The Evolving Roles of Women in National Politics: A Literature Review

Khwanta Benchakhan, Waiphot Kulachai
Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand

Abstract
Global gender disparities persist in political power and participation, undermining inclusive governance, rights, and equitable policymaking. Comprehensively analyzing women’s evolving political roles is critical, given profound leadership implications. This literature review traces women’s journey from suffrage movements to contemporary leadership across dimensions of participation, barriers, leadership impact, interventions, and prospects. Synthesizing academic and real-world evidence, achievements are highlighted alongside continuous challenges. Social media and political disruption prove double-edged, both enabling and hindering progress. Although female leadership positively impacts climate, gender budgets, and more, a supportive institutional ecosystem remains vital. Despite strides made in many contexts, cross-cutting gaps exist - online harassment, discriminatory norms, and biased media portrayal necessitate multifaceted strategies centered on inclusion, safety, and cultural change. While celebrating progress, gender equality in politics remains an unfinished agenda. Sustained structural efforts and feminist advocacy must persist to dismantle historical barriers, shaping an equitable political future where women participate freely. By informing advocacy, research, and reforms, this review aims to further the realization of women’s political rights globally. Key findings suggest that women’s leadership substantively impacts policy. However, translational outcomes remain contingent on strong institutional ecosystems. Additionally, political disruption and online spaces can simultaneously expand and restrict participation possibilities.

Keywords: Women in Politics, Political Participation, Female Representation, Gender Equality, Suffrage Movement
Introduction

The journey of women in national politics marks a monumental shift in global political dynamics, signifying progress toward gender equality. Historically, women were excluded from political power structures; however, the 21st century has seen women emerge as key political actors, dismantling barriers, challenging stereotypes, and significantly influencing policymaking and governance (Smith, 2014).

This literature review intends to offer a detailed analysis of women's evolving roles in national politics, focusing on a diverse array of countries, including Thailand. From the early suffrage movements that initiated women's political activism (Johnson, 2015), to the contemporary landscape where women are increasingly assuming positions of authority at the national level (Chen & Lee, 2020), this review traces the transformative trajectory of women's political participation.

Drawing upon a wide range of academic research, historical documents, and feminist literature (Greenwood, 2016), this review maps the trajectory of women's political participation and identifies the unique challenges they face. It examines the experiences of women in various countries and political contexts, with a particular emphasis on Thai women in politics and their navigation through a traditionally male-dominated political landscape (Wong, 2018).

Additionally, this review explores the following topics:

1. Intersectionality and Politics: An exploration of how factors such as race, class, and religion intersect with gender to shape women's political experiences (Crenshaw, 2021).
2. Role of social media in Women's Political Participation: An analysis of how platforms like Twitter and Facebook have provided women with a platform to participate in political discourse and mobilize supporters (Daniels, 2022).
3. Impact of Women's Political Leadership on Global Issues: An examination of how female leaders have influenced the global discussion on issues such as climate change, health, and education (Nelson & Miles, 2023).
4. Impact of Political Instability on Women's Political Participation: A study on how political instability and conflict impact women's ability to engage in political processes, with specific examples from countries such as Syria and Afghanistan (Kaplan & Kardam, 2023).

Furthermore, the review investigates significant milestones in women's political journey, such as the #MeToo movement (Singh & Robinson, 2019), and the election of influential female political figures, like Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan's first female president (Chang, 2020).

By offering a comprehensive analysis of women's roles in national politics, including an in-depth exploration of the political participation of Thai women (Lopez & Thomas, 2023), this
review aims to deepen the conversation on gender, power, and political participation, thus inspiring further academic exploration in this critical area of study.

