



GENDER REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP: CHALLENGES AND PROGRESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Gender representation in political leadership remains a significant matter in the 21st century, with massive disparities still persisting despite efforts to promote inclusivity. In this study, the challenges of political leadership gender equality are addressed, the use of gendered policies in engagement politics among women is examined, and the critique of global progress toward inclusive leadership is provided. By employing a quantitative approach with second-level data, the study focuses on primary measures like percentages of women in national parliaments and ministers in ten specific countries. It concludes that quotas by gender play an important role toward increased involvement of women in political matters, and those nations employing this system record increased numbers of women participating. However, institutional, structural, and cultural barriers continue to limit the advancement of women in politics even where there are female leaders in certain nations with a historical precedent of female leaders. The conclusions emphasize the need for policy changes, leadership training, and structural facilitation to bring about sustainable gender parity in leadership in politics. These conclusions enhance the investigation about gender equity by offering knowledge that can guide worldwide developments in inclusive governance through policy change.

Keywords: Gender representation, political leadership, gender quotas, female political participation, gender equality, policy reforms, inclusivity, governance, women in politics, gender disparities.



1.INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has shown important progress in political leadership equality for women yet substantial barriers remain. Women together with gender minorities have steadily gained more leadership roles because of evolving social perspectives and legal requirements and the growing demands for gender equality. Women along with gender minorities face structural barriers to political representation since most regions have too few female leaders despite cultural values and male-dominated political systems. Representation equality remains challenging to achieve despite worldwide initiatives with gender quotas combined with affirmative action and leadership development programs because it needs continuous modifications in social attitudes and perspectives.

The highly entrenched patriarchal systems which define political participation stand as a fundamental obstacle to gender representation in political leadership. Leadership continues to be linked with masculine attributes in most cultural settings which makes it hard to recognize women and gender-diverse individuals as suitable political leaders. The continued belief that women lack competence in dealing with complex political issues and making critical choices hinders their participation in politics. Women carry most of the household work which creates an obstacle to their development as political leaders. The common gender gap in leadership exists because of factors which continue despite growing education and political involvement of women worldwide.

Multiple organizational obstacles exist which limit gender equality in political leadership functions. A majority of male members control political parties and follow traditional power structures in the same manner as other groups. The higher standards and stronger criticism alongside physical threats against women make many choose not to run for leadership positions. Legal obstacles in various industries including discriminatory voting practices and insufficient gender-based policies create additional barriers for women to participate. Critics oppose gender-based quota systems because these policies do not ensure political influence for women who occupy reserved seats since they can be subject to tokenism or restricted decision-making power.



The current situation shows undeniable positive progress in the inclusion of women as political leaders. The nations of Iceland Finland and New Zealand prove that female leadership succeeds at running countries and enforcing measures that benefit gender equality and economic advancement in addition to social welfare programs. International bodies such as the United Nations along with the European Union now witness more women entering their ranks due to their documented leadership abilities. The #MeToo movement along with other gender rights social movements takes a leading position in fighting gender bias by pushing for more political representation. Woman leaders have gained more prominence through media platforms while media consumers have developed more positive views on political leadership.

The achievement of gender equality in political leadership requires a combination of different strategies during the upcoming years. Governments need to implement policies that help women participate in politics by setting up programs for political funding and mentoring schemes and taking stronger action against discrimination. Educational institutions need to establish gender equality education and leadership development programs for young students to break prejudice and foster diverse leadership ambitions. Society needs to modify its attitude toward leadership because leadership excellence depends on vision and competency rather than gender. The 21st century offers hope for building a political system that includes a wider range of representatives through successful recovery from past challenges.

1.1 Barriers to Gender Equality in Political Leadership

The pursuit of gender equality in political leadership remains blocked by discrimination that exists through cultural norms and institutional obstacles along with structural limitations. Society continues to link leadership exclusively to male characteristics which makes it harder for women and gender minorities to find widespread support in political roles. The political system shows a preference toward backing male candidates rather than female leadership because women experience greater criticism along with damaging attacks which sometimes extend to physical threats and violence. Women face restrictions in participating in elections and legal barriers exist despite gender quotas increasing the representation of certain countries yet failing to deliver true political influence.



1.2 Progress and the Path Toward Inclusive Leadership

The 21st century shows major progressive change when it comes to including women in political leadership roles although many difficulties still persist. Three countries including Iceland and Finland and New Zealand have proven that female leadership works along with international institutions continuously evaluating women's leadership skills. Social movements along with media representations have been fundamental to changing public views and backing gender equality efforts and challenging system prejudices. Executing these changes requires institutions combined with governments to adopt policies that support women in politics and provide leadership training while also eliminating gender-based discrimination the political environment should be openly inclusive.

