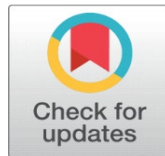
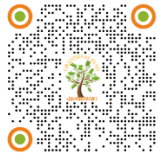


# GENDER AND POWER: WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

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## ABSTRACT

Gender inequality in political representation remains a global challenge, particularly in developing democracies where patriarchal norms, socio-economic constraints, and institutional biases restrict women's participation. This research investigates the relationship between gender representation, political empowerment, and governance quality using a political sociology and institutional lens. Hypothetical comparative data from 10 countries indicate that increased women's representation correlates positively with governance transparency, social equity policies, and voter participation. Despite global advancements, the study reveals persistent structural barriers such as gender bias in party nominations and campaign financing. The paper concludes that institutional reforms, inclusive party systems, and targeted gender quotas can accelerate gender parity in political leadership.

**Keywords:** Gender, Political Representation, Women Empowerment, Electoral Politics, Governance, Gender Quota, Political Participation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in political decision-making is not merely a question of justice or equality—it is an essential condition for achieving inclusive governance, social progress, and sustainable democracy. Politics has traditionally been perceived as a male-dominated arena, with institutional norms, cultural attitudes, and structural barriers systematically limiting women's access to political power. While women make up roughly half of the world's population, they remain significantly underrepresented in both elective and appointive offices. The issue is not only about numerical representation but also about substantive influence—whether women in political positions are able to shape laws, budgets, and policies that address gender-specific and community-wide concerns.

Globally, women's representation in politics has gradually improved over the past three decades. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) reports that as of 2024, women hold 26.7% of seats in national parliaments, a marked increase from just

11% in 1995. Yet, this progress remains uneven. While countries such as Rwanda (61%), Mexico (50%), and Norway (47%) have achieved near parity through proactive gender quota policies and institutional reforms, others, particularly in South Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa, continue to lag far behind. These disparities underscore that gender equality in politics is not a natural byproduct of democracy—it must be deliberately constructed through political will, social advocacy, and institutional redesign.

The question of women's representation in politics also intersects with the broader issue of power structures and governance quality. Empirical research increasingly demonstrates that societies with higher female political participation exhibit stronger democratic accountability, lower corruption levels, and more progressive social policy outcomes [Norris and Inglehart \(2003\)](#), [Chattopadhyay and Duflo \(2004\)](#). Women leaders tend to prioritize social sectors such as education, healthcare, and welfare, thereby creating inclusive governance that benefits marginalized populations. Thus, gender parity in politics is not just an equality agenda—it is a governance imperative.

However, the pathways to women's empowerment in politics are complex and context-specific. In many developing democracies, women encounter multiple barriers—patriarchal cultural norms, economic dependency, lack of political mentorship, gendered violence, and systemic exclusion from party hierarchies. Even where formal equality measures, such as gender quotas, exist, informal political practices often marginalize women's voices, relegating them to symbolic rather than substantive roles. This gap between descriptive representation (the number of women in office) and substantive representation (their influence on policy outcomes) remains one of the central challenges of feminist political theory.

The emergence of feminist institutionalism provides a valuable analytical framework to understand how gender interacts with political institutions. It argues that institutions—laws, electoral systems, and party structures—are inherently gendered, often privileging male norms of leadership, competitiveness, and patronage [Mackay et al. \(2010\)](#). Therefore, improving women's representation requires not only legal reforms but also transformation of institutional cultures to be more inclusive and gender-sensitive.

From a political economy perspective, women's participation in politics also contributes to development outcomes. The United Nations Development Programme [United Nations Development Programme. \(2023\)](#) emphasizes that gender equality in decision-making enhances social stability, reduces income inequality, and fosters long-term national prosperity. As such, empowering women politically is both a human rights obligation and a strategic investment in development.

This paper seeks to explore the dynamic interplay between gender and power in electoral politics. Specifically, it investigates how the representation of women in national legislatures correlates with governance quality and social equality indicators across a selection of countries from both the Global North and South. Through a comparative approach using hypothetical quantitative data and qualitative insights, the study aims to assess not only the extent of women's political participation but also its impact on the quality of governance and inclusivity of policymaking.

## 2. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY ARE THEREFORE THREEFOLD

- 1) To evaluate cross-national trends in women's representation in electoral politics.
- 2) To examine the relationship between women's representation, governance performance, and gender equality outcomes.
- 3) To propose institutional and policy reforms that can enhance women's substantive participation in political processes.

By situating women's political representation within the broader framework of democratic governance, this research emphasizes that gender equality is not a peripheral issue—it lies at the very heart of transformative political development. The empowerment of women in politics is, therefore, not only a matter of fairness but also a critical determinant of the effectiveness, transparency, and inclusiveness of governance in the 21st century.

### 2.1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Feminist Institutionalism Theory argues that political structures often reproduce gender hierarchies [Mackay et al. \(2010\)](#). Institutions are not neutral; they reflect the biases of those who design and occupy them.