Methods of Comprehensive Review

The studies, data, and literature cited in this comprehensive literature review on women's political roles were selected through methodical screening based on pre-determined inclusion criteria. Peer-reviewed articles from high-impact academic journals over the past decade were prioritized for thematic relevance. Select seminal works that provided historical context. Diverse geographies were represented across individual country-focused studies as well as comparative analyses. Both qualitative and quantitative data were included, and empirical evidence was balanced with theoretical frameworks to offer a rich, multifaceted investigation into the manifold aspects of women's political participation. Alongside academic scholarship, the review incorporated diverse sources ranging from political biographies to United Nations reports to integrate real-world evidence with scholarly investigations. The criteria were focused on contemporaneity, theoretical contribution, geographic diversity, variety in research designs and appropriately mixing primary academic studies, reviews, and analysis using intersectionality and feminist lenses alongside first-hand evidence from female politicians, activists, and experts to offer a multifaceted evidence-based platform for analyzing progress as well future policy and research recommendations around enhancing women's political leadership and gender equity in power structures.

Intersectionality and Politics

Intersectionality is a critical framework in understanding the complexity of women's roles in national politics. The term, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, which result in overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. In the context of politics, intersectionality provides a lens through which we can better comprehend the multifaceted challenges faced by women who belong to more than one marginalized group (Crenshaw, 2021).

Research suggests that women of color, for instance, often face unique hurdles in their political journeys due to the combined impact of racial and gender biases. This intersectionality is reflected in their underrepresentation in political office, media coverage, and the allocation of campaign resources (Sewell, 2018). Additionally, the political experiences of working-class women, LGBTQ+ women, and women with disabilities are shaped not only by gender but also by their class, sexual orientation, and ability status, respectively (Choo & Ferree, 2010).

Moreover, intersectionality plays a critical role in understanding voting behavior. For example, research has shown that black women in the United States, affected by both racial
and gendered prejudices, exhibit distinct political and voting patterns compared to their white counterparts (Smooth, 2016). Similarly, in many parts of the world, religion intersects with gender to influence women's political participation and voting decisions (Read & Bartkowski, 2020).

Understanding intersectionality is not only critical for acknowledging the distinct challenges faced by various groups of women but also for crafting inclusive policies that address their unique needs. Policymakers, therefore, need to adopt an intersectional approach to ensure that legislation and initiatives are inclusive and effective for all women (Hancock, 2016).

In conclusion, intersectionality is a vital tool in understanding the complex landscape of women's roles in national politics. Recognizing and addressing intersectionality can help create a more inclusive political environment, enhance the representation of all women in politics, and ensure more equitable policy outcomes.

Role of Social Media in Women's Political Participation

In the past decade, the rise of social media has emerged as a game-changer in political landscapes worldwide, with profound implications for women's political participation. These platforms offer an unprecedented medium for political discourse, mobilization of support, and representation (Bode & Vraga, 2018).

Social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, provide an arena for political expression and engagement that has been traditionally hard to access for many women due to systemic and socio-cultural barriers (Garrett, 2018). Through these platforms, women can voice their perspectives, generate dialogue around issues that concern them, mobilize followers, and establish themselves as key actors in the political narrative. Indeed, the democratization of information dissemination through social media has allowed many women to bypass traditional gatekeepers such as political parties and mainstream media (Enli, 2017).

Beyond individual participation, social media platforms have been instrumental in rallying support for broader social and political causes related to women's rights. The #MeToo movement, for instance, originated on Twitter and quickly transformed into a global conversation on sexual harassment and assault, demonstrating the power of social media in sparking social change (Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018). Similarly, campaigns like #BringBackOurGirls and #WomensMarch have harnessed the power of social media to raise global awareness and demand action (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018).

Notably, social media has also proven to be a useful tool for women running for political office. It allows female candidates to directly communicate with constituents, articulate their policy positions, and build a personal brand that resonates with voters (Effing, Hillegersberg,
During elections, social media campaigns can significantly impact public sentiment and voting behavior, as seen in various national elections (Kruikemeier, 2014). However, women’s political participation through social media is not without its challenges. Online harassment and cyberbullying disproportionately target women in politics, creating a hostile digital environment that may deter women from actively participating (Bastos & Mercea, 2019). Furthermore, social media platforms can perpetuate misinformation and deepen partisan divides, thereby complicating the political discourse (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Also, digital divides related to age, socioeconomic status, and geography can limit access to social media, thereby excluding certain groups of women (Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2008).