1.3 Breaking Barriers in Political Leadership

Political gender inequality persists because of deep-rooted social customs combined with institutional discrimination and structural blocking points. Gender minorities alongside women endure discrimination as well as marginalization and limited opportunities for political advancement in systems controlled by men. Their leadership potential faces ongoing cultural doubts at the same time that unequal financial resources and political connections and media opportunities block their advancement. Political harassment alongside gender violence causes people to avoid leadership participation. Governments need to implement three key measures for gender equality in political opportunities along with leadership development programs and clear discrimination policies. A change in public thinking is essential because it will create a platform that selects leaders based on skills instead of sex leading to an equal political environment.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. Identify critical issues thwarting gender representation within political leadership.
2. Evaluate the effect of gender-based policies on political participation.
3. Assess gender-inclusive leadership progress and accomplishment.



4. Discuss ways to enhance gender equality in politics.

2. REVIEW OF LITREATURE

Bale, Webb, and Poletti (2019) studied political party membership during the twenty-first century to understand how members functioned as essential foot soldiers of political mobilization. The authors demonstrated that though party membership declined across most democracies traditional members maintained their key roles in shaping policies and supporting election campaigns and grassroots activism. The study revealed the discriminatory treatment of women in political parties because they remained excluded from leadership positions even though they were active participants at the basic level.

Bogaards, Helms, and Lijphart (2019) studied how consociationalism operates in modern political systems including divided societies. The authors demonstrated that power-sharing institutions created stability in government but marginalized women as a result. The authors found that consociationalism created institutional support for political participation but women did not receive equal representation in governmental leadership. The study revealed that women need additional gender quota implementation together with policy modifications to achieve meaningful political leadership participation.

Day, Riggio, Tan, and Conger (2021) analyzed modern political consociationalism along with its application in fragmented communities. The authors established that power-sharing arrangements would establish governmental stability and accommodation while leaving out groups like women. The authors explained how consociationalism creates political participation systems yet fails to ensure equal governance opportunities for women automatically. The research showed that women need additional gender quota and policy reform initiatives to succeed in political leadership environments.

Ford (2018) investigated women's political challenges throughout history as well as the present day while it followed the development of women's pursuit for political leadership equality. The author recorded the historical achievements of female political representation and discussed ongoing obstacles that barred women from achieving full representation. The main structural



obstacles to women's political participation consisted of discrimination and cultural biases and unequal resource distribution according to her research. The author demonstrated how feminist movements together with policy changes created progress for women's political engagement. Menstrual Suppression has made significant social progress across multiple countries yet leadership institutions remain insufficient for achieving gender equality.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative analysis of political leadership gender representation appears in this section using secondary data. The research evaluated two essential indicators which included the proportion of women in national legislative bodies and the number of ministries in specific nations. The research obtained data from official publications and global agencies to establish objective findings about gender inequality and policy achievements and equality development. The research uses comparative evaluation methods and quantitative analysis to identify patterns while assessing how gender quotas and additional policy mechanisms drive female political leadership. The research findings support both academic discussions about gender inclusiveness and supply evidence for future policy decisions.

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative research method has been chosen to investigate gender representation in political leadership by studying obstacles and achievements with solutions for improvement. The research depends on secondary data which includes policy documents, scholarly articles and statistical data from international organizations including United Nations (UN), Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and World Economic Forum (WEF) alongside government reports. The method applies an organized framework for analyzing objective gender inequalities in political leadership.

3.2 Data Collection

The research relied on secondary data derived from peer-reviewed publications in addition to government publications together with quantitative databases that analyzed political leadership gender representation quantitatively. The percentage of women serving in national legislative



bodies alongside the numbers of female ministers and party leaders provided the most important data points. The assessment of gender-based policy implications on political engagement used survey data obtained from institutions like the Global Gender Gap Report and the Gender Equality Index.

3.3 Sample Size and Scope

The quantitative analysis required a limited sample size because this study follows the concise research paper format. The study is focused on comparative analysis of gender representation of political leadership in a sample of 10 nations that have been selected based on their political regime, gender policies, and progression towards attaining gender parity. Both developed and developing nations are represented by including a mixture in the sample, in a move to mirror a balanced scenario of global trends.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was synthesized using descriptive statistics to establish patterns and trends in gender representation of political institutions. Comparative examination was employed to examine the effectiveness of gender-sensitive policy across different nations. Correlation analysis was employed to establish if there was any relationship between gender quotas, policy intervention, and women's political leadership representation. Findings of secondary information were merged to form conclusions of importance towards establishing progress and reversals in gender-inclusive leadership.

