

Gender and Comparative Politics: Political Representation in Asia

CHETNA SHARMA
Kamala Nehru College

PUSHPA SINGH
Miranda House College

This article aims to understand the trend of ubiquitous gender exclusion in politics in the Asian context by analysing women's political representation and exploring the possibility of employing it as a frame for gendering the discipline of comparative politics. Political representation is a significant marker of women's empowerment or the lack of it, and gender crosscutting all dimensions of political inquiry provides an efficient framework of analysis. Gender-based analysis of women's political representation from Asia offers a new perspective emerging from the specificities of its context. The discussions highlight how, despite adopting specific provisions of gender quotas in politics, Asian societies have not witnessed substantial gains in overall women's empowerment as participatory exclusion continues to remain a norm.

Keywords: gender, comparative politics, women's political representation, gender quota, Asia

It has been very recent that the study of gender and politics has become a pertinent subject of scholarly engagements in the field of Comparative Politics. For a very long time, gender as an independent category remained mostly absent from the broader framework of comparative political analysis. However, in contemporary times there has been increased realization of the centrality of gender in politics and of why it needs to be bolstered as a dependent as well as an independent category of analysis. Merely adding women to legislatures and public offices will not be enough, rather a deeper transformation at the level of practice of politics as well as its academic study is required, as gender inequalities are embedded in both these realms (Waylen, Celis, Kantola & Weldon, 2013). These efforts will not only rectify the profound gender blindness in political spaces but would also make the discipline gender equitable. However, gender is not to be understood as exclusively referring to women; rather it includes the construction of masculinities and femininities, the relationship between men and women and how these shape politics and political outcomes. This article employs women's political representation as the frame to explore the possibility of gendering comparative politics to see to what extent this frame enables an overall gain in women's status and empowerment. Alongside, it also attempts to study and comparatively analyse the nature, scope, and challenges of women's political representation with a special focus on the countries of Asia.

The objective of gendering comparative politics is to establish gender as a central analytical category in the study of the discipline. The aim is not just to foreground gender issues and perspectives, but also to examine those dimensions of politics that may have been obscured by the male, heterosexist bias in the discipline (Weldon, 2006). It seeks to provide a critical account of the perpetuating gender inequality in different countries and contexts and demonstrate how ideas about masculinity and femininity shape behaviours, and construct relations and privileges, establishing them as the norm. These imbued gender norms permeate all political spaces based on which organisations institutionalise “definitions of femininity and masculinity and perpetuate gender hierarchies” (Connell, 2005, p. 18). As political parties, electoral institutions and political behaviour are informed by these gender constructs and barriers, women’s political representation has not been able to translate into overall visible political gains for them. In the specific contexts of Asian societies with firmly ascribed gender hierarchies, this task becomes even more challenging due to the coupling of several other factors. Scholars of ‘Gender and Politics’ hold these reasons responsible for perpetuating gender exclusion in both politics and the political science discipline. Therefore, positioning gender as a crucial category of inquiry equal in weight to other categories like class, race, ethnicity, and religion is pertinent in gendering the discipline and would also foster meaningful political representation beyond the institutional boundaries (Tripp, 2010). Though the status of research on gender in comparative politics considers it just as another subset of the subject, the constant pushing of the boundary would gradually unsettle existing explanations and recast the understanding of ‘political’, deeply informed by and inclusive of gender (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010).