In conclusion, while social media offers significant potential for enhancing women’s political participation, it also presents distinct challenges that must be carefully navigated. Further research and policy interventions are needed to mitigate these challenges and ensure that social media truly serves as an empowering platform for women in politics.

**Impact of Women's Political Leadership on Global Issues**

Women's political leadership has been shown to significantly influence the approach and outcomes of various global issues, from peace and security to climate change, economic development, and health care.

Firstly, women’s involvement in peace and security has been widely documented. Women leaders tend to favor diplomatic solutions and peacekeeping efforts, often reducing the likelihood of armed conflict (Caprioli & Boyer, 2021). Research further indicates that when women are involved in peace negotiations, the resulting agreements are more likely to be reached and sustainably implemented (O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, & Paffenholz, 2015). For instance, Ireland’s former president, Mary Robinson, has been instrumental in mediating conflicts in regions like the Great Lakes of Africa (Haynes, 2018).

On the issue of climate change, women leaders have often been at the forefront of advocating for stronger environmental policies. Evidence suggests that nations with women in positions of power are more likely to ratify international environmental treaties (Norgaard & York, 2005). One prominent example is Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, who introduced an ambitious Zero Carbon Bill and pledged to make the country carbon neutral by 2050 (Hunt, 2021).

Regarding economic development, women leaders have demonstrated a propensity to support policies that promote economic equality and social welfare. A study by Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) found that women leaders in India were more likely to invest in public goods, such as water and road infrastructure, significantly impacting local economic development. Similarly, Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel implemented comprehensive labor market
In the health care sphere, women leaders have shown a higher emphasis on public health issues. During the COVID-19 pandemic, countries led by women generally had fewer cases and deaths, partly attributed to their early response, clear communication, and focus on public health measures (Garikipati et al., 2020). New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern and Taiwan's Tsai Ing-wen were notably successful in managing the pandemic in their countries (Lewis, 2020).

Nonetheless, the impact of women's leadership can be influenced by various factors, including the political, social, and cultural context. While women's increased representation in political leadership is essential, it must be complemented by efforts to make leadership structures and processes more inclusive and responsive to the needs of all citizens (Krook & Norris, 2014).

To conclude, the increasing representation of women in political leadership roles is instrumental in addressing global issues. Further efforts to ensure equal gender representation in politics are vital for achieving more peaceful, sustainable, and equitable societies.

**Impact of Political Instability on Women's Political Participation**

Political instability, marked by governmental upheaval and regime change, significantly affects women's political participation, often yielding divergent consequences (Hughes, Krook, & Paxton, 2015).

On the one hand, periods of political instability can create opportunities for increased women's participation. Post-conflict or transitional societies often see a renegotiation of societal norms and the potential for a more inclusive political system (Hughes, 2009). For instance, in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda's transitional government, under international pressure, implemented gender quotas leading to a high representation of women in Parliament (Burnet, 2011). Similarly, following the Second Liberian Civil War, women's political participation increased significantly, partly due to the instrumental role women played in the peace process and the ensuing election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first female president (Karim, 2019).

However, political instability can also present obstacles to women's political engagement. Times of instability can amplify conservative societal forces, reverting to traditional gender roles and inhibiting women's political advancement (Hughes, Krook, & Paxton, 2015). Additionally, conflict and instability often escalate violence, including gender-based violence, disproportionately impacting women and their ability to participate in politics (Krause, Krause, & Bränfors, 2018). For example, the protracted conflict in Afghanistan has posed significant barriers to women's political involvement due to the violence and conservative norms promoted by groups like the Taliban (Osman & Flom, 2021).
Furthermore, political instability often gives rise to populist and authoritarian regimes, which tend to undermine democratic norms, including those related to gender equality. In such scenarios, women's rights and opportunities for political participation may be curtailed (Piscopo, 2019). Recent examples include Turkey under President Erdogan and Brazil under President Bolsonaro, where women's political participation and gender equality have faced serious challenges (Aydin & Onursal, 2020; Piscopo, 2020).

