

GENDER, POLITICS, GOVERNANCE AND POLICY: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE FROM ASIA, AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA

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Abstract

Gender rhetoric in power struggles is a recurring decimal in the configuration of political supremacy, governance and policy design worldwide. Though the myth of equality has been disseminated through the front burner in international forums and constitutional amendments, considerable gender parity in political engagement and governance is yet to be achieved. This study, therefore, offers a comparative, interdisciplinary study of gender, politics, governance, and policy architecture in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Anchoring on feminist conventionalism, integrative, and postcolonial discourse, the study scrutinises illustrative and significant representation, recognised reforms such as quotas, gender-friendly budgeting and policy spheres covering health, education, and violence inhibition. Drawing from selected countries in Africa (Rwanda, Nigeria, and South Africa); Asia (India, Japan, and the Philippine); and Latin America (Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina), the study opines that though the role of institutional bureaucratization cannot be ignored, political dynamics, administrative ability, socio-political organisation, and fiscal structures define policy efficacy. The study summates that gender-inclusive governance demands not only representation but intentional sharing of political influence and fiscal equity, as is advocated by Honourable Kafilat Ogbara of Nigeria.

Key Words: Gender, Politics, Policy, Governance, Comparative.

1. Introduction

Gender roles intertwining with politics are key to democratic authenticity and good governance. Political conventions evolved within sexist institutions that have silently ignored women intentionally cum traditionally from lending their voices in decision-making spaces. Despite the tremendous impact of female franchise activities in the 1800s and 1900s, which signalled a spiralling change, political institutions persist in reproducing gender-based power imbalances (Phillips, 1998).

The worldwide dissemination of parity ideals —advanced through international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)—has significantly influenced constitutional reforms and legislative developments in many countries. Nevertheless, substantial challenges remain, including persistent gaps in political representation, policy biases, and entrenched structural inequalities. Data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023) indicate that women hold only about one-quarter of parliamentary seats worldwide, with notable variation across regions. Though, Nigeria, in Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration, is trying to create Special Seats for Women in the Parliament in next dispensation, which is yet to be seen.

This study is guided by four key research questions:

In what ways do state agencies structure gendered access to political power?

To what extent do gender quotas and parity laws produce substantive political representation?

How do regional political trajectories shape gender policy outcomes?

What implications do these findings hold for transformative governance?

The study merges theoretical frameworks with empirical results drawn from regional case studies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender and Political Quota: Universal Viewpoints

The rapport linking gender and political quota has fascinated substantial intellectual consideration for over the years. Initial female movements opined that political

establishments were traditionally manipulated around sexist ideologies, thus tactically excluding women from power configuration. Anne Phillips (1998), argues that, democratic legality needs women's contribution in partisan policy-making to fairly protect the interests of all and sundry in society. Her stance brought about swelling intellectual attention to vivid quotas issues that anchored on the statistical presence of women in political institutions.

Study on female political involvement shows that improved quotas for women oftentimes are the consequences of better governance aftermaths. Differentiating between substantive representation and descriptive representation, Hanna Pitkin suggests that: whereas descriptive representation has to do with statistical quotas of females occupying political positions, substantive representation hinges on whether women politicians' backup policies that improve female desire in politics. Contrarily, erudite scholars argue that statistical quota alone is rather not sufficient in making gender sensitive policies, especially where established barriers challenge female political freedom.

Universal research carried out by the Inter-Parliamentary Union discloses substantial distinctions in female parliamentary quotas across regions. Developing countries often battle with structural challenges like political disturbances, sexual norms, economic setbacks, inter/intra party prejudices and so on. On the other hand, Nordic nations persistently register greater numbers of women in political involvement. These differences prove that gender balance in politics is anchored not solely in political reforms, but in institutional overhaul and socio-economic/socio-cultural changes. (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023; Krook, 2009; Paxton, Hughes, & Painter, 2010).

2.2 Feminist Institutionalism and Gendered Power Constructions

Views of traditional women's rights activists have become a leading framework for analysing women's political representation. Erudite intellectuals like Louise Chappell, Fiona Mackay and Meryl Kenny (2010) opine that political institutions are naturally gendered. Official structures may seem gender friendly, but the hidden script often tends to support masculine power players, thus replicating dominant political orders.

Challenges to female political inclusion is entrenched within legal structures, political parties, electioneering procedures and the process of selecting party leaders as argued by Feminist theorists. The strategies and networks operated by Political parties are male dominated, hence, hindering women's chances at candidature. More so, the prevailing culture within

many political institutions often reward leadership styles structured by competitiveness, assertiveness, and dominance—traits traditionally associated with masculinity—thus constraining women's privileges for meaningful political involvement and progression.