The article is structured into three parts: the first part situates the idea of gendering comparative politics theoretically for making the discipline more inclusive and equitable; the second part attempts to map this very idea through the analytical frames of women’s political representation, and the last part outlines the challenges in this process. Political representation is the most significant indicator of women’s political empowerment or the lack of it and is central to feminist politics as well as democratic systems; hence is used to serve as the frame of analysis for the subject matter. It is the edifice of the modern democracy and foundational political values that every society desires to attain. Political representation and strategies to bring more women into politics such as gender quotas serve as decisive yardsticks to examine the gendering of political spaces. This paper is greatly indebted to the already existing body of literature on the subject matter however, further work is required to delineate the different political outcomes from various regions. As it can be seen from Table 1, Asia fares poorly compared to other regions of the world despite specific provisions like gender quota. In this light, this article aims to explore different dimensions and challenges to women’s political representation in the region raising pertinent questions such as, why the provision of reverse discrimination in form of gender quota in many Asian countries did not translate into a substantial rise in women’s political participation and representation overall? Why did the marginal increase in women’s political representation in these societies not necessarily result in policy gains for women as a group, leading to their empowerment? After occupying the political office, are women able to make a difference? The discussions on these dimensions and challenges to women’s political representation in Asia add a new perspective to already existing debates in this

domain. The article foregrounds the inter-connections and mutual reinforcement of politics as an academic discipline and politics as it is practised and employs women's political representation as a tool of inquiry.

FIGURE 1. Data for Region-wise Women's Representation in Parliament



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data for all houses combined, figures of 1995 and 2021 respectively.

Gendering Comparative Politics

This work builds on a wide range of scholarship available in gendering comparative politics and women's political representation in Asian countries. While Waylen, Celis, Kantola & Weldon (2013) demonstrate the gendered nature of politics as practices and political science as an academic discipline, Baldez (2010) draws attention to the 'gender lacuna' in comparative politics research. Chappell (2006), Beckwith (2010) and Tripp (2010) demonstrate how gender operates as a process within institutions and define comparative politics of gender as an attempt to broaden, extend and correct our analysis. These scholars suggest a multidirectional research agenda that employs vertical and horizontal comparisons that would widen our understanding across spaces and times. Schwindt-Bayer (2010) suggests that this discourse should move from "gender and comparative politics" to "comparative politics of gender" with significant comparison and integration in the literature. While Nelson and Choudhary (1994) produced the first cross-national analysis of women's political participation, Tremblay's (2007) study of women's political representation in democracies highlights remarkable differences between established democracies and new democracies using feminist-informed statistical analysis. Dahlerup (2006) and Krook (2009) critically engage with a comparative study of gender quotas to build a common theoretical framework explaining the considerable variation worldwide in the origins and impact of such reforms. On the other hand, Kazuki (2008), Burghoorn, Iwanga, Milwertz and Wang (2008), Derichs

and Thompson (2013) Chao and Ha (2020) discuss the specificities of women and political processes in Asia.

Bringing Gender in the Centrality of the Discourse of Comparative Politics

The field of gendering comparative politics started taking shape in the past three decades. However, an attempt of women scholars to engage with gender-based analysis inside the discipline collectively started much earlier. In 1969, a women's caucus was created within the American Political Science Association, followed by the emergence of the Study Group on Sex Roles and Politics under the International Political Science Association in 1976. The European Consortium of Political Research constituted the Standing Groups on Women and Politics in 1986. In the beginning, studies focusing on women remained primarily confined to the feminist circles; the reason being that the investigations were still in their infancy and overtly concentrated on counting the number of women in the political arena, while the larger scholar community shied away from engaging with core feminist issues (Waylen, Celis, Kantola & Weldon, 2013). However, the discourse required focusing on the "organisation of political life to highlight how social norms, laws, practices and institutions advantage certain groups and forms of life and disadvantage others" systematically (Weldon, 2006; p.235). The understanding that the institutions are gendered structures and operate in gendered ways required further analysis of gender inequality reproduced through institutions and policies. (Krook 2010; 2013)