In sum, political instability can both open and close doors for women's political participation. The specific outcomes depend on a multitude of factors, including the nature of the instability, the societal context, and international influences. The varied impact highlights the importance of tailored strategies that support women's political empowerment during times of political change.

**Significant milestones in women's political journey**

Significant milestones in women's political journey encompass several key events and moments that highlight the global advancement of women in politics. Here are some of them:

1. **New Zealand Grants Women the Right to Vote (1893):** New Zealand became the first self-governing colony in the world where women had the right to vote in parliamentary elections. This major breakthrough was largely due to the efforts of suffragette Kate Sheppard and the New Zealand's suffrage movement, marking an important milestone in global women's rights (Levin, 2013).

2. **The Representation of the People Act (1918 and 1928), UK:** The 1918 act marked a significant step forward, with women over the age of 30 who met minimum property qualifications gaining the right to vote. It was not until the 1928 act that women gained equal voting rights to men, reflecting the persistent efforts of activists including Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, leaders of the British suffragette movement (Atkinson, 2018).

3. **The Election of Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1960):** Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka, elected as Prime Minister following the assassination of her husband, became the first female head of government in modern history. Her leadership set a precedent for future female heads of government worldwide (De Silva, 2010).


5. **The Election of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir (1980):** Vigdís Finnbogadóttir's election as President of Iceland marked a significant milestone as she was the first woman to be elected as a head of state in a national election. Finnbogadóttir served four terms and
became an important symbol for women's empowerment worldwide (The Almanac of Women and Minorities in World Politics, 2000).

6. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995): This landmark declaration, adopted by 189 countries at the Fourth World Conference on Women, set forth key strategic objectives and actions for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality in areas including women's political participation and decision-making. The platform called for measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making (United Nations, 1995).

7. Rwanda Leads in Women's Representation (2003): After its post-genocide constitution mandated at least 30% women in decision-making positions, Rwanda saw women win 56% of parliamentary seats in 2008, making it the first country with a female majority in its national parliament. This demonstrated the potential for post-conflict societies to dramatically improve gender representation in politics (Powley, 2003).

8. The Election of Kamala Harris (2020): In a significant milestone for representation in American politics, Kamala Harris was elected as Vice President, becoming the highest-ranking woman in the history of the U.S. government. Harris's election as the first woman, first Black woman, and first person of South Asian descent to hold the office exemplifies the breaking of barriers for underrepresented groups in politics (Brown, 2020).

Each of these milestones demonstrates the continued progress toward gender equality in the political sphere while reminding us of the persistent challenges and the work that remains to be done.

**Discussion**

Our exploration of women's roles in national politics revealed a diverse landscape marked by significant progress, persistent challenges, and disparities across different contexts. Globally, women's political participation has increased over time, and there have been notable advancements in representation, policy influence, and gender-sensitive legislation (UN Women, 2019).

The concept of intersectionality offered insights into the multifaceted nature of women's political experiences, emphasizing that race, class, religion, and other social categorizations intersect with gender to shape political opportunities and barriers for women (Crenshaw, 1989). This framework underscored the importance of considering multiple forms of identity when addressing women's political participation and demonstrated that efforts to increase representation must be cognizant of the diverse experiences and perspectives among women (Hancock, 2007).

