four dimensions collectively serve as a robust analytical framework. They encapsulate internal family structures (succession), corporate governance (board diversity), societal norms (culture), and external scaffolding (institutional support). Integrating [Sukamdani \(2023\)](#) ASEAN-wide comparative insights enriches this study by contextualizing Indonesia and Thailand within broader regional patterns and highlighting the uniqueness of each country's trajectory in promoting (or limiting) women's leadership in family firms. In this case, this study adopts an integrated analytical framework encompassing the four dimensions. Each dimension represents a distinct layer of influence shaping women's leadership trajectories, ranging from internal family processes and organizational structures to societal norms and external institutional systems.

This framework draws from key theoretical models such as Role Congruity Theory by [Eagly and Karau \(2002\)](#) to explain gender-role bias in succession; Resource-Based View by [Barney et al. \(2001\)](#) for board diversity as a strategic resource; Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions to assess national cultural variance; and Institutional Theory by [Scott \(2008\)](#) to understand the role of normal support mechanisms. This multidimensional structure enables a culturally grounded and theoretically sound comparison between the two countries.

## **3. Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative comparative analysis to explore how women navigate leadership roles within family-owned businesses in Indonesia and Thailand. The comparative approach is appropriate for identifying thematic similarities and contextual differences between two culturally distinct yet regionally proximate Southeast Asian nations. By analyzing multiple intersecting variables, such as succession dynamics, board diversity, cultural norms, and institutional support, this study aims to provide a holistic understanding of women's leadership trajectories in family business contexts. Data for this research were collected from a broad range of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, case studies, regional surveys, and institutional reports.

Academic materials were drawn from Scopus- and SINTA-indexed journals with relevance to gender studies, family firm governance, and Southeast Asian business dynamics. Institutional resources, such as [PwC \(2019\)](#) and global platforms like Hofstede Insights, provided contextual data on sociocultural and structural indicators. Case examples highlighting women's succession and governance experiences in Indonesia and Thailand were synthesized through literature mapping, prioritizing sources with empirical grounding and regional specificity. The unit of analysis is the leadership pathway of women in family businesses, viewed through the comparative national settings of Indonesia and Thailand. Rather than focusing on a single enterprise or individual, the study generalizes findings based on aggregated patterns observed across documented cases and institutional studies. This macro-level approach enables the research to highlight structural tendencies while preserving real-world business practices.

The analytical process was organized deductively, guided by four major themes drawn from the literature review: succession dynamics, board diversity, cultural factors, and institutional support. Qualitative data were categorized and interpreted within this thematic framework to identify consistencies and divergences between the two countries. The thematic analysis allowed for a focused yet flexible exploration of how sociocultural and institutional contexts shape leadership outcomes for women in family businesses. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study employed source triangulation and cross-checked data between academic publications, regional surveys, and cultural indices. Although primary data were not included, the robust integration of academically credible and policy-relevant materials ensured analytical rigor. The absence of firsthand accounts is acknowledged as a limitation; however, it is offset by the breadth and reliability of the comparative literature base used in this research.

## 4. Results and Discussions

### 4.1. Indonesia

Succession dynamics in Indonesian family firms are deeply shaped by patriarchal expectations, with daughters frequently positioned as secondary heirs despite equal or superior credentials. Multi-case evidence shows that female successors must establish legitimacy through exceptional performance and relational capital because primogeniture and male-first norms are implicitly enforced in many business families ([Ramadani et al., 2017](#)). The synthesis of ASEAN literature also places Indonesia as the country with the most developed yet still male-tilted succession discourse, in which transitions overwhelmingly prioritize family insiders and favor sons unless strong countervailing signals exist ([Sukamdani, 2023](#)). Studies of Indonesian succession timing and process design further indicate that formalization reduces contestation but does not automatically neutralize gender bias unless criteria explicitly recognize daughters' merit and prior grooming ([Tirdasari & Dhewanto, 2020](#)). [Anggadwita, Profityo, Alamanda, and Permatasari \(2020\)](#) reveal that in many Chinese-Indonesian family firms, leadership traits such as decisiveness and control are culturally attributed to men, resulting in gender bias that sidelines daughters despite their competence.