A comparative gender analysis outlines crucial gender questions to investigate them across cultures and regions to find the patterns of similarities and differences in gender omissions. With this objective, many works started emerging on the subject of gender and politics, thereby making it a meticulous field of engagement. The publication of three seminal peer-reviewed journals such as *Politics and Gender*, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* and *The Journal of Women, Politics and Policies* have served as outliners in this regard. As a consequence of these studies, the subject of women/gender started finding a prime place in top mainstream journals like *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science* and *Journal of Politics*. These works began contesting, deconstructing, and reconstructing gendered concepts of power, equality and difference, justice, and democracy (Chappell, 2010). However, mainstream research on 'politics' and 'gender and politics' seems to exist in separate silos as the general study in politics frequently excludes the gender analysis; unless the subject of research itself mandates it. Also, there is visible ambivalence towards assigning gender a precise place and position in the studies of politics. This perplexity emanates from the dilemma that while there is a rising scholarship in the field, gender does not figure in the centrality of political studies. Though scholars working in this area occupy the places in top colleges and universities globally, this field of inquiry remains marginal primarily.

A further limitation of this field has been the unavailability of data and lack of funds to support such research and surveys. Additionally, available limited studies have been heavily Eurocentric as they focused on comparisons of institutions of the West and had not developed the categories to capture the perspectives of developing societies. These studies revolved around the advanced democracies of Europe and North America, where there exist the most robust data on gender (Tripp, 2010).

These challenges have marred the development of comparative gender studies. Though, a wide-angle study of how gender operates within institutions in different societies is highly desirable and would widen the understanding of its implications in terms of policy outcomes. Such an exercise within and between very different political contexts involving complex conceptual and resource issues would be daunting yet required. Comparative gender studies must be mindful of the heterogeneity of women as a category, for they are marked by the differences in terms of race, religion, nationality, language and their situatedness in the political economy of a particular country. While these categories autonomously affect women, they also tend to produce compounded impact through the intersectionality of these concepts. Comparative studies in gender should be able to capture this intersectionality that creates multiple barriers for women in politics and public policy.¹ The discipline can broaden its canvas by simultaneously making space for large *n* and region-specific studies on gender. Whereas extensive *n* studies would generate comprehensive data on different conditions required for general theory building, the small *n* or region-specific studies would provide humongous information on detailed nuances for a thorough understanding of the dynamics of gender exclusions.

Now that the concept of gendering comparative politics has been theoretically contextualised, the next section will explore politics as it is practised by using political representation as a tool of analysis and seeing how it helps map women's status and empowerment. The discourse of politics as a body of knowledge and an academic discipline inherently shapes politics as it is practised on the ground. Hence, it is useful also to highlight their interlinkages and interdependence. The diverse historical, political and cultural legacies influence the political settings of different societies, making them adopt divergent pathways that may enable or restrict space for women's agency and power struggles. Gender hierarchies embed both: the study of the discipline of politics and its practice on the ground, and both these categories coproduce gender exclusions.

Mapping Women's Political Representation: Some Reflections from Asia

Of late, there have been tremendous efforts to advance women's political representation, a ubiquitous indicator of women's status in society. However, they remain underrepresented in national parliaments and top public offices. The explanation partially lies in the correlation of the societal, cultural and religious attitudes that have an apparent bearing on women's political participation. On the other hand, the type of the electoral system and voting pattern also influence the nature and scale of women's political representation (Norris 2006). For example, proportional representation provides greater scope for women's participation than majoritarian systems. Understanding factors determining women's political representation needs a multifaceted analysis approach (Tremblay, 2007). As the inherent patriarchal bias shapes political institutions, structures and the prevailing

¹ Intersectionality refers to the fact of overlapping of different aspects of social and political discrimination along with the gender bias. This term was used by Black feminist scholars to show the intermeshed and multi-layered discrimination based upon class, race and sexuality.

norms that govern the civic spaces, women's political representation becomes an uphill task. These patriarchal norms and prejudices are then replicated in the political attitudes and actions, resulting in gendered outcomes in institutions, programmes and policies (Singh & Sharma, 2019). Legislatures, judiciary, political parties, and bureaucracy- none of them has been immune from the patriarchal biases as women remain underrepresented in them and all top tiers of government across the countries.