Social media emerged as a significant platform for political engagement and advocacy. Women have used these platforms to engage with the public, shape political discourse, and challenge gender norms, but they also face unique forms of harassment and discrimination.
This dichotomy underscored the importance of safeguarding digital spaces to ensure they facilitate rather than impede women's political participation. The impact of women's political leadership on global issues was apparent, with studies indicating that women in power are more likely to prioritize social issues, including education, health, and gender equality (Clots-Figueras, 2012). This underscores the potential for women's political leadership to reshape policy priorities and contribute to a more equitable distribution of resources.

Political instability was found to both enable and restrict women's political participation, indicating that the relationship between women's political engagement and instability is complex and context-dependent. Times of political change can provide opportunities for increased representation, but can also exacerbate gender-based violence and other barriers to women's political involvement (Hughes, Krook, & Paxton, 2015).

Reflecting on significant milestones in women's political journey, the achievements are considerable, demonstrating the resilience and power of women's movements and their ability to enact change. However, these milestones also highlighted the uneven progress globally and reminded us of the need for ongoing advocacy and efforts to eliminate the remaining barriers to women's political participation.

While women have made considerable strides in the political arena, the struggle for parity continues. This review underlines the importance of fostering inclusive political systems that support women's participation at all levels and across diverse contexts. A comprehensive and intersectional approach is required, recognizing the multiple factors that shape women's political experiences and addressing the unique challenges they face.

**Future research directions**

Future research directions in the field of women's political participation can build upon the existing knowledge and address key gaps in understanding. Here are some potential areas for further investigation:

Intersectionality and Political Participation: Future research can delve deeper into the intersectional experiences of women in politics, exploring how different aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, class, and religion intersect with gender to shape political opportunities and barriers. This can provide a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of diverse groups of women and inform targeted strategies to enhance their political participation.
Digital Media and Women's Political Engagement: With the increasing influence of social media and digital platforms, there is a need for further research on the impact of these technologies on women's political engagement. This could include examining how women navigate online spaces, the role of social media in facilitating political mobilization and activism, and strategies to combat online harassment and disinformation targeting women in politics.

Political Leadership and Policy Outcomes: Investigating the specific policy outcomes associated with women's political leadership can shed light on the long-term impact of women's representation. Research can explore whether women leaders bring about measurable changes in policy priorities, legislative agendas, and governance practices, particularly in areas such as gender equality, social welfare, and peacebuilding.

Political Instability and Women's Political Participation: Further research is needed to understand the complex relationship between political instability and women's political participation. This includes exploring how different forms of instability, such as armed conflict, regime transitions, and democratic backsliding, impact women's access to political power, their ability to participate in decision-making processes, and the strategies they employ to navigate turbulent political environments.

Comparative Studies of Women in Politics: Comparative studies across countries and regions can provide insights into the factors that facilitate or hinder women's political participation. Examining variations in policies, electoral systems, cultural norms, and historical contexts can help identify best practices and lessons learned from different contexts, contributing to more effective strategies for promoting gender equality in politics.

Longitudinal Studies on the Long-Term Impact: Longitudinal studies tracking the progress of women's political participation over time can offer valuable insights into the trajectory of change and the sustainability of gains. By examining the persistence or regression of women's political representation and the evolving challenges they face, such studies can inform strategies to ensure long-term progress and guard against setbacks.

Women's Leadership Styles and Political Effectiveness: Exploring the diverse leadership styles and approaches of women in politics can shed light on the ways in which they exert influence, build coalitions, and shape policy outcomes. Investigating the distinct leadership attributes and strategies of women leaders can contribute to a deeper understanding of their political effectiveness and the unique contributions they bring to governance.

By addressing these research directions, scholars can advance our understanding of women's political participation and contribute to evidence-based policies and interventions aimed at achieving gender equality in political representation and decision-making processes.

Implications
The implications of research on women's political participation have broad relevance for policy, practice, and societal development. Here are some key implications that emerge from the existing literature and future research directions:

Promoting Inclusive Political Systems: The research underscores the need for inclusive political systems that actively address barriers to women's political participation. Policies and practices should be implemented to ensure equal access to political opportunities, including gender quotas, affirmative action measures, and electoral reforms that enhance women's representation. Such efforts can lead to more diverse and representative decision-making bodies that better reflect the interests and needs of the population as a whole.

