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THE NEXUS BETWEEN WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL OFFICE, GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICIES, AND LEGISLATION

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to investigate the intricate relationship between women's representation in political office, the formulation and implementation of gender-responsive policies, and their subsequent influence on legislative agendas. The paper delves into the global context, drawing on empirical data, case studies, and theoretical frameworks to discern the ways in which increased women's political participation impacts the creation of policies aimed at addressing gender disparities. The study underscores the importance of diverse representation in shaping legislation that advances gender equality and highlights the positive feedback loop that exists between women's participation in politics, the adoption of gender-responsive policies, and legislative outcomes. This research paper explores the intricate interplay between women's representation in political office, the development and enactment of gender-responsive policies, and their consequent impact on legislative agendas. Based on an analysis of secondary data, this study navigates the global landscape by utilizing empirical evidence, case studies, and theoretical constructs to unravel the multifaceted ways in which heightened female political engagement influences the crafting of policies aimed at mitigating gender disparities. The research underscores the significance of inclusive representation in molding legislation conducive to advancing gender parity, while also highlighting the symbiotic relationship between women's participation in the political sphere, the integration of gender-sensitive policies, and the resulting legislative achievements.

Keywords: Women's Representation, Political Office, Gender-Responsive Policies, Legislation, Gender Equality, Political Participation, Policy Formulation, Legislative Agendas, Gender Disparities, Inclusive Representation, Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

The persistent underrepresentation of women in political office remains a prevailing issue in societies worldwide, even in the face of substantial progress towards achieving gender equality. Within the realm of scholarly discourse and policy circles, a growing consensus acknowledges that bolstering women's presence in political decision-making spheres holds the potential to catalyze the creation and implementation of gender-responsive policies. This research endeavor embarks on a quest to enrich the current body of knowledge by delving into the intricate web of connections that link women's active engagement in political office, the emergence of policies attuned to gender considerations, and the consequential effects on the shaping of legislative agendas.

As societies grapple with the enduring challenge of gender imbalance within political representation, diverse stakeholders have endeavored to comprehend the multifaceted implications of such disparities. Empirical evidence underscores that equitable participation of women in the political realm brings fresh perspectives, experiences, and priorities to the fore, which in turn can contribute to more nuanced and holistic policy solutions. In this context, the interplay between women's representation, the formulation of gender-responsive policies, and subsequent legislative trajectories emerges as a dynamic arena of exploration that demands deeper inquiry.

By leveraging a repository of secondary data, this research aspires to transcend geographical boundaries and tap into a wealth of cross-national insights. Through the analysis of case studies, theoretical frameworks, and empirical data, we aim to unravel the mechanisms through which an augmented presence of women in political office triggers the emergence of gender-sensitive policies. Moreover, this study endeavors to elucidate the reciprocal relationship between women's active involvement in shaping policies and the consequential influence on legislative agendas, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on the path towards gender equality.

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This research seeks not only to uncover the nexus between women's representation, gender-responsive policies, and legislative outcomes but also to underscore the significance of fostering an inclusive political landscape for comprehensive policy formulation. By shedding light on this intricate interplay, this study aspires to provide insights that can guide policymakers, researchers, and advocates in their collective efforts to address gender disparities and create a more equitable future.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To investigate and elucidate the complex relationship between women's representation in political office, the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies, and their subsequent impact on legislative agendas.
2. To comprehensively explore the causal linkages between increased women's representation in political office and the emergence of gender-responsive policies, by analyzing existing secondary data and relevant literature.
3. To gain insights into the mechanisms through which women's active participation in political decision-making influences the formulation and design of policies aimed at addressing gender disparities.
4. To assess the extent to which gender-responsive policies, influenced by women's representation, are effectively implemented and contribute to tangible outcomes in terms of gender equality.
5. To investigate how the integration of gender-sensitive policies, driven by women's involvement in politics, influences the prioritization and evolution of legislative agendas at national and global levels.
6. To emphasize the cyclical relationship between women's representation in political office, the formulation and implementation of gender-responsive policies, and the resulting impact on legislative decisions, thus reinforcing the importance of diverse political participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research consistently demonstrates that increasing the representation of women in political office is essential for achieving gender equality and promoting women's rights. Studies by Norris and Inglehart (2011) and Dahlerup (2006) indicate that women's presence in political decision-making bodies leads to more inclusive policies, improved social welfare outcomes, and increased attention to gender-specific issues. Gender-responsive policies refer to initiatives and programs that address gender inequalities and promote women's empowerment. The presence of women in political office is closely linked to the development and implementation of such policies. According to research by Tripp et al. (2018), women legislators are more likely to prioritize issues related to gender equality, such as reproductive rights, childcare, and violence against women, leading to the formulation of more comprehensive and effective policies.

