

Women, Politics, and Economic Development

Nujhat Atia^{1,2*}

¹ Officer, Employment and Activation, Skills Development Programme, BRAC, Bangladesh

² MA in International History, Arts and Humanities School, Khulna University, Khulna, Bangladesh

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

The nexus between female political engagement and economic advancement constitutes a pivotal yet inadequately assessed matter within global governance frameworks. While women comprise over 50% of the worldwide population, they hold under 25% of the parliamentary roles internationally. This pronounced underrepresentation is a barrier to formulating inclusive policies that are indispensable for sustainable economic development. The meaningful involvement of women in political decision-making processes is essential, as female leaders frequently emphasize investments in healthcare, education, and the expansion of the labor market, domains that possess both immediate and enduring implications for economic progression. Empirical evidence from nations such as Rwanda, alongside scholarly investigations from Bangladesh, illustrates that women's leadership plays a significant role in promoting economic advancement by advocating for policies that enhance social welfare and gender equality. Ultimately, including women in political realms introduces a spectrum of perspectives, thereby nurturing innovation and social development crucial for ongoing economic prosperity.

Keywords: Women, Political Representation, Economic Development, Gender Equality, Governance, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

The inadequate representation of women within political arenas represents a considerable barrier to achieving inclusive and sustainable economic progress on a global scale. As previously indicated, women account for nearly fifty percent of the global population yet hold fewer than twenty-five percent of parliamentary positions worldwide (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). This significant deficiency in female political presence hinders the development of effective policies, thus limiting the creation of solutions that truly cater to the diverse needs of society. The exclusion of women from leadership positions poses a major obstacle, undermining economic stability and sustainability while exacerbating inequality. Empirical evidence, such as that from the World Bank Group (2018), illustrates that governance marked by gender equality enhances policy responsiveness and promotes more equitable economic results.

The establishment of resilient and equitable growth frameworks necessitates an increase in female engagement within political domains. The participation of women in political decision-making processes contributes a variety of perspectives that are crucial for developing comprehensive policy structures that inclusively reflect the interests of the entire populace. Advancing gender equality in the political landscape is essential for ensuring that critical policies concerning healthcare, education, social welfare, and labor markets, the foundational sectors for sustained economic success receive appropriate attention and resources. Furthermore, empirical studies indicate that female political leaders often improve governance quality by emphasizing transparency and initiatives aimed at reducing corruption, thus fostering an environment favorable to economic expansion (Wekwete, 2014). In Bangladesh, the heightened involvement of women in decision-making capacities has already resulted in noteworthy advancements in poverty reduction strategies and gender-responsive policies, consequently enhancing educational and employment opportunities for women. This article posits that economic progress is intricately connected to the proactive political engagement of women. It examines how female political leadership shapes the creation of inclusive economic policies, addresses the persistent obstacles that impede their complete political participation, and assesses the positive economic outcomes linked to increased female political representation. While acknowledging alternative perspectives that argue female political activism alone cannot resolve economic challenges, this article emphasizes that women's leadership is a vital component of the structural reforms necessary for achieving economic equality and prosperity. The analysis is supported by extensive research conducted in Bangladesh as well as international case studies, illustrating how the enhancement of women's political empowerment acts as a catalyst for sustainable economic development.

2. Political Representation and Economic Advancement: The Argument for Female Leadership

The dynamic relationship between the portrayal of women in political offices and the subsequent economic effects represents a crucial domain of examination within modern academic discourse. A growing body of empirical research indicates that nations with a greater percentage of female legislators tend to demonstrate more advantageous economic conditions. Investigations reveal that female leadership is instrumental in facilitating two essential results: the enhancement of gender equality and the promotion of sustainable economic systems characterized by inclusive growth (Mechkova et al., 2024). A significant connection has been established between increased

female representation in political institutions and improved economic outcomes at the national scale (Hornset & de Soysa, 2022). Hornet and de Soysa (2022) notably found that countries with heightened female political engagement display superior economic metrics.