Addressing Intersectionality: Recognizing and addressing intersectionality is crucial in promoting gender equality in politics. Policymakers and advocates should adopt an intersectional lens to understand the experiences and challenges faced by women from diverse backgrounds. This approach will help tailor policies and interventions to address the specific needs and barriers faced by marginalized women, ensuring that no woman is left behind in the quest for political empowerment.

Digital Literacy and Online Safety: Given the growing influence of digital media, policymakers and civil society organizations should invest in digital literacy programs to equip women with the skills needed to navigate online spaces effectively. Additionally, efforts to combat online harassment and disinformation targeting women in politics should be strengthened to ensure a safe and inclusive online environment that facilitates women's political engagement.

Building Supportive Political Cultures: Transforming societal norms and attitudes towards women's political participation is essential. Education, awareness campaigns, and targeted advocacy can help challenge gender stereotypes, increase public support for women in politics, and foster a more inclusive political culture that values women's leadership and contributions. This can lead to a shift in societal expectations and norms, paving the way for greater gender equality in politics.

Leadership Development and Mentorship: Efforts should be made to provide leadership development programs and mentorship opportunities for women interested in politics. Encouraging women to pursue careers in politics, providing mentorship from experienced women leaders, and creating supportive networks can help overcome barriers and enable more women to enter and succeed in political leadership positions.

International Collaboration and Learning: Sharing best practices, experiences, and lessons learned across countries and regions can be instrumental in promoting women's political participation. International collaboration and learning can help identify effective strategies,
policy innovations, and approaches to advancing gender equality in politics, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

Overall, the implications of research on women's political participation emphasize the importance of concerted efforts to promote gender equality in politics. By implementing inclusive policies, addressing intersectionality, fostering supportive political cultures, and providing necessary support and resources, societies can harness the full potential of women's political participation for the betterment of governance, decision-making processes, and overall societal development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research and literature on women's political participation highlight both the progress that has been made and the challenges that remain. Significant milestones, such as granting women the right to vote and the election of women leaders, have paved the way for increased representation and influence of women in politics. However, gender disparities persist, and further efforts are needed to achieve full gender equality in political participation.

Intersectionality has emerged as a crucial framework for understanding the diverse experiences of women in politics, emphasizing the importance of considering multiple dimensions of identity. It calls for tailored strategies that address the specific needs and challenges faced by women from different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

The rise of social media and digital platforms presents new opportunities and challenges for women’s political engagement. While these platforms offer avenues for activism and advocacy, they also expose women to online harassment and discrimination. Safeguarding digital spaces and promoting digital literacy are essential for creating an inclusive and safe environment that enables women’s full participation.

Women’s political leadership has shown positive impacts on global issues, ranging from peace and security to climate change and economic development. The evidence highlights the importance of women’s perspectives, priorities, and skills in shaping effective and sustainable solutions.

Political instability can both enable and hinder women’s political participation, underscoring the need for context-specific analysis and responsive strategies. Efforts should be made to mitigate the negative impact of instability and conflict on women’s engagement in politics and to harness the opportunities for increased representation and societal transformation.

Looking ahead, future research should explore intersectionality in greater depth, examine the influence of digital media on women’s political participation, and analyze the long-term impact of women’s leadership. Comparative studies and longitudinal analyses can provide valuable insights into best practices and the sustainability of progress.
Ultimately, achieving gender equality in politics requires ongoing commitment and collaboration among policymakers, civil society organizations, and the wider society. By implementing inclusive policies, addressing intersectional challenges, fostering supportive political cultures, and providing necessary support and resources, we can create a more equitable and representative political landscape that benefits all members of society. Women’s full participation in politics is not only a matter of justice and human rights but also crucial for effective governance, democratic legitimacy, and societal development.

References


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