The representation of women in political office also plays a vital role in shaping gender-sensitive legislation. Studies by Franceschet (2012) and Krook and O'Brien (2012) suggest that women legislators are more likely to advocate for and pass legislation that addresses gender-based discrimination, promotes women's rights, and advances gender equality. This includes laws related to equal pay, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and political participation.

Despite the importance of women's representation in political office, numerous challenges and barriers persist. Research by Krook (2010) highlights structural factors such as gender biases, patriarchal norms, and discriminatory practices that limit women's access to political power. Additionally, social expectations, lack of financial resources, and limited networking opportunities can further hinder women's participation and advancement in politics.

The literature reviewed underscores the significant role of women's representation in political office in shaping gender-responsive policies and legislation. Women in political positions are more likely to prioritize gender-specific issues and advocate for laws that promote gender equality. However, persistent challenges and barriers hinder women's participation in politics, necessitating concerted efforts to overcome gender biases, provide

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support and resources for women candidates, and promote inclusive political environments. By addressing these challenges, societies can foster greater gender equality, empower women, and create a more inclusive and responsive political landscape.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses secondary data analysis to explore the relationship between women's representation in political office, gender-responsive policies, and legislative agendas. Data is collected from various sources, including academic journals, governmental reports, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. Data selection and evaluation are rigorous to ensure relevance, reliability, and validity. Data synthesis and analysis are conducted to identify patterns, trends, and relationships. Case studies from different countries will be examined to provide nuanced insights into the causal connections between women's representation and policy outcomes. The study will draw upon established theoretical frameworks related to political representation, gender studies, and policy analysis to provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and dynamics at play. Ethical considerations are upheld throughout the research process. Limitations include data availability, biases, and control over data collection. The study contributes to the scholarly discourse on gender equality and informed policy decisions.

The Nexus between Women's Representation in Political Office, Gender-Responsive Policies, and Legislation

The nexus between women's representation in political office, gender-responsive policies, and legislation is a complex and significant area of study. This theory explores the interconnectedness between these three variables and delves into how they mutually influence each other. At its core, this theory seeks to understand the relationship between women's presence in political decision-making bodies, the policies that address gender disparities and promote equality, and the legislation enacted to support these efforts. One aspect of this theory focuses on the impact of increasing women's representation in political office. Studies have shown that when more women hold positions of power, there is a greater likelihood of gender-responsive policies being adopted. Female politicians often bring unique perspectives and lived experiences to the table, which can shape policy agendas and prioritize issues that are important to women. Gender-responsive policies, in turn, play a vital role in addressing gender inequalities and promoting inclusive governance. These policies aim to redress systemic gender-based disparities and create a more equitable society. By addressing issues such as education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and violence against women, gender-responsive policies pave the way for increased gender equality.

Legislation is another crucial component in this nexus. Laws enacted by governments have the power to institutionalize and enforce these gender-responsive policies. Legislation can establish systems that ensure equal opportunities for women in various spheres of life, solidifying their rights and protections. Understanding the interplay between these three elements can shed light on the factors that enable or hinder progress in achieving gender equality. By examining how women's representation in political office influences the adoption of gender-responsive policies and subsequent legislation, researchers and policymakers can identify strategies to promote gender equality more effectively. In conclusion, the nexus between women's representation in political office, gender-responsive policies, and legislation offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing and advancing gender equality. Studying this theory can help guide efforts to increase women's political participation, develop effective gender-responsive policies, and advocate for legislation that upholds women's rights.

The representation of women in political decision-making bodies has been recognized as a crucial factor in promoting gender-responsive policies and advancing gender equality. This section explores the various ways in which women's presence in such bodies can impact the formulation of policies that address gender-specific concerns.