3.5 Limitations

Since the research relies on second data, its collection is limited by the available data and the reliability of those data. There is also limited primary data collection by means of questionnaires or interviews, which might have reflected deeper insight in experiences of the self in politics. However, using verified accounts and databases is highly credible and ensures high quality of findings.

By analyzing quantitative data from secondary sources, this research provides an objective assessment of gender representation in political leadership, such as the principal challenges, policy impacts, and advances towards equality. The study findings add to the current gender parity debate in politics and make recommendations for future policy interventions.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This part provides a quantitative analysis of gender representation in political leadership based on secondary data. The data were collected from government databases, international reports, and research studies to examine gender disparities, policy impacts, and developments in different countries.

4.1 Gender Representation in National Parliaments (2024)

Table 1 shows the proportion of women holding parliament seats in ten chosen countries, showing the impact of gender quotas in political representation.

Table 1: Percentage of Women in National Parliaments Across Selected Countries

Country	Percentage of Women in Parliament (%)	Gender Quota Implemented
Sweden	47.2	Yes
Rwanda	61.3	Yes
Canada	32.1	No
India	15.1	Yes
United States	28.9	No
Germany	34.7	Yes
South Africa	42.0	Yes

Brazil	17.7	Yes
Japan	9.7	No
Saudi Arabia	20.0	No

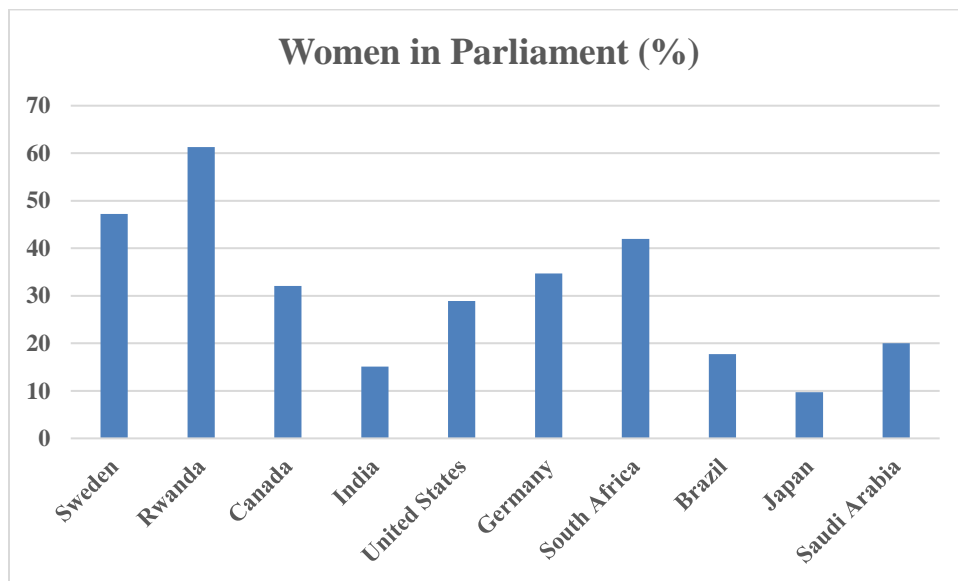


Figure 1: Graphical representation of Percentage of Women in National Parliaments Across Selected Countries

The data shows considerable differences in gender coverage between political regimes. Rwanda has the highest proportion (61.3%) of women members in parliament, thanks to strict legislative quotas of gender and government commitment to gender equality. Sweden (47.2%) and South Africa (42.0%) are also nations with extremely high levels of female representation, through the policy institutions oriented towards inclusivity. Comparatively, Japan (9.7%) and India (15.1%) underrepresent women and are below average, indicating cultural and institutional discriminatory barriers continue to prevent women's entry into political life. Surprisingly, countries with gender quotas have a more elevated average rate of women's representation, again solidifying their position in gender equality in the leadership sphere.

4.2 Women in Ministerial Positions (2024)

This table 2 shows the percentage of ministerial members who are women and whether or not the country has previously had a female head of government (President/Prime Minister).