Empirical studies consistently indicate that women in leadership positions tend to favor policies that promote public welfare, including investments in healthcare and education, which are critical factors for sustainable economic growth (Adams, 2015). Inglehart and Norris (2003) assert that the rise of female political leadership is positively associated with improvements in human development metrics, such as higher educational attainment, increased income levels, and longer life expectancy – all of which significantly enhance economic performance.

Rwanda exemplifies the advantageous effects of female leadership, boasting the highest percentage of women in parliamentary positions worldwide, exceeding 60% (Bauer & Burnet, 2013). In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda has experienced extraordinary economic progress, a trajectory significantly influenced by the proactive involvement of women in political domains (Jones, 2002). Rwandan legislators have effectively utilized their electoral power to create policies that greatly improve social welfare, expand educational access, and strengthen healthcare infrastructures. Burnet (2008) asserts that these initiatives have directly contributed to economic development by reducing poverty and fostering human advancement.

A fundamental area of policy emphasis for women in political roles is the enhancement of workforce empowerment. Research conducted by Milazzo and Goldstein (2019) indicates that female legislators are actively engaged in developing policy initiatives designed to aid women in overcoming obstacles to economic engagement. They advocate for legislation concerning fair compensation, improved childcare facilities, and educational equity, all of which promote women's involvement and success in the labor market. By endeavoring to achieve gender equity in the professional sphere, female leaders unlock significant workforce potential, thus contributing to economic growth.

The political landscape in Bangladesh following the revolution of July 2024 has prompted notable transformations in the representation of women within political arenas and their roles in economic development. The extensive mobilization for democratic reforms during this pivotal period has triggered initiatives aimed at increasing women's political participation. As highlighted by Chowdhury (2025), the proportion of women in parliament surged to around 25% in 2025, reflecting a significant increase from 20% in 2023. Previous policies under the post-revolutionary frameworks promoted gender integration, introduced microfinance programs, and improved access to education and healthcare for women. These initiatives have resulted in heightened literacy rates among women and an increase in their involvement in the economic domain. However, despite these advancements, women continue to encounter barriers to their full political engagement, such as cultural resistance, electoral violence, and discriminatory practices (Haug et al., 2020; Krook, 2017). Nonetheless, this transformation has facilitated new avenues for championing gender equality within the political domain, which is anticipated to further catalyze economic development throughout the nation.

3. Gender Parity in Governance: An Essential Component for Economic Advancement

Distinct and more effective economic strategies emerge from political leadership that exemplifies gender parity, thereby promoting more comprehensive frameworks in healthcare, education, and the employment sector. Equitable representation of women in political decision-making yields policies that more accurately reflect the needs of the entire populace, particularly those of demographics that are frequently overlooked. This inclusive model is essential for sustainable economic progress, as it ensures a broader distribution of developmental benefits across all segments of society (World Bank Group, 2018).

The economic progress of a nation is significantly more evident when women achieve enhanced parity in political leadership positions. Empirical studies conducted by Mechkova et al. (2024) demonstrate that nations with a greater presence of female legislators attain improved human development metrics, which are fundamentally associated with economic progress. The participation of women in political arenas has a direct influence on policy choices pertaining to healthcare, education, and social welfare—areas that yield both immediate and long-term benefits for economic prosperity. Gender-inclusive policies promote economic sustainability by enabling entire populations to utilize their comprehensive talents, rather than limiting contributions to a restricted subset of the community (World Bank Group, 2018).

Healthcare systems influenced by female leadership often prioritize the delivery of services related to maternal and child health, initiatives that contribute positively to the long-term productivity of the national workforce. Female political leaders have been pivotal in implementing healthcare policies that benefit rural populations and economically disadvantaged groups (Kabeer, 2018). Furthermore, women in governance advocate for legislative actions that enhance access to high-quality education for girls and women, thereby cultivating a more educated and skilled workforce.

The presence of gender parity in political leadership is associated with improved fairness in labor practices, which encompasses the advancement of equitable compensation structures and the enhancement of working conditions. Research by Hornset and de Soysa (2022) indicates that the participation of women in political decision-making serves as a catalyst for policy reforms that champion the fair treatment of workers, thereby promoting more efficient and equitable labor markets and increasing economic productivity. Achieving sustainable economic development requires the full political engagement of women, thus reinforcing the tenets of equality and justice and enabling the realization of economic potential.