[Istiatin and Luhglatno \(2017\)](#) emphasize that even when women exhibit essential successor qualities, such as integrity, transformational leadership, and the ability to maintain family harmony, they are still required to exceed performance expectations compared to male siblings to be considered viable leaders. [Rosen, Luddin, and Supriyati \(2019\)](#) stress that formal succession planning and professional development opportunities can mitigate these barriers by legitimizing female leadership potential within family governance structures. [J. D. Tan, Supratikno, Pramono, Purba, and Bernarto \(2019\)](#) further note that when incumbents embrace mentorship roles, it opens the door for daughters to engage more actively in business operations, gradually shifting entrenched norms. Broader reviews on gender exclusion in succession echo these patterns, noting that bias persists even when female heirs possess the requisite human capital, thereby constraining women's pathways to top roles in founder-led and second-generation firms.

Recent evidence on governance and innovation in Indonesia is nuanced: adding women to boards is associated with higher innovation inputs and improved disclosure quality; however, these benefits are dampened in family-controlled contexts, where entrenchment and concentrated power persist. A large-sample study of 868 listed firms finds that gender-diverse boards spur R&D and innovation overall, yet the positive effect is significantly weaker in family firms, suggesting that family control can blunt the strategic value of women's voice ([Harymawan & Nismara, 2022](#)). Newer work shows that family ownership also moderates the link between women on supervisory boards and performance, again indicating context dependence in Indonesian governance systems ([Ermawati & Dianawati, 2024](#)).

[Fendiani and Tandiono \(2016\)](#) suggest that aligning managerial and ownership stakes could create greater internal opportunities for female leaders if governance systems become more inclusive. [Koentjoro and Gunawan \(2020\)](#) further demonstrate that dynamic capabilities and effective knowledge management attributes, often enhanced by diverse leadership teams, are linked to sustainable competitive advantage, yet remain underleveraged in family businesses with low female participation. Sectoral studies report similar patterns on disclosure outcomes, cybersecurity, and anti-corruption, where women's presence is associated with stronger transparency; however, the effects vary with ownership structure and Indonesia's two-tier board architecture ([Natalia & Isnalita, 2024](#)). Taken together, these findings suggest that women's board participation is a valuable resource; however, realizing its full impact requires governance designs that limit family dominance and enable independent, merit-based oversight.

Cultural norms in Indonesia play a decisive role in shaping women's leadership opportunities in family firms. [Pekerti \(2008\)](#) documented that daughters educated abroad are frequently expected to return home to fulfill family obligations, which often conflicts with their aspirations for leadership. This statement was further supported by [Hertzman \(2020\)](#) whose research aligned with him. [Rademakers \(1998\)](#) describes the persistence of "bapakism," a paternalistic leadership style in which authority is vested in a male figure, reinforcing hierarchical decision-making that disadvantages women. [Efferin](#)

[and Hartono \(2015\)](#) argue that strong cultural congruence between owners and employees helps preserve these gendered traditions, making cultural transformation slow and incremental. Consequently, even when women are equipped with relevant skills and education, they must navigate a social environment that prioritizes family loyalty and traditional gender roles over merit-based leadership selection.

Formal institutional mechanisms to support women's leadership in Indonesian family businesses are limited. [Sukamdani \(2023\)](#) observes that leadership development often relies on informal mentorship from family members rather than structured programs designed to prepare female successors. [Sharma, Ratri, and Krishnamachari \(2012\)](#) note that while corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives can provide broader networking opportunities, they are rarely tailored to address gender disparities in leadership. Without targeted interventions, such as gender-specific leadership training, mentorship networks, and policy incentives, progress will continue to depend on individual family dynamics rather than systematic change. This reliance on informal pathways perpetuates inequality and limits the pipeline of qualified female leaders in Indonesian family enterprises.