Political Institutions and Gendered Norms

The nature of political space is highly gendered, reflected in the masculine nature of the state, institutions, administration, and the policy process. All political institutions are gender regimes with distinctive ideologies of how women and men should act, think, and feel making gender hierarchies stratified and unquestionable (Kronsell, 2005; Lovenduski, 2005). Gender is imprinted upon the institutions in various ways: through the behaviour, work norms, dressing, role in the family and so on. All these parameters potentially influence the political opportunities and constraints facing feminist actors: it can assist in determining when and which institutions will be more open or closed to gender equality demands (Chappel, 2006). When women enter a male-dominated institution, they face structural barriers that prevent them from wielding influence in the legislative process. Even when women win a place in a gendered institution, they remain outsiders. For example, a research study of the Indian Parliament shows that when women politicians first entered parliament, it was not deemed appropriate for them to congregate with men beyond official engagements in the Central Hall. Hence, a separate ladies' room was created as a convention, though, in the later years, women did not prefer it for the sake of greater visibility and more opportunities for networking (Rai, 2015). Legislatures are informed by the work norms defined by the parameters of males by practising irregular hours of work that are unwelcoming to women with more than their share of family responsibilities (Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). For instance, a study on work norms in politics in China highlights that most women Mayors find the late meeting arrangements and dining and drinking practices inconvenient with their family responsibilities (Qi, 2008). The role of most women occupying political offices in Asia remains limited due to substantial domestic duties, societal prejudices, and power asymmetries, making it more challenging for them to compete and actively contribute to politics.

Women's access to leadership posts and powerful committee appointments in the legislature are also restricted. They are often allocated soft or lower profile portfolios depicting that they do not wield equitable political power (Tan, 2020). The specific requirements of women are never factored in the legislature, and an uproar is created when women demand them. For example, a women legislator from the State of Assam in India, Angoorlata Deka, missed out on lots of debate while shuffling between her nearby quarter and the legislature to feed her baby. The speaker of the House responded that the MLA's quarter was not far away, and the "legislator could easily see her baby whenever she wanted" (Gupta 2007). Such demands of female legislators are seen as an exception rather than a natural practice of creating equal physical space for both the sexes.

Women's acceptability in politics in Asia depends on various non-political factors such as their dressing, behaviour, moral code of conduct, role in the family as wives

and mothers, etc. In most countries globally, but more so in the Asian context, women politicians are expected to dress up conventionally. For example, in India, the institutional politics of the parliament desires women to be dressed traditionally in sari or *salwar kameez*, as reflected in the dressing of politicians like Indira Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj and Sonia Gandhi; however, for men, dressing is not an issue of concern (Rai, 2015). Likewise, the first Filipino politician wore traditional dress to appear as a non-militant and non-aggressive woman, and the pattern has continued since then. However, some women politicians like Philippines president Dr Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Indonesian president Megawati Sukarnoputri also adopted Western women's power suit to project themselves as modern leaders with whom the West will engage seriously (Taylor, 2008). At the same time, these women chose to dress conservatively while visiting rural or predominantly Muslim regions. For women in China, dressing style has been a dilemma between adopting old socialist gender-neutral clothes that can make them appear more like men hiding their femininity or adopting a personalised style (Qi, 2008). Most of these women, on some occasions, wear gender-neutral clothes, while on other occasions, they prefer expressing their personal choices. Still, this constant shift between gender identities and official image has not been easy for them. These norms act as a gender trap because women politicians are required to be warm and behave aggressively only occasionally: displaying a blend of masculine as well as feminine qualities.