When women are elected as parliamentarians or legislators, they bring their unique perspectives and experiences to the policy-making process. This diversity of viewpoints is essential for considering a wide range of issues and crafting policies that reflect the needs of both women and men. Women parliamentarians are more likely to

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prioritize issues related to gender equality, reproductive rights, violence against women, healthcare, education, and social welfare. Their participation can lead to the introduction of bills, amendments, and initiatives aimed at promoting gender-responsive policies. Women's caucuses are informal groups of women parliamentarians who come together to advocate for policies that promote gender equality. These caucuses provide a platform for collaboration, strategizing, and consensus-building on gender-related issues. They can exert pressure on the government to prioritize gender-responsive policies and ensure that such policies are adequately discussed and implemented. Women's caucuses can also facilitate networking among women parliamentarians across party lines, fostering a sense of solidarity and enhancing their collective influence.

The broader institutional and cultural context within which political decision-making occurs also plays a significant role in shaping policy priorities. Institutions with more equitable gender representation tend to be more attuned to the needs of women and are more likely to prioritize gender-responsive policies. Additionally, cultural factors, such as social norms and expectations, can influence the extent to which women's voices are heard and their concerns are addressed. A supportive political culture that values women's contributions and perspectives can create an environment conducive to gender-responsive policy formulation. The presence of women in political decision-making roles serves as a form of symbolic representation. When women hold prominent positions, they become role models for aspiring female leaders and demonstrate that women can excel in politics and policy-making. This can encourage more women to participate in politics and increase the likelihood of gender-responsive policies being formulated.

Women parliamentarians often use their positions to advocate for gender equality and women's rights. They can leverage their platform to raise awareness about gender-specific issues, challenge discriminatory practices, and promote legislative changes. Through speeches, debates, and media engagement, they can influence public opinion and generate support for policies that address gender disparities.

Women's representation in political decision-making bodies is a critical factor in shaping gender-responsive policies. Their presence brings diverse perspectives, priorities, and experiences to the policy formulation process. Women parliamentarians, women's caucuses, institutional and cultural factors, role modeling, and advocacy all contribute to the development of policies that address the specific needs and concerns of women, ultimately advancing gender equality and social progress.

Gender-responsive policies have the potential to garner bipartisan support by addressing issues that are not inherently partisan. Many aspects of gender equality, such as promoting women's economic empowerment, addressing violence against women, and enhancing healthcare access, can be seen as common concerns transcending political affiliations. By emphasizing the shared benefits of such policies, advocates can work towards building a broader consensus and increasing the likelihood of policy adoption and implementation. While there might be agreement on the importance of gender-responsive policies, challenges can arise during their implementation. Budgetary constraints, competing policy priorities, and resistance to change within established institutions can hinder the successful execution of these policies. Additionally, deeply ingrained cultural norms and discriminatory practices might impede the effective implementation of gender-responsive policies. Overcoming these challenges requires sustained advocacy, capacity-building, and a commitment to address systemic barriers.

Civil society organizations play a vital role in holding governments accountable for the execution of gender-responsive policies. These organizations often serve as watchdogs, monitoring policy implementation and advocating for necessary adjustments. CSOs can mobilize public support, engage in lobbying efforts, and use strategic communication to raise awareness about the importance of gender equality policies. Their involvement helps maintain pressure on governments to fulfill their commitments and ensures that gender concerns remain on the legislative agenda. An important aspect of ensuring policy execution is the establishment of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. These mechanisms help track progress, identify bottlenecks, and assess

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the impact of gender-responsive policies. By collecting data and evidence, policymakers and advocates can make informed decisions and continuously refine policies to achieve better outcomes.

International and regional agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provide a framework for governments to commit to gender equality and women's empowerment. These agreements create a context in which governments can be held accountable for implementing gender-responsive policies and demonstrate their commitment on a global stage. Effective implementation of gender-responsive policies often requires public support and awareness. Engaging the public through awareness campaigns, education, and inclusive dialogues can build a constituency for change and encourage governments to prioritize gender-related issues in their legislative agendas.

Gender-responsive policies have the potential to shape legislative agendas by addressing issues that can garner bipartisan support, though challenges in implementation and resistance can arise. Civil society organizations play a crucial role in holding governments accountable and ensuring policy execution. Monitoring, evaluation, international frameworks, public engagement, and strategic advocacy all contribute to the successful integration of gender-responsive policies into legislative agendas, furthering progress toward gender equality.