Therefore, cultural and institutional enablers in Indonesia are advancing, but unevenly. Cross-national cultural comparisons consistently characterize Indonesia as having high power distance and being more "masculine" than Thailand, reinforcing hierarchical deference and traditional role expectations that shape intra-family leadership choices. At the same time, policy and ecosystem signals are shifting: the financial regulator reports rising financial literacy and inclusion for women, and national women's entrepreneur associations provide networking and capacity programs that can strengthen the pipeline of female leaders from family SMEs to large firms ([OJK, 2024](#)). Case illustrations, such as the Martha Tilaar Group, show how women-led family enterprises combine commercial success with women's empowerment initiatives, building human capital and role models that normalize female leadership in family businesses ([UNCTAD, 2023](#)). Nevertheless, without explicit gender-responsive succession criteria and board nominations, these ecosystem gains may not convert into equitable leadership outcomes within tightly held family firms.

#### **4.2. Thailand**

Thailand presents a more structured and inclusive approach to succession planning, affording women greater opportunities to ascend to leadership roles in family businesses. [Luechapattanaporn and Wongsurawat \(2021\)](#) find that Chinese-Thai family firms combine Confucian principles with formalized training and mentorship, enabling both male and female heirs to develop leadership skills from an early stage. [W. L. Tan and Fock \(2001\)](#) provide evidence of cases where daughters successfully led family firms by balancing entrepreneurial innovation with respect for tradition, thereby overcoming gender-based reservations. [Rodsutti and Makayathorn \(2005\)](#) stress that open communication and adaptability within family structures help legitimize female successors and facilitate smoother leadership transitions. Although residual gendered expectations persist, Thailand's normalization of women's economic participation has made female successors more visible in owner-managed and diversified business groups than in many ASEAN peers ([PwC, 2019](#)). While residual gendered expectations persist, Thailand's normalization of women's economic participation has made female successors more visible in owner-managed and diversified business groups than ([PwC, 2023](#)). While residual gendered expectations persist, Thailand's normalization of women's economic participation has made female successors more visible in owner-managed and diversified business groups than in many ASEAN peers.

Board-level gender diversity in Thailand family firms, while less extensively documented than in Indonesia, is generally higher in practice. Regional benchmarking by the IFC and partners documents steady growth in women's board seats across ASEAN and identifies Thailand among markets with active dialogues on board gender diversity, director pipelines, and governance codes ([IFC, 2019](#)). Global surveys also report a continued upward trend in women's board representation in Southeast Asia between 2021 and 2023, with Thailand contributing to the regional rise, although levels remain short of global averages ([Deloitte, 2024](#)). Family-controlled Thai firms often combine family representation with independent directors, and when women occupy these seats, studies link their presence to improved

oversight and stakeholder trust factors that ease intergenerational transitions. Complementary survey evidence indicates that Thai family firms are increasingly formalizing succession and governance documents, which, by design, expand the visibility of qualified women for C-suite and board roles (PwC, 2023). This result was previously mentioned: women hold 26% of senior management roles and 31% of next-generation leadership positions, reflecting a more inclusive governance environment (PwC, 2019). [Yabushita and Suehiro \(2014\)](#) argue that modernization and openness in Thai corporate culture have created more space for women to influence governance. [Srisathan, Ketkaew, Jitjak, Ngiwphrom, and Naruetharadhol \(2022\)](#) find that diverse teams enhance the implementation of open innovation strategies, which are critical for maintaining competitiveness. Overall, Thailand's governance environment appears more receptive to translating women's human capital into positional authority than in many neighboring contexts.