4. Comprehending the Barriers to Women's Comprehensive Involvement in Political Leadership

Women across the globe, including those in Bangladesh, face significant barriers to their comprehensive engagement in political affairs, which arise from entrenched cultural biases, inadequate financial support, and hostile political climates. Societal perceptions frequently categorize women primarily as caregivers rather than leaders, which diminishes their capacity and societal endorsement to engage proactively in political activities (Haug et al., 2020). Conventional

societal norms in Bangladesh, similar to those in a large portion of South Asia, impose considerable pressure on women who seek to attain positions of political leadership (Haug et al., 2020).

The limitations imposed by economic resources significantly hinder political advancement. Successful political campaigns require substantial financial investments, which a considerable number of women are unable to secure due to inadequate access to financial support and professional networking opportunities. As evidenced by research conducted by the International Labour Organization, women in Bangladesh face considerable political challenges stemming from their restricted access to economic resources (Silva, 2022).

Political harassment and violent acts represent formidable deterrents for women seeking involvement in the political domain. The interrelation of political harassment and physical aggression forms a primary challenge faced by female politicians, especially in regions like Bangladesh, which frequently experience such occurrences (Krook, 2017). The hostile environment fostered by political violence significantly discourages a larger number of women from both entering and maintaining their presence within the political sphere (Krook, 2017).

Globally, women account for a mere 25.5% of parliamentary seats (Kumar, 2017), notwithstanding the efforts of countries like Rwanda and Sweden, which have instituted gender quotas to enhance female representation (Bauer & Burnet, 2013; Kumar, 2017). Despite the increase in numerical representation of women in Bangladesh due to the allocation of reserved parliamentary seats, considerable challenges persist that hinder women's full and equitable involvement in conventional parliamentary roles (Chowdhury, 2025). To adequately tackle these intricate barriers, a comprehensive strategy is imperative: the introduction of gender quotas that extend beyond reserved seats, the allocation of targeted financial support and capacity-building programs for female candidates, the creation and enforcement of legislation aimed at preventing violence and harassment in the political context, and the advancement of broader cultural reforms aimed at dismantling discriminatory practices (Krook, 2017; Haug et al., 2020). While the quota system in Bangladesh has proven effective in improving the political visibility of women, their overall participation and influence across the entirety of political spheres remain limited. Expanding these initiatives will cultivate a truly inclusive environment for all genders and encourage sustained gender equality.

5. Case Studies

Numerous nations have witnessed beneficial economic development correlated with the rise of female political leadership, with Rwanda exemplifying a particularly remarkable instance. Rwanda experienced exceptional economic growth and post-genocide recovery, largely due to its significant representation of women in political roles. Following the devastating genocide of 1994, Rwanda faced considerable economic and social hurdles. Recognizing the necessity for a transformative societal shift, the country enshrined gender equality as a core tenet of its political leadership strategies. Rwanda enacted pioneering gender quota legislation stipulating that public institutions across all levels must ensure a minimum of 30% female representation in leadership positions. In 2020, Rwanda garnered international acclaim for achieving the highest proportion of

female legislators in its parliament, with women accounting for over 60% of the Chamber of Deputies (Haug et al., 2020).

The deliberate integration of women's perspectives has resulted in profound shifts in policy and noteworthy economic progress. The substantial involvement of women in political domains has had a direct influence on fiscal and developmental policy structures. In Rwanda, the governance model, significantly shaped by women's contributions, advocates for policies that expand educational opportunities, enhance health outcomes, and promote gender equality. These initiatives have played a crucial role in the nation's impressive economic achievements. Women in leadership roles have been pivotal in devising strategies aimed at poverty alleviation, improving healthcare services, and increasing agricultural productivity, which is a vital economic sector. For instance, female legislators in the Rwandan parliament have actively sought to enact policies that enhance access to arable land and financial resources for women, thereby empowering their roles within this crucial domain.