Women Leaders in Asian Politics

The countries of Asia have witnessed many influential women leaders in politics who received global attention. However, their rise signifies specific patterns of their relationship to dynastic politics and familial ties. This feature of Asian politics unequivocally leads to the crucial question: how did these women politicians covet the top political offices in a society marked by recalcitrant patriarchal hierarchies? To what extent have family connections been crucial in their ascendance, and if their presence in these offices results in substantial gains for women's enhanced status in society in general? These questions serve as the outliers when comparatively analysing the nature of women's political representation in Asia vis-à-vis older democracies of the West. In Asia, particularly in South Asia, some early women political leaders attained high office by inheriting them from their male relatives as widows, wives or daughters (Jahan, 1987). They often carried inherited charisma and served the practical purposes of nipping the internal factionalism within the party. The ascendance of women leaders like Bandaranaike and Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka, Indira Gandhi in India, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Khaleda Zia, and Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh, and Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar was legitimised because of the political legacy of their male family members. Likewise, Corazon Aquino in the Philippines, Megawati Sukarnoputri in Indonesia, and Yingluck Shinawatra in Thailand could establish themselves in the highest offices, courtesy of their family ties with male politicians. Some women politicians like Soong Ching Ling in China and Tanaka Makiko in Japan did not occupy the top offices. They still managed to remain influential in politics due to their husband and father's legacy. The special political virtue of 'moral capital' used strategically by female dynastic leaders also becomes a reason for their downfall. They are often held to high moral standards when facing charges of corruption, scandals and controversies. (Chao & Louisa, 2020).

TABLE 1. Women Head of the State in Asia

<i>Name of Political Leader</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Serving period</i>
Sukhbaataryn Yanjmaa	Mongolia	1953-1954
Sirimavo Bandaranaike	Sri Lanka	(1960-65, 1970-77, 1994-2000)
Indira Gandhi	India	1966-77, 1980-84
Soong Ching-Ling	China	1968-1972
Golda Meir	Israel	1969 to 1974
Corazon Aquino	Philippines	1986-1992
Benazir Bhutto	Pakistan	1988-90, 1993-96
Khalida Zia	Bangladesh	1991-96, 2001-2006
Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga	Sri Lanka	1994-2005
Sheikh Hasina	Bangladesh	1996-2001, 2009-till date
Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo	Philippines	2001-2010
Megawati Sukarnoputri	Indonesia	2001 to 2004
Pratibha Patil	India	2007-2012
Roza Otunbayeva	Kyrgyzstan	April 2010 to December 2011
Yingluck Shinawatra	Thailand	2011-2014
Park Geun Hye	South Korea	2013- 2017
Bidhya Devi Bhandari	Nepal	2015-till date
Aung San Suu Kyi	Myanmar	2016 till 2021
Tsai Ing-Wen	Taiwan	2016 till date
Halimah Yacob	Singapore	2017-till date

Source: Created by authors

Another prevalent pattern in women's political representation in some countries of Asia is women's 'partaking inclusion' but 'participatory exclusion'. While women have actively contributed to anti-colonial struggles and democratic transition against dictatorial regimes, their causes are rendered insignificant in the post-transition periods signifying exclusion. This demonstrates a participation paradox which does not result in the formal share in political power, institution building and decision making (Razavi, 2001; Waylen, 2010). For example, despite their tremendous role in the Indian independence movement, neither any effort has been made to independently document the nature and achievement of women's political participation, nor this could ensure women any formal seat in the political system (Kumar, 1993). Likewise, many women leaders have led democratic uprisings against dictatorship: Corazon Aquino in the Philippines, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh, Megawati Sukarnoputri in Indonesia, Aung Sang Suu Kyi in Myanmar, and Wan Azizah Wan Ismail in Malaysia. Nonetheless, there

has been a marginal increase in overall women's political participation in these societies compared to other regions, as reflected in Figure 1.

The above discussion depicts that women's political representation in Asia suffers many structural, systemic, and ideological impediments. Even after reaching the highest echelons of power, women political leaders have to struggle as institutional changes and legislative reforms do not necessarily spur shifts in social, cultural and gender norms. The working pattern and behaviour of legislatures remain a challenge for female legislators in Asian countries (Ahmed, 2020). In Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan, Islamic principles have been invoked by conservative Muslim leaders to limit the participation and rise of women leaders (Thompson, 2002). The high parameters set for women leaders also incite strong reactions leading to cases of assassination, for example, Indira Gandhi in India and Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan. Women leaders have to be cautious in public space regarding their reputation, and therefore they avoid working closely and mingling with their male colleagues beyond a point. This fact was reported by some women Mayors from China in their interviews while expressing their discomfort with the overall patriarchal social and political settings (Qi, 2008). At times, women parliamentarians are subjected to harassment and violence in the form of sexist remarks, online sexist attacks, and psychological harassment prevalent across nations, as discussed in Inter-Parliamentary Union studies (2016).