This could be the reason why legal reforms and legislation have not yielded much result in respect of equality rights. Hence, I agree with the Inter-Parliamentary Union's stance that formal reforms and policy decisions must go hand in hand with positive changes in informal traditions, if they are to achieve significant successes.

2.3 Gender Quotas and Affirmative Action Policies

One of the most extensively debated issues in gender and politics scholarship concerns the effectiveness of gender quotas. Gender quotas are policy mechanisms designed to increase women's political representation by reserving seats, candidate positions, or electoral opportunities for women.

According to Mona Lena Krook (2009), quota systems have significantly increased women's political representation in many countries. Krook identifies three major quota models: reserved seats, legislative candidate quotas, and voluntary party quotas. Research suggests that quota systems can rapidly increase female representation when accompanied by effective implementation mechanisms.

The Rwandan experience is frequently cited as a successful example. Studies by Gretchen Bauer and Jennie Burnet (2013) indicate that constitutional quotas contributed significantly to Rwanda's emergence as the country with the highest proportion of women parliamentarians globally. Similarly, quota reforms in Latin America have transformed women's political representation, particularly in Mexico and Argentina.

However, critics argue that quotas may produce symbolic representation rather than substantive empowerment. In some contexts, women elected through quota systems remain dependent on male political patrons and may possess limited influence over policymaking. Consequently, contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasises the need to assess not merely the numerical outcomes of quotas but also their impact on policy agendas and governance processes.

2.4 Intersectionality and Multiple Dimensions of Exclusion

The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), has become central to gender and governance studies. Intersectionality argues that gender inequality cannot be understood in isolation because women's experiences are shaped simultaneously by race, class, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, and other social identities.

Crenshaw's framework challenges approach that treat women as a homogeneous group. Instead, it demonstrates that some women experience multiple forms of discrimination that reinforce one another. For example, poor rural women may face greater barriers to political participation than urban middle-class women, even within the same country.

Intersectional analysis is particularly relevant in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where colonial histories, ethnic diversity, and socio-economic inequalities continue to shape political opportunities. Scholars argue that gender-sensitive policies must address these overlapping structures of disadvantage if they are to promote genuine inclusion. Consequently, intersectionality has become an important analytical tool for evaluating governance reforms and public policies.

2.5 Postcolonial Feminism and Gendered Governance

Postcolonial feminist scholars have criticised Western approaches to gender and politics for overlooking historical and cultural specificities in the Global South. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988), many mainstream feminist analyses portray women in developing countries as passive victims while ignoring local forms of resistance and agency.

Postcolonial theorists contend that colonial administrations often institutionalised patriarchal governance structures that continue to influence contemporary politics. In many African and Asian societies, colonial authorities strengthened male-dominated traditional institutions while marginalising women's indigenous political roles. These historical legacies continue to affect women's access to political power.

Studies of postcolonial governance demonstrate that contemporary gender inequalities cannot be separated from broader histories of colonialism, economic dependency, and state formation. Consequently, postcolonial feminism advocates context-specific approaches to gender reform rather than universal policy prescriptions.

2.6 Gender, Governance, and Public Policy Outcomes

An expanding body of literature investigates whether women's political participation influences governance outcomes. Research generally suggests that female political leaders are more likely to prioritise social welfare, education, healthcare, child protection, and gender-based violence prevention.

The influential study by Raghavendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo (2004) found that women leaders in India's local governments invested more resources in public services directly relevant to community welfare. Similar findings have emerged from studies conducted in Latin America and Africa, where increased female participation has been associated with stronger commitments to gender-responsive budgeting and social protection policies.

Nevertheless, scholars caution against essentialist assumptions that women inherently govern differently from men. Policy outcomes depend significantly on institutional environments, political incentives, party structures, and available resources. Thus, governance effectiveness results from the interaction between representation and broader political contexts.

2.7 Regional Scholarship: Africa, Asia, and Latin America

Regional studies reveal important variations in gender governance trajectories. African scholarship highlights the paradox of progressive constitutional reforms alongside persistent socio-cultural barriers. Researchers such as Patricia Okeke-Ihejirika (2014) argue that despite affirmative action commitments, countries like Nigeria continue to experience low female representation due to political violence, economic barriers, and patriarchal party systems.

In Asia, scholars focus on the interaction between traditional cultural norms and democratic reforms. Studies of India demonstrate the transformative potential of local government reservations for women, whereas research on Japan highlights the persistence of institutional and cultural obstacles despite legal reforms.

Latin American literature frequently emphasises the role of feminist social movements in advancing policy change. Countries such as Mexico and Argentina have adopted some of the world's most progressive gender parity laws due largely to sustained civil society activism. Nevertheless, implementation gaps remain evident in countries where political commitment is weaker.