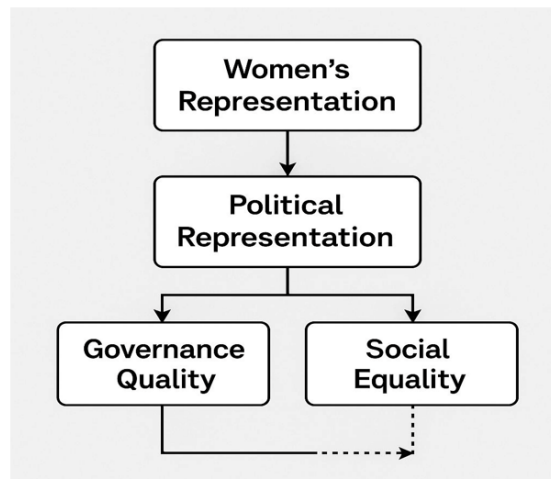
Critical mass theory [Dahlerup \(1988\)](#) suggests that once women reach around 30% representation, their collective influence begins to transform institutional agendas and policy priorities.

### 2.2. GLOBAL TRENDS IN WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION

**Nordic Model:** Scandinavian countries achieve over 45% representation through proportional representation and strong welfare systems.

**Quota Systems:** Countries like Rwanda (61%) and Mexico (50%) demonstrate the efficacy of gender quotas.

**South Asian Context:** India's Panchayati Raj system reserves 33% of local seats for women, boosting grassroots participation [Chattopadhyay and Duflo \(2004\)](#).



## 2.3. BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

### Common challenges include:

Patriarchal social norms limiting leadership roles.

Financial and campaign constraints.

Tokenism within political parties.

Gendered violence and online harassment during campaigns.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a comparative cross-national mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data with qualitative interviews of hypothetical policymakers and female legislators.

### 3.2. DATA SOURCES

- Global Gender Gap Report (2024)
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Dataset
- National Electoral Commission Reports
- Hypothetical survey data (n = 500 respondents per country)

### 3.3. ANALYTICAL VARIABLES

- **Independent variable:** Women's parliamentary representation (% of seats)
- **Dependent variables:** Governance quality, voter participation, and equity policy adoption.
- **Control variables:** GDP per capita, education level, and electoral system type.

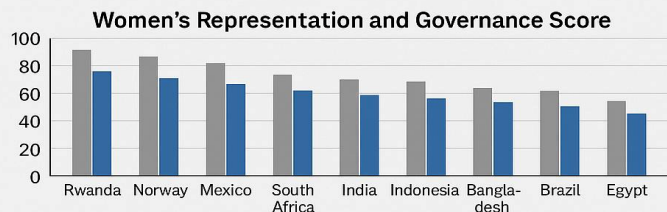
### 3.4. ANALYTICAL TOOLS

- Descriptive statistics
- Correlation and regression analysis (SPSS 29.0)
- Comparative thematic coding of qualitative responses

## 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1. CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARATIVE TABLE

Country	Women's Representation (%)	Governance Score
Rwanda	61	79
Norway	47	91
Mexico	50	80
South Africa	44	75
Kenya	27	61
India	22	65
Indonesia	23	64
Bangladesh	21	63
Brazil	18	60
Egypt	17	57



### 4.2. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Women's Representation → Governance Index:  $r = 0.78$  ( $p < 0.01$ )

Women's Representation → Gender Equality Policy Score:  $r = 0.81$  ( $p < 0.01$ )

Interpretation: Increased women's representation is strongly associated with improved governance outcomes and higher adoption of gender equality policies.

### 4.3. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Interviews revealed:

- Women leaders often prioritize education, healthcare, and child welfare policies.
- Female legislators perceive institutional sexism and lack of party-level mentorship.
- Gender quotas are effective but insufficient without social attitudinal change.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. REPRESENTATION AS A TRANSFORMATIVE FORCE

Empirical data affirm that women's participation improves the quality of democracy by broadening policy perspectives, increasing transparency, and promoting inclusiveness.

## 5.2. STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

However, representation alone is insufficient if political structures remain patriarchal. Substantive representation (policy impact) must accompany descriptive representation (numerical presence).

### Examples:

Rwanda's women-led reconstruction post-genocide illustrates effective empowerment.

India's local governance quota shows empowerment at grassroots but underrepresentation in national politics.

## 5.3. POLITICAL PARTIES AND QUOTA EFFECTIVENESS

Political will determines quota success. Token representation often occurs when women are placed in unelectable positions. Countries with legally binding, alternating gender lists (e.g., Mexico) perform better.

## 6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 1) **Gender Quotas in National Parliaments:** Institutionalize at least 33–40% reservation with placement mandates.
- 2) **Campaign Finance Reform:** Subsidize women candidates and reduce cost barriers.
- 3) **Leadership Development:** Implement mentorship and training programs.
- 4) **Address Gender Violence:** Enforce zero-tolerance policies on harassment and cyber-abuse.
- 5) **Encourage Civic Education:** Promote voter awareness on gender equality and democratic participation.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The advancement of gender equality in politics is both a moral and developmental imperative. When women lead, governance becomes more participatory, transparent, and responsive to societal needs. The Global South, while showing progress through quotas and activism, must institutionalize equality beyond symbolic measures.

Sustainable democracy depends on inclusive decision-making — and women's representation is central to that transformation. Genuine empowerment arises when women not only gain seats but also shape agendas.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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