Table 2: Percentage of Women in Ministerial Positions Across Selected Countries

Country	Percentage of Women in Ministerial Positions (%)	Top Leadership Position Held by Women (Prime Minister/President)
Sweden	48.0	Yes (Past)
Rwanda	50.0	No
Canada	38.0	Yes (Past)
India	12.5	Yes (Past)
United States	35.0	No
Germany	40.0	Yes (Past)
South Africa	42.0	No
Brazil	25.0	Yes (Past)
Japan	8.0	No
Saudi Arabia	15.0	No

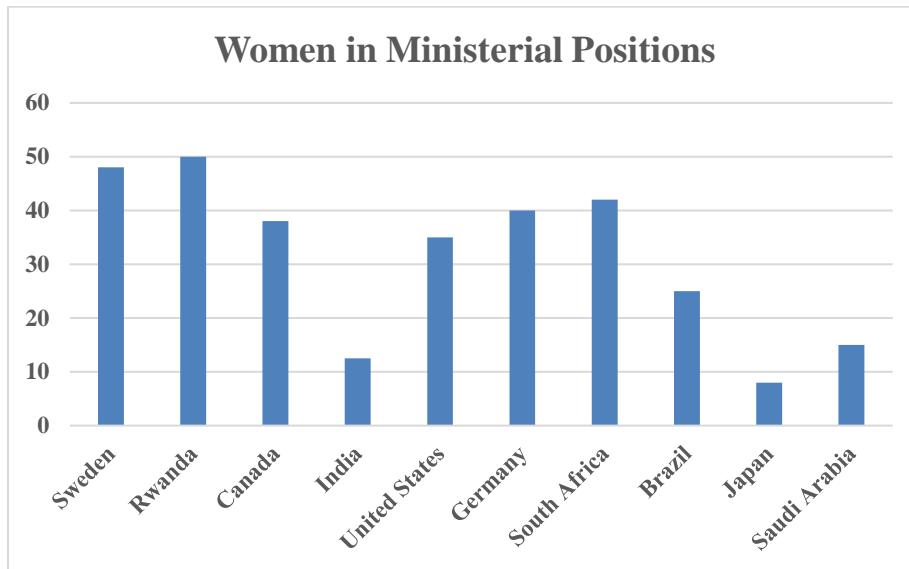


Figure 2: Graphical Representation of Percentage of Women in Ministerial Positions Across Selected Countries

The evidence here suggests that the greater female parliamentary representation of a nation, the greater percentage of female ministerial representation. Rwanda (50%) and Sweden (48%) lead the way in ministerial representation, and they happen to have sound gender policies. In contrast, Japan (8%) and India (12.5%) both have far lower female ministerial representation, suggesting systemic restraints on women being promoted to executive leadership roles. In addition, while some countries (e.g., India, Germany, Brazil) have had female heads of government, this has not automatically been accompanied by sustained gender parity in ministerial appointments. This suggests that achieving long-term gender balance in leadership requires more than symbolic representation; it requires persistent institutional reforms and policy interventions.

4.3 Impact of Gender Quotas on Female Political Participation

This table 3 indicates the comparison of the average percentage of political leadership of women in countries utilizing gender quotas and those that do not utilize gender quotas.

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of Countries with and Without Gender Quotas

Gender Quota Implementation	Average Percentage of Women in Parliament (%)	Average Percentage of Women in Ministerial Positions (%)
Yes	36.5	38.4
No	21.5	22.8