2.8 Gap in Existing Literature

Although existing studies provide valuable insights into gender representation, governance, and policy reforms, much of the literature remains regionally fragmented. African, Asian, and Latin American experiences are often examined separately, limiting opportunities for comparative understanding. In addition, many studies often focus predominantly on descriptive representation while paying less attention to how governance structures and policy mechanisms shape substantive outcomes.

This study addresses these gaps by undertaking a comparative analysis of gender, politics, governance, and policy across selected countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Through this comparative lens, the study seeks to identify both shared patterns and region-specific dynamics that influence the effectiveness of gender-inclusive governance.

3. Theoretical Frameworks

3.1 Defining Gender and Politics

Sexual role denotes the society's structured tasks, manners, and expectations that society assigns to both genders (Butler, 1990). While politics has to do with actions in relation to governance and policy-making prowess in public institutions (Heywood, 2013). Viewing sexual roles in politics, thus, requires the appreciation of power quotas between both sexes during the entire electioneering process.

3.2 Governance and Policy

Governance is synonymous with power and authority to manage the systems, processes and institutions of a people for a designated period as the constitution of the people stipulates. This is achieved through the articulation of interest, affiliated with partisan politics, legal backing and ammonisation (UNDP, 1997). In the same vein, policies are administrative blueprints espoused by governments for the smooth running of the governance process. Hence, gender-friendly governance incorporates principles of equality and fairness in commensurate terms.

3.3 Feminist Institutional Framework

The feminist institutional stance upholds that political institutions are characteristically gendered and often gravitate to reproducing existing power hierarchies (Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010). In this context, both formal institutional arrangements—such as electoral systems—and informal practices, including patronage networks and entrenched political

norms, play an important role in structuring the extent to which women are able to access and participate in political power.

3.4 Interdependent Barriers

Crenshaw (1991) and Krooks (2009) corroborate the notion that intersectionality emphasises that systems of oppression are interconnected. Gender inequality is often interdependent with other social hierarchies such as race, class, ethnicity, religion, and the legacies of colonialism. As a result, policies that treat women as a single, uniform group may inadvertently reproduce or deepen existing inequalities rather than address them.

3.5 Postcolonial Gender Critique

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988) and other postcolonial feminist intellectuals argue that colonial rule profoundly transformed indigenous gender relations, frequently institutionalising sexist legal structures. In many parts of Africa and Asia, systems of colonial indirect rule reinforced the authority of male-dominated customary institutions, thereby consolidating sexist power within local governance structures.

3.6 Visible inclusion versus effective advocacy

Hanna Pitkin (1967) differentiates between descriptive representation, which refers to the numerical presence of a group, and substantive representation, which involves advocating for the group's interests. Current debates focus on whether simply increasing women's representation in political bodies leads to meaningful changes in policy priorities.

4. Women and political Authority in Africa

Gender fundamentally influences the distribution of power, access to resources, and authority across both private and public domains. While political institutions have historically been dominated by men, recent decades have witnessed notable advances toward greater gender equality in governance. Nevertheless, persistent variations continue to affect representation, decision-making authority, and policy agendas. This study examines the interplay between gender and politics, the ways in which governance structures mediate this relationship, and the role of policies in promoting more equitable results.

4.1 Nigeria: Policy Initiatives Lacking Structural Transformation

In 2006, Nigeria embraced a National Gender Policy endorsing a 35% affirmative-action allocation for women. Regardless of this official pledge, women continue to occupy less than 10% of seats in national legislatures (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). This is, nevertheless, occasioned by structural challenges which include, but are not limited to:

Internal party patronage mechanisms

Exorbitant cost of the campaign

Exorbitant cost of nomination forms

Violence during the electoral process

Traditional religious ideologies

Ethnicity and regional politics

Some schools of thought, however, suggest that fragile institutional implementation weakens policy motivations (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2014). Nigeria exemplifies how policy declarations alone are insufficient without genuine political will. Even as, the Bill for Special Seats for Women, sponsored by Chairperson, House Committee on Women Affairs and Social Development, Honourable Kafilat Ogbara, who represents the Kosofe Federal Constituency of Lagos in the 9th Assemble, is yet to be actualised (The Guardian, 13th April, 2026).

4.2 South Africa: Institutional Inclusion via Parties

The South African model combines legal equality by constitutional provision with voluntary party allocations, exemplified by the African National Congress.

Women represent nearly 45% of members in the South African legislature. The country has been a pioneer in implementing gender-responsive budgeting and robust domestic violence legislation. Yet socio-economic disparities continue to affect Black women most severely.