Culturally, Thailand exhibits more flexibility toward women in leadership than Indonesia, despite the persistence of hierarchical structures. [Chou, Chang, and Han \(2016\)](#) note that Buddhist values of merit-making and compassion help legitimize women's authority by framing leadership in moral rather than strictly hierarchical terms. [Kilenthong and Rueanthip \(2018\)](#) observed that entrepreneurship is often nurtured within supportive family networks, enabling women to engage in business leadership without directly challenging cultural norms. [Luechapattanaporn and Wongsurawat \(2021\)](#) highlighted the adaptability of Thai family firms in blending traditional values with modern business practices, reducing resistance to female leaders. This cultural receptiveness plays a significant role in facilitating women's integration into leadership roles.

Thailand offers stronger institutional support mechanisms for women's leadership in family businesses than Indonesia. [Luechapattanaporn and Wongsurawat \(2021\)](#) describe how formal training programs and structured succession planning processes equip women with the skills and legitimacy to lead. [Srisathan et al. \(2022\)](#) note that innovation networks and collaborative platforms frequently include female leaders, enhancing their visibility and professional credibility. [Chou et al. \(2016\)](#) also find that CSR initiatives in Thailand often carry cultural weight, linking social responsibility with moral leadership in ways that resonate with community values. These combined institutional and cultural supports create an ecosystem in which women have greater opportunities to ascend to and succeed in leadership roles.

Nevertheless, cultural and institutional scaffolding also favor women in Thailand relative to Indonesia. Comparative cultural indices portray Thailand as having a high-power distance but lower masculinity norms, which can soften resistance to women occupying public leadership roles in business families. Policy instruments and funds targeted at women's economic empowerment, such as the Women Empowerment Fund and programs supported by the Ministry of Social Development, create formal avenues for capability building that complement family-internal grooming. However, country diagnostics highlight that unpaid care burdens and financing gaps still constrain women's leadership bandwidth, signaling the need for ecosystem fixes alongside firm-level reforms ([UNDP, 2023](#)). The net effect is a setting in which motivated female heirs encounter fewer structural barriers to succession than in Indonesia, but continued attention to care infrastructure and capital access is required to sustain gains.

### **4.3. Comparative Analysis**

Compared with Thailand, Indonesia shares family-centric ownership logics and deference to founders but diverges in how culture, institutions, and governance translate women's capabilities into leadership authority. Across ASEAN, family firms overwhelmingly prefer insider successors; however, Thailand's greater formalization of succession (plans, criteria, and early exposure) has widened entry points for daughters, while Indonesia's informal, patriarchal norms continue to narrow them absent explicit gender-responsive design ([Kittikornwattana & Kiatpanont, 2024](#); [Sukamdani, 2023](#)). On governance, both countries show that women's board participation can enhance disclosure and innovation outcomes; however, Indonesian evidence repeatedly finds that the family-ownership context dampens these benefits unless checks on entrenchment exist ([Ermawati & Dianawati, 2024](#); [Harymawan & Nismara, 2022](#)).

Thailand's ecosystem featuring active surveys, governance dialogues, and capacity programs appears more effective at converting women's human capital into board and senior management roles, although the region as a whole remains below parity (Deloitte, 2024; IFC, 2019; PwC, 2023). Finally, macro-institutional conditions matter: global legal and policy diagnostics, coupled with national data on women's economic participation, suggest that reducing care burdens and improving access to capital are critical levers in both countries, with Thailand somewhat ahead on practical support and Indonesia advancing through financial literacy and inclusion initiatives (OJK, 2024; UNDP, 2023; WorldBank, 2024). These contrasts underscore that culturally congruent formalization, clear succession criteria, transparent nominations, targeted mentoring, and external networks can mitigate bias and make women's leadership in family firms more routine than exceptional across both contexts.