Rwanda's economic progress after the conclusion of the genocide has been noteworthy. Between 2001 and 2015, the country recorded an average GDP growth rate of 8% while concurrently making substantial strides in reducing poverty levels. The active participation of women in leadership positions has been crucial in promoting these positive changes, thanks to their dedication to empowerment and inclusive development policies. Furthermore, various social indicators, such as maternal health and gender equality in education within Rwanda, have shown marked improvement. The engagement of women in the policymaking process directly enhances these results and is essential for cultivating sustainable, long-term economic development (Reyntjens, 2015; Lopez & Bannon, 2004; Ansoms, 2005).

An additional example of impactful female leadership can be discerned in New Zealand under the guidance of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. Her governance directed New Zealand toward economic progress through prudent investments in technology, education, and initiatives focused on renewable energy. Moreover, she established extensive social welfare programs and systems to ensure fair economic opportunities. Her globally recognized response to the pandemic, which emphasized public health and strategies for economic recovery, enabled the nation to navigate and exhibit resilience in the face of the crisis. These occurrences collectively validate the effectiveness of women in political leadership roles to foster significant and positive economic outcomes. These countries have achieved sustainable development and economic advancement through the implementation of gender-inclusive policies and a focus on human development, demonstrating a clear correlation between female leadership and economic success.

6. Counter-arguments

A widely acknowledged criticism asserts that the simple participation of women in electoral processes does not intrinsically lead to economic progress, considering the multitude of significant variables that influence economic growth. Opponents argue that fundamental developmental obstacles, such as insufficient infrastructure, widespread corruption, and restricted access to healthcare and education, require concurrent intervention for enduring economic progress, regardless of the identities of those in power.

While it is acknowledged that economic development represents a complex phenomenon influenced by a myriad of factors, this article asserts that women's leadership often introduces unique methodologies for addressing issues that can effectively tackle these critical challenges. Female leaders, especially in contexts like Bangladesh, tend to emphasize the creation of social welfare systems, the implementation of gender equality programs, and the formulation of inclusive growth pathways due to their recognition of these components as vital for enduring economic progress. For instance, women in leadership roles in Bangladesh have advocated for and supported policy changes that improve healthcare services, broaden educational opportunities, and increase resource distribution for underprivileged groups. These policies provide long-lasting advantages to the economy by enhancing the ability of each individual to contribute productively to society. Furthermore, female leadership has played a crucial role in fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among female peers, establishing new enterprises, and promoting economic development from the grassroots level.

The amplified presence of women in specified political positions in Bangladesh following 2024 highlights the strategic significance of female leadership within the governance paradigm of the nation (Chowdhury, 2025). While systemic reforms are essential for comprehensive economic transformation, the growing participation of women in decision-making roles in Bangladesh is driving a shift towards more equitable economic development. Their leadership extends beyond mere representation, acting as a vital impetus for sustainable financial advancement by ensuring that developmental policies are just and address the needs of the entire population.

7. Conclusion

The increased political participation of women serves as a fundamental catalyst for sustainable economic progress. Despite facing persistent societal, economic, and political challenges, women's leadership offers critical insights necessary for the development of effective and inclusive policies. Exemplary instances, such as that of Rwanda, illustrate that female leaders prioritize essential domains such as healthcare, education, and social welfare, which are vital for enduring economic advancement. Their active involvement enhances governance transparency and contributes to the reduction of corruption, thereby fostering a stable environment that is conducive to economic growth. Recent advancements in Bangladesh concerning inclusive gender policies and the enhancement of women's political representation following 2024 create a strong foundation for equitable economic development. Realizing the economic benefits associated with women's leadership necessitates comprehensive reforms, including the reinforcement of gender quotas, the provision of financial and institutional support, and the enactment of laws against political violence. In summary, empowering women in political spheres is not only a significant ethical imperative but also a crucial strategy for promoting national wealth and ensuring a fair and prosperous future for all.

AI Declaration: This document exclusively uses artificial intelligence to enhance the language, elevating coherence, fluidity, and understanding while maintaining the essential essence of the ideas expressed.

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