4.3 Rwanda: Post-Conflict Constitutional Redesign

The Rwandan case highlights one of the most significant advances in gender representation: after the 1994 genocide, the 2003 Constitution instituted a 30% minimum allocation for women in governance structures. Women now hold more than 60% of seats in Rwanda's lower house (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). Bauer and Burnet (2013) contend that the combination of gender quotas and strict party discipline enabled this rapid inclusion. Nevertheless, scholars

question whether Rwanda's centralised governance structure constrains independent feminist policymaking. However, major milestones such as:

Gender Compliance and Monitoring Office

Legal frameworks for combating gender-based violence

Land policies providing property rights to women have been recorded.

Nonetheless, some argue that constrained political pluralism hampers efforts toward more transformative political change.

5 Women and Political Authority in Asia

451ThePhilippines: Leadership, Patronage, and Political Power

The Philippines has elected two female presidents, Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Yet, despite these symbolic milestones, entrenched dynastic politics and patronage systems continue to limit systemic change. Hence, there is a minimal representation of women in politics in the Philippines.

5.2 India: Community-Based Feminist Political Mobilisation

India's gender policy is quite significant. India introduced a 33% reservation for women in local governance via constitutional amendments between 1992 and 1993. As a result, Chattopadhyay & Duflo (2004) opined that this policy has led to the election of over one million women leaders across different political echelons. Empirical research thus indicates better provision of public goods when women lead. However, in certain areas, "proxy representation"—where male relatives stand in for women—continues to be a challenge.

5.3 Japan: Cultural Barriers and Gradual Policy Change

Japan shows very low levels of female representation in parliament. Although the 2018 gender equality law promotes balanced candidacies, it lacks effective enforcement. Dalton (2017) argues that this low representation is linked to corporate career pathways and gendered expectations surrounding care giving.

6. Gender and Governance in Latin America

6.1 Mexico: Constitutional Gender Equality

In 2019, Mexico introduced constitutional gender equality, authorising uniform representation of both sexes through all levels of governance. Therefore, women presently occupy around half of the seats in the legislature (IPU, 2023). This is achieved through focused and intentional civil society and grassroots feminist mobilisation underpinned by the enforcement of these reforms.

6.2 Brazil: Quotas Without Enforcement

Brazil stipulates that at least 30% of electoral candidates be women; however, weak enforcement often results in only symbolic or nominal conformity (Araújo & Alves, 2007).

6.3 Argentina: From Allocations to Feminist Policy Amendment

In 1991, Argentina spearheaded gender allocation laws and later espoused equality amendments. Women's agitations like *Ni Una Menos* swayed bills on gender violence and sexual fairness.

7. Comparative Analysis

From the overview, it could be deduced that several models emerge across regions. Independence and dictatorial political structures impact the level of practical autonomy diversely. In Africa, for instance, the powerful manipulate the system like a do-or-die affair in order to be there, given that intersectionality is still not adequately incorporated into most policy frameworks. In this way, equity and fairness in the allocation of political seats can be effective when policy declarations are genuinely backed up by political will. Feminists' funding is another great hurdle policy-makers must deal with, coupled with internal party politics, violence during the entire electioneering process, traditional religious ideologies, and ethnic cum regional politics. For example, countries such as Nigeria, the Philippines, Japan and Brazil grapple with some of the aforementioned issues.

On the contrary, we see gender equity and fairness flourishing in countries such as India, Rwanda, Mexico, Argentina and South Africa, though not without issues. Like India's "proxy representation"—where male relatives stand in for women—continues to be a challenge.

From our case studies, it is obvious that civil society mobilisation and economic empowerment correlate with political participation and strengthen policy sustainability, as seen in Mexico and Argentina.

8. Recommendations

For cogent gender parity in politics, governance and policy as it is in Rwanda:

1. Statutory equality and equitable amendments, integrating enforceable penalties, must be put in place
2. Strong policies on financing reforms for funding female aspirants
3. Feminist-inclusive budgeting
4. Institutional enforcement of female commissions
5. Radical political education to break down sexist barriers/norms to avoid tokenism
6. Effective gender policies must address multiple, overlapping disadvantages.
7. Bills for Special Seats in Parliament, as is advocated in Nigeria, be given speedy passage

9. Conclusion

Given that gender, politics, governance, and policy are profoundly intertwined, female inclusion in politics goes beyond women's rights agitations, struggles and movements; it should rather be tackled through institutional evolution and continuous positive reforms.

It is agreed to some extent that a significant milestone has been achieved, yet, there is still a huge gap. Africa exhibits constitutional reforms; Asia portrays grassroots innovations; Latin America epitomises institutionalised equality. Nevertheless, symbolic representation is insufficient to guarantee substantive justice. Transformative gender governance necessitates systemic change, specifically through the redistribution of resources and power. Acknowledging overlapping social identities to address unique forms of discrimination, and the need for collective action and ongoing pressure from civil mobilisation and the speedy recognition and bills of intentional inclusion.

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