Table 1. Comparative summary of women's leadership in family business

Variable	Indonesia	Thailand
Succession Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Succession remains informal and heavily patriarchal, in which daughters are often sidelined despite their qualifications (Harymawan &amp; Nismara, 2022; Ramadani et al., 2017).</li> <li>• Generally, male heirs are prioritized, and leadership for women depends on exceptional legitimacy-building (Sukamdani, 2023).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalized succession planning with training and mentorship for both genders and reduced discretionary bias (Luechapattanaporn &amp; Wongsurawat, 2021; Rodsutti &amp; Makayathorn, 2005; W. L. Tan &amp; Fock, 2001).</li> <li>• Succession is increasingly formalized with structured training and early exposure of female heirs (Games &amp; Sari, 2023; PwC, 2019).</li> <li>• The greater acceptance of daughters in leadership reflects cultural flexibility and institutional scaffolding (Sukamdani, 2023).</li> </ul>
Board Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's board participation has a minimal impact on family-controlled firms because of entrenched male dominance (Harymawan &amp; Nismara, 2022).</li> <li>• Opportunities for women remain constrained by governance culture (Fendiani &amp; Tandiono, 2016; Koentjoro &amp; Gunawan, 2020).</li> <li>• Symbolic representation persists without real influence, thereby limiting innovation outcomes (Ramadani et al., 2017).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women hold 26% of senior management roles and 31% of next-generation leadership positions; diversity supports open innovation (PwC, 2019; Srisathan et al., 2022; Yabushita &amp; Suehiro, 2014).</li> <li>• Gender-diverse boards in family firms show greater openness to inclusive governance, although gaps remain (Games &amp; Sari, 2023).</li> </ul>
Cultural Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indonesian norms emphasize women's supportive roles, with strong patriarchal resistance in family firms (Ramadani et al., 2017; Sukamdani, 2023).</li> <li>• High masculinity scores reflect stricter gender-role expectations (HofstedeInsights, 2023).</li> <li>• Strong patriarchal traditions (bapakism) restrict women's autonomy; daughters are often expected to prioritize family over career (Hertzman, 2020; Pekerti, 2008; Rademakers, 1998).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buddhist values of compassion and merit-making legitimize women's leadership, and flexible cultural norms enable the integration of tradition and modernity (Chou et al., 2016; Kilenthong &amp; Rueanthip, 2018).</li> <li>• Thai culture, while hierarchical, allows greater female visibility in economic and leadership roles (Sukamdani, 2023).</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher female educational attainment and labor force participation foster the acceptance of women leaders (PwC, 2019).</li> </ul>
Institutional Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimal formal programs; reliance on informal family mentorship; and CSR initiatives that are not gender-specific (Sharma et al., 2012; Sukamdani, 2023).</li> <li>Institutional mechanisms remain weak and rely on informal networks and family goodwill (Ramadani et al., 2017).</li> <li>The lack of systemic mentorship or training reduces women's pathways to authority (Harymawan &amp; Nismara, 2022).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong institutional scaffolding: formal training, networks, and culturally embedded CSR support women leaders (Chou et al., 2016; Luechapattanaporn &amp; Wongsurawat, 2021; Srisathan et al., 2022).</li> <li>Institutional support is stronger through women's business associations, state policies, and public-private initiatives (Games &amp; Sari, 2023; PwC, 2019).</li> <li>Structured mentorship and training programs provide visible support for female successors.</li> </ul>

Table 1 presents a comparative summary of women's leadership in family businesses across four analytical dimensions: succession dynamics, board diversity, cultural norms, and institutional support. The findings demonstrate that Indonesia and Thailand share common features as Southeast Asian family-based economies; however, they diverge significantly in how gender is negotiated within leadership succession. In Indonesia, patriarchal traditions and informal succession practices continue to marginalize daughters, whereas in Thailand, structured succession planning and cultural flexibility have opened greater space for female heirs.

The table also highlights the different governance contexts regarding board diversity. In Indonesia, women's inclusion on boards often remains symbolic, with little influence on decision-making or innovation outcomes. Conversely, in Thailand, women occupy a larger share of senior management and next-generation leadership roles, reflecting a more receptive governance environment, although challenges persist. Cultural norms reinforce these patterns, with Indonesia's high masculinity index perpetuating traditional gender expectations, whereas Thailand demonstrates greater cultural receptivity to women's public roles due to higher female education and workforce participation.