Gender Quota

One of the ways to bring a feminised transformation in politics could be by raising the proportion of women legislators, which can be achieved through quotas for women (Lovenduski, 2005). Hence, to address the underrepresentation of women, many countries have adopted different provisions like quotas, laws or policies requiring candidate lists or representative bodies to include women, racial, ethnic, or religious minorities. There are two ways to ensure equal representation of women in politics: 'the incremental track' and 'the fast track' (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005). The incremental track reflects a gradualist approach, which assumes that the number of women in parliaments will gradually rise with the overall development of the society. This approach is followed in politics of many post-industrial democracies, for example, Nordic countries, where voluntary adoption of gender quotas by one party leads to a contagion effect resulting in subsequent adoption by other parties for electoral considerations, thereby consolidating women's representation by ripple effect (Matland & Studler, 1996). On the other hand, the fast track approach creates institutional provisions like mandatory gender quotas through constitutional changes at the policy level. It is adopted by those societies where gender parity in politics is a greater challenge to achieve, for example, in many semi-democratic or non-democratic states of Asia (Moon, Chun, Kim & Kim, 2008).

Three main varieties of quotas are party quotas, legislative candidate quotas, and reserved parliamentary seats. Some Asian countries, such as Pakistan, introduced gender quotas in the 1950s and Bangladesh in the 1970s, setting the earliest examples of gender justice in politics (Kazuki, 2008). Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines have political party quotas to ensure a specific proportion of women's representation. In contrast, Timor-Leste and Indonesia have legislative candidate quotas that ensure the representation of female candidates on the party list. India adopted the system of reserved seats at the local self-government level, whereas China presents a combination of party quota and reserved seats for

women. South Korea legislated candidate quotas and Taiwan has both legislated candidate quotas and reserved seats to ensure women's representation. Although these quotas are not mandatory in all countries, those implementing them generally do better in women's political representation than those who do not, namely Japan and Sri Lanka.

The various forms of gender quotas, either in national parliaments, local government or party laws in different countries like Afghanistan, Jordan, Cambodia, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, and Timor-Leste indicate an increase in women's representation (Table 2). In South Korea, only sixteen women served in cabinet positions between 1948 and February 1998 (Kyung-Ae, 1999). However, with the introduction of the gender quota, the number of elected women increased, reaching 57 in 2020, the highest ever since its democratisation in 1987 (Mobrand, 2019). In Singapore, there were no women in parliament from 1970 to 1984 (Chew, 2008), hence the voluntary party quota of 30 per cent was introduced to increase women's representation (Tan, 2016). Similar trends were visible in Indonesia, a majority-Muslim country, after the inclusion of a 30 per cent quota for women. The country returned to democracy in 1999 following three decades of authoritarian rule and brought law reforms in 2004 and 2009, resulting in improved women's representation in the 2009 elections (Hillman, 2017).

TABLE 2. Gender Quota Database of Asian Countries

<i>Country</i>	<i>Quota Type</i>	<i>Percentage of Women in Parliament on the basis of Last Elections</i>
Afghanistan	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the subnational level	27%
Armenia	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the subnational level	22.7%
Bangladesh	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the subnational level	20.9%
China	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the subnational level	24.9%
Georgia	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the subnational level	20.7%
India	Legislative Quota at the subnational level	14.4%
Indonesia	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the subnational level	21%
Iraq	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the subnational level	26.4%