Nordic countries are often cited as exemplary in terms of gender equality and women's representation in politics. These nations have implemented various policies and practices to promote gender-responsive governance. For instance, Norway introduced a gender quota for corporate boards, resulting in increased women's representation. In Sweden, a strong emphasis on work-family balance, parental leave policies, and affordable childcare has contributed to greater gender equality in the workforce. These policies are influenced by the significant presence of women in political decision-making roles.

Rwanda stands out for its remarkable progress in increasing women's representation in politics and its subsequent impact on policy formulation. After the devastating genocide in 1994, women's participation in politics became crucial for rebuilding the nation. Rwanda adopted a quota system mandating that at least 30% of parliamentary seats be reserved for women. This policy has resulted in one of the highest percentages of women in parliament globally. The increased presence of women in political decision-making has led to policies addressing gender-based violence, land rights, and women's economic empowerment.

Argentina provides an example of how women's representation can influence policy changes. The "Ni Una Menos" movement, which emerged to combat femicide and violence against women, gained significant momentum and contributed to a broader cultural shift. This movement was supported by women parliamentarians who advocated for legislative changes to address gender-based violence. Their efforts led to the passage of laws that strengthened penalties for femicide and expanded protections for victims of gender violence.

India offers a case where women's representation has resulted in policy changes at the local level. The Panchayati Raj system introduced quotas for women in local village councils. Women elected to these positions have championed issues such as water supply, sanitation, and education, leading to improvements in the lives of rural women and their communities. This experience has also inspired discussions about implementing similar quotas at higher levels of government.

South Africa's post-apartheid transition saw significant efforts to ensure women's representation and gender-responsive policies. The country adopted a progressive constitution that explicitly guarantees gender equality. The Women's Caucus in the South African Parliament played a vital role in advocating for gender-responsive policies, including those related to gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and economic empowerment.

These case studies collectively demonstrate the varying ways in which women's representation in political decision-making bodies can impact the formulation of gender-responsive policies and drive legislative outcomes. From quota systems to grassroots movements, these examples highlight the interconnectedness between women's political participation, policy changes, and advancements in gender equality.

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Gender-responsive policies and legislation can positively influence education outcomes for girls and women. When women are better represented in decision-making bodies, there tends to be increased attention to policies that promote girls' access to education, address gender disparities in enrollment, and improve the quality of education. Adequate representation also helps in dismantling cultural barriers that might hinder girls' education. This results in increased enrollment, retention, and improved educational attainment for girls, contributing to long-term gender equality by enhancing women's access to economic opportunities and decision-making roles. Gender-responsive policies play a significant role in improving women's healthcare access and overall well-being. When women's perspectives are considered in policy formulation, it leads to policies that focus on maternal health, reproductive rights, and access to family planning services. This contributes to a reduction in maternal mortality rates, improved maternal and child health outcomes, and enhanced overall healthcare services for women.

The presence of women in political decision-making bodies contributes to policies that promote women's economic empowerment. Gender-responsive policies often address issues related to equal pay, workplace discrimination, paid family leave, and affordable childcare. Such policies create an enabling environment for women to participate more fully in the workforce, pursue career advancements, and close the gender wage gap. Consequently, women's economic participation and financial independence are enhanced, leading to broader economic benefits for families and societies. Increased women's representation in politics results in policies that promote women's political participation and empowerment. Gender-responsive policies may include measures to increase the number of women candidates, support women's leadership development, and address barriers to women's political engagement. This can lead to a more inclusive and representative political landscape, where women's voices and concerns are integrated into legislative priorities, leading to more equitable policies and outcomes. The interconnected dynamics between women's representation, gender-responsive policies, and legislation can contribute to shifting social norms and attitudes towards gender roles. As more women occupy decision-making roles and advocate for gender equality policies, societal perceptions about women's capabilities and roles can change. This can lead to broader societal shifts that challenge gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices.

The positive impacts in education, healthcare, economic participation, and political empowerment are interconnected and tend to reinforce each other. When women are educated and healthy, they are better equipped to participate in the workforce and engage in political processes. Similarly, empowered women in decision-making roles can advocate for policies that promote education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for all women, leading to a positive feedback loop.