Finally, institutional support emerges as a critical differentiator. Indonesian women leaders often rely on informal family goodwill in the absence of systemic mentoring or training structures. In contrast, Thailand benefits from stronger institutional scaffolding, including business associations, state policies, and mentorship programs that formally support female successors. Taken together, the table underscores that women's leadership in family firms is not only a matter of individual competence but also of structural, cultural, and institutional arrangements that either hinder or enable leadership pathways. These comparative insights provide a strong foundation for the conclusions and recommendations presented in the following section.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Conclusion

This study compares women's leadership in family businesses in Indonesia and Thailand across four dimensions: succession dynamics, board diversity and governance, cultural norms, and institutional support. The analysis shows that women's leadership trajectories in both countries are shaped less by individual capability deficits and more by how family logics, cultural expectations, and institutional architectures either constrain or enable their access to decision rights. Indonesia is characterized by informal, male-preferential succession routines and family entrenchment that dilute the influence of women, even when they hold formal titles, whereas Thailand demonstrates more structured succession

pathways and a denser support ecosystem that makes women's advancement more visible. Across both contexts, the mere presence of women in the organization or on boards does not automatically translate into authority; the decisive variables are rule clarity, role legitimacy, and governance safeguards that limit unilateral control by incumbents. Overall, the comparative evidence suggests that formalization, transparency, and ecosystem scaffolding are the levers that convert women's human capital into durable leadership power in family firms.

In Indonesia, the central pattern is the persistence of informal, patriarchal succession tempered by growing cases of female resilience and professionalization. Daughters typically enter leadership after prolonged legitimacy-building through education, performance in key projects, and careful negotiation within the family hierarchy; however, decision rights remain vulnerable to founder intervention and kinship politics. Board diversity is improving but often functions symbolically in family-controlled firms, with innovation and disclosure benefits emerging only when independent oversight and merit-based criteria constrain concentrated control. Cultural expectations around gendered caregiving and deference to senior males continue to shape who is seen as a "natural" successor, although urban, internationally exposed, and professionally governed firms display more inclusive practices. Institutional support is expanding through financial inclusion, networks, and role models; however, these remain uneven and are not sufficient to systematically neutralize succession bias or ensure women's strategic voice at scale.

Thailand presents a different equilibrium in which succession planning, mentorship, and early-role exposure are more routinely structured, thereby normalizing the visibility of women as heirs in the leadership pipeline. Female participation in senior management and governance has risen alongside broader professionalization, and firms more frequently codify roles and processes that make leadership transitions less personality-dependent. Cultural norms remain hierarchical but less rigidly masculine, which reduces the social penalties for women occupying authority and supports a wider range of legitimate leadership styles. Institutional scaffolding in public-private programs, business associations, and targeted capability building creates clearer rungs on the ladder for women to convert competence into recognized authority. However, trust gaps from incumbent leaders, care burdens, and financing frictions continue to limit the full conversion of women's presence into decisive strategic power, signaling that Thailand's gains require consolidation and deeper governance embedding.

Compared with Indonesia, Thailand shares family-centered ownership logics and high-power distance but diverges in how rules, roles, and resources are organized to translate women's human capital into leadership. Thailand is further along the formalization curve, with clearer succession criteria, mentoring routines, and external networks that widen entry points for daughters, whereas Indonesia relies more on individual resilience against entrenched norms, producing uneven outcomes across firms and sectors. In governance, Indonesia shows the widest gap between representation and influence, while Thailand more often couples representation with role clarity and stakeholder-facing accountability. Culturally, Indonesia's higher masculinity and stronger adherence to male-first traditions slow the routinization of women's authority, whereas Thailand's more flexible cultural repertoire reduces the "role incongruity" penalties for female leaders. The overarching conclusion is that gender-equitable leadership in family firms becomes routine rather than exceptional when families institutionalize gender-neutral succession, refresh boards with independent competence, and plug into supportive ecosystems that sustain women's leadership beyond a single generation.