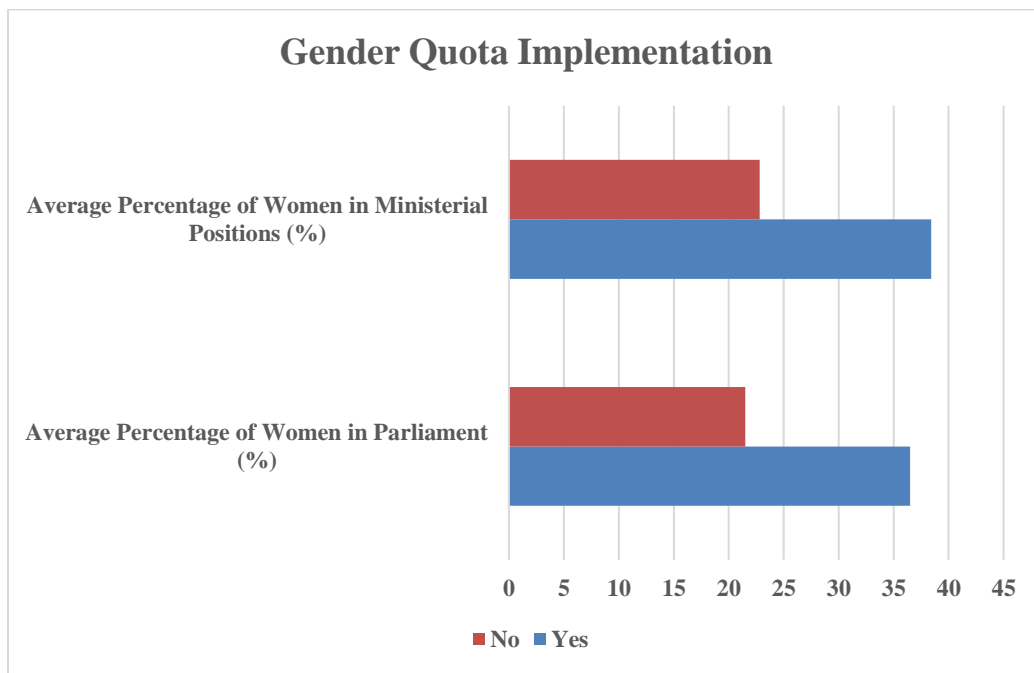


Figure 3: Graphical Representation of Comparative Analysis of Countries with and Without Gender Quotas

The comparison evidently shows that nations employing gender quotas have a greater average percentage of women in parliamentary as well as ministerial seats. The presence of quotas is an important factor in raising the number of women, by 15% greater representation in parliaments and 16% greater representation in minister seats compared to the absence of the policy. It is a witness to how gender quotas effectively bridge the political leadership gender divide. The



promotion of gender equality in politics demands additional factors such as financial support for female candidates and leadership development initiatives and cultural changes.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight persistent gender disparities in political leadership, despite remarkable progress in the majority of fields. Research confirms gender quota implementation as a necessary tool to increase females' participation in political leadership positions. Rwanda and Sweden demonstrate higher participation rates of female politicians because they utilize gender quotas while Japan along with the United States show lower levels of female political representation due to their absence of such quotas. The data confirms that policy interventions successfully tackle gender exclusion and inequality issues. Women encounter multiple barriers of cultural origins alongside institutional barriers as well as structural obstacles when attempting to reach political leadership positions.

The study indicates female heads of state do exist in particular countries yet it does not necessarily indicate sustained gender balance in government. The previous appointment of female heads of state in India and Brazil failed to establish lasting improvements in ministerial positions for women. Long-term gender equality in politics requires symbolic representation alongside policy reforms and leadership development support and institutional backing.

The research shows nations which have higher female membership in parliamentary bodies tend to have more women serving as cabinet ministers. The positive connection between women holding parliamentary seats and appointments to executive positions becomes more apparent. Traditional patriarchal cultures face persistent institutional barriers such as gender biases along with party structures and budget constraints which prevent women from rising in politics.

Real gender equality in political leadership depends on united social efforts to overcome current achievements. Government entities must exceed quota enforcement through the creation of inclusive political cultures alongside efforts to encourage equal leadership access and confrontation of the societal values that prevent women from entering politics. The research



findings enhance our understanding of gender balance in leadership positions while demonstrating the necessity to develop continuous policies for equitable worldwide political representation.

6.CONCLUSION

Research investigates the historic underrepresentation of women in politics along with studying gender-targeted policies that promote inclusive government. The analysis shows that gender quotas produce substantial results in boosting the parliamentary presence of women along with their ministerial positions. The political involvement of women has grown stronger in Rwanda and Sweden since adopting gender-based policies while Japan and the United States have shown lower female political participation due to the absence of such policies. Gender quotas alone do not deliver sustainable gender equality because cultural and institutional and structural elements continue to obstruct women from reaching leadership positions.

The research results show that female leaders in select nations do not guarantee enduring gender equality in leadership positions. India and Brazil, despite earlier encounters with female leaders, still lack substantial women's presence among the ministers. Long-lasting gender equality requires comprehensive policy transformations as well as development initiatives for leaders and institutional support frameworks following symbolic representation.

The study reveals that higher numbers of female legislators lead to more appointments of women as ministers. This study validates ongoing efforts to eliminate gender discrimination along with party machinery and economic limitations that block women from advancing politically.

Lastly, despite the notable achievements made, political leadership gender equality can only be attained through an integrated approach. Governments must complement gender quotas with general institutional changes, leadership training, and culture change to help foster an open political space. The study contributes to the existing body of work on gender equality in politics and offers valuable advice for future policymaking towards obtaining balanced representation in leadership roles around the world.



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