The interconnected dynamics between women's representation, gender-responsive policies, and legislation have a transformative impact on gender equality outcomes. By influencing education, healthcare, economic participation, political empowerment, and societal norms, these elements collectively contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society where women's rights and opportunities are advanced.

CHALLENGES

- **Backlash and Resistance:** As progress is made in advancing gender-responsive policies, there can be backlash from those who resist change or perceive it as a threat to traditional power dynamics. Efforts to roll back policies or to undermine women's representation can hinder the positive feedback loop.
- **Sustainability:** Ensuring the sustainability of gender-responsive policies requires ongoing commitment and resources. Policies may be vulnerable to changes in government, shifts in public priorities, or economic constraints.
- **Implementation Gaps:** Even when gender-responsive policies are adopted, gaps in implementation can occur due to bureaucratic hurdles, lack of resources, or resistance within institutions.

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- **Intersectionality:** Addressing the needs of marginalized groups within the broader context of gender equality is essential. Intersectionality acknowledges that women's experiences are shaped by multiple identities (race, ethnicity, class, etc.) that interact to produce unique challenges and opportunities.
- **Data and Research Deficits:** A lack of comprehensive gender-disaggregated data can hinder effective policy formulation, monitoring, and evaluation. More robust research is needed to understand the nuanced impacts of policies on different groups of women.

Future Research Directions:

- I. **Intersectionality and Policy Formulation:** Future research can delve into how intersectionality informs the design of gender-responsive policies. Understanding how policies affect women with diverse identities can lead to more inclusive and effective solutions.
- II. **Social Norms and Culture Change:** Exploring the broader impact of women's representation on societal norms and attitudes towards gender roles is an important area of research. How does women's visibility in politics shape public perceptions and influence cultural change?
- III. **Long-Term Impact:** Investigating the long-term effects of gender-responsive policies on gender equality outcomes is essential. How do policies impact future generations and contribute to sustained progress?
- IV. **Global South Perspectives:** Much of the existing research focuses on Western contexts. Exploring the experiences and challenges of women's representation and gender-responsive policies in the Global South can provide valuable insights.
- V. **Media and Communication:** The role of media in shaping public perceptions of women in politics and the dissemination of information about gender-responsive policies is an emerging research area.
- VI. **Digital Transformation:** As technology continues to shape society, understanding how it affects women's political participation and the potential for leveraging technology for gender-responsive governance is a relevant topic.
- VII. **Comparative Studies:** Comparative studies across countries and regions can provide insights into the varying impacts of women's representation and gender-responsive policies in different contexts.
- VIII. **Men's Engagement:** Research can explore how engaging men as allies in advancing gender-responsive policies and women's representation can lead to more sustainable progress.

Addressing challenges and exploring future research directions is essential for fostering a deeper understanding of the intricate relationships between women's representation, gender-responsive policies, and legislative change. By continually expanding our knowledge, we can work towards more effective strategies to advance gender equality and inclusive governance.

CONCLUSION

In the intricate web that connects women's representation in political office, gender-responsive policies, and legislative outcomes, this research paper sheds light on a fundamental truth: the presence of women in decision-making roles is a powerful catalyst for societal change. Through a comprehensive exploration of the interplay between these components, it becomes evident that the journey toward gender equality is intricately woven into the fabric of governance and policy formulation. The significance of women's representation in political offices cannot be overstated. It serves as a pivotal starting point, amplifying the voices of those historically marginalized and bringing forth perspectives that challenge the status quo. As women parliamentarians and caucuses advocate for gender-responsive policies, they channel these diverse viewpoints into the policy formulation process. This dynamic interaction results in legislation that addresses pressing gender-specific concerns, ranging from education and healthcare to economic empowerment and political participation. This paper has illuminated, this nexus is not without its challenges. From resistance to change to gaps in policy implementation, obstacles are inherent in the

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pursuit of gender equality. These challenges underscore the need for sustained dedication and advocacy to ensure that the positive feedback loop between women's representation, gender-responsive policies, and legislative change remains robust and enduring. Looking forward, the conclusion drawn is one of hope and urgency. The transformational potential of women's participation in politics is undeniable. By harnessing this potential and pushing for policies that advance gender equality, societies can unlock a future where women and men share in the benefits of equitable governance and just legislation. Continued efforts to bridge the gender gap in political decision-making are imperative, guided by the understanding that a more inclusive political landscape leads to a more equitable society.

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