## **5.2. Research Limitations**

This study relies on secondary sources—reviewed articles, surveys, and institutional reports—rather than primary interviews or ethnographic fieldwork, which limits the ability to capture the micro-processes of negotiation, identity work, and power sharing that shape succession inside specific families. The comparative scope is intentionally restricted to Indonesia and Thailand; therefore, the external validity to other ASEAN contexts (for example, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam) is suggestive rather than definitive. Within-country heterogeneity, such as differences across industries, firm sizes, urban-rural settings, religious traditions, and generational stages, could not be fully disaggregated, which may mask important contingent patterns. Measurement limitations also remain: indicators such as "women on

boards” do not necessarily capture de facto decision rights, agenda-setting power, or control over resource allocation, and survey-based statistics can understate informal influence or overstate formal inclusion. Finally, publication and language biases may privilege firms that are already professionalized and publicly visible, meaning that more traditional or private family firms, where constraints may be stronger, are underrepresented in the available evidence.

### ***5.3. Suggestions and Direction for Future Research***

For Indonesian family firms, the priority is to institutionalize gender-neutral succession by codifying role requirements, experience paths, and performance criteria that are explicitly open to daughters and to communicate these rules early to reduce ambiguity and resistance. Families should complement representation with real authority by refreshing governance bodies, adding independent directors, clarifying decision rights, and tying oversight roles to measurable innovation, risk, and sustainability outcomes. At the capability level, structured mentorship, cross-functional rotations, and external secondments can accelerate daughters’ exposure to strategic tasks and stakeholder interfaces. Ecosystem partners, such as business associations, financial institutions, and universities, can scale executive education and peer networks specifically tailored to female successors in SMEs and mid-cap family firms. Policymakers can encourage adoption through voluntary governance codes, tax incentives for board professionalization, and programs that ease care burdens and capital access, thereby removing systemic frictions that disproportionately affect women.

For Thai family firms, the task is to consolidate gains by hard-wiring inclusive succession into family constitutions and shareholder agreements, ensuring that leadership pathways for daughters are protected from ad hoc reversals during ownership or life-cycle shocks. Firms should deepen the link between women’s leadership and firm-level performance by tying incentives to innovation, export growth, and compliance outcomes under the stewardship of gender-diverse leadership teams. Institutional actors can scale mentorship, coaching, and financing instruments that target female successors in second- and third-generation firms, while policy efforts should focus on reducing unpaid care burdens and strengthening work–family infrastructure to free leadership bandwidth. Cross-border learning with ASEAN peers can professionalize director pipelines and normalize women’s authority in complex business groups and family offices. Together, these measures can turn Thailand’s visible participation gains into durable decision rights across generations.

For researchers, future work should employ mixed methods that link large-sample panel data with in-depth interviews and longitudinal case studies to measure how specific design choices (for example, independent nominations, evaluation rubrics, and mentoring architectures) alter women’s decision rights and firm outcomes over time. Comparative research that incorporates additional ASEAN countries can map where cultural and institutional thresholds tip women’s presence into authority and what combinations of policy and governance elements are most cost-effective. Micro-level studies should examine negotiation strategies, identity work, and coalition building by female successors in founder-dominant settings, including how men in the family become allies of inclusive governance. Attention to intersectionality, such as class, ethnicity, religion, and regional variation, can reveal why similar policies travel differently across firms and locales. Finally, evaluation studies of policy pilots and association-led programs can move the field from description to evidence-based prescriptions, clarifying which interventions reliably close the gap between representation and power in family-business leadership.

### **Author Contributions**

NFG contributed to conceptualization and study design, data collection and analysis. MR and NFG jointly drafted and revised the manuscript. MR supervised the research process. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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