Israel	Legislative Quota at the sub national level and voluntary quota adopted by political parties	24.2%
Jordan	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the subnational level	11.5%
Republic Of Korea	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the subnational level and voluntary quota adopted by political parties	19%
Kyrgyzstan	Legislative Quota at the subnational level	17.1%
Malaysia	Voluntary Quota adopted by Political Parties	14.9%
Mongolia	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the subnational level	17.3%
Nepal	Legislative Quota for the lower house, upper house and at the subnational level	32.7%
Pakistan	Legislative Quota for the lower house, upper house and at the subnational level	20.2%
Philippines	Legislative Quota at the sub national level and voluntary quota adopted by political parties	28%
Saudi Arabia (No Direct Elections)	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the sub national level	19.9%
Sri Lanka	Legislative Quota at the sub national level	5.4%
State Of Palestine	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the sub national level	12.9%
Taiwan	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the sub national level	41.6%
Thailand	Legislative Quota at the sub national level and voluntary quota adopted by political parties	15.7%
Timor-Leste	Legislative Quota for the lower House and at the sub national level	38.5%
Turkey	Voluntary Quota adopted by Political Parties	17.3%
United Arab Emirates	Legislative Quota for the lower House	50%
Uzbekistan	Legislative Quota for the lower house, upper house and at the subnational level	32.7%
Vietnam		24.4%

Some countries eagerly incorporate women while others do not; for example, female legislators occupy 42 per cent of the seats in Taiwan's legislature (Table 2). China also displays a higher share of women's representation, attributable to gender quota through its Communist Party. On the other hand, women occupy only 10 per cent of the seats in economically advanced Japan. The assessment of women's political representation worldwide also does not appear optimistic, as highlighted by World Economic Forum's Report on Gender Gap 2021. It shows that women represent only 26.1 per cent of 35,500 parliament seats and just 22.6% of over 3,400 ministers worldwide; with 81 countries that never had any women as head of the state, it would take 145 years to achieve gender parity in politics (Global Gender Gap Report, WEF, 2021).

Mapping the Trajectory

The discussions in the preceding section have addressed the crucial questions raised in the research design of this article. However, the specific explanations can be located in the complexities of Asian societies and politics. Gender quota intersects with the party system, institutionalisation, electoral competition, legal enforcement and social attitudes towards women in its effect on shaping the representation of women. The framework of party affiliations often dissuades women from proposing women-centric policies in a male-dominated political system. Many women are found to be giving their seats to men to fulfil party discipline. As men hold decision-making power in parties, women do not want to offend them and endanger their careers. It has been observed that when the party performs poorly, or the male political lead is caught up in a scandalous situation, women may get the leadership opportunity. Women and their issues remain fragile and on the margins in the party with limited funding for women-centric projects. Male legislators' backlash against the increasing numbers of women legislators also acts as a deterrence. In all political parties, across the spectrum of ideologies, women struggle hard to get into the crucial positions, and they hardly get access to top leadership posts. (Kazuki, 2008, Moon, Chun, Kim & Kim, 2008).

Studies reveal that quota alone is insufficient to ensure the gendering of the political space and rarely challenges men's majority dominance of legislatures (Hughes, 2011). The approach of just 'adding women' to the existing structures and processes may not bring substantial changes without factoring in the complete account of the obstacles confronting the women. For example, in Nepal, where women were elected in 40.9 per cent of seats after the 2017 local elections, many of them indicated that they had financial and management challenges and needed more training for political governance. Japanese women are reluctant to run for office due to socially expected gender roles in families (Kage & Tanaka, 2019). Koizumi Junichiro of the Liberal Democratic Party in 2005 and Ozawa Ichiro of the Democratic Party of Japan in 2009 promoted many female candidates for strategic reasons. Though the number of women candidates and MPs in the 2009 election was the highest ever in Japan, they were considered subjects to the party boss, being labelled as "Koizumi's female children" or "the Ozawa girls." (Kubo & Lee, 2017). In South Korea, women beneficiaries of the gender quotas are expected to vote along party lines to pay back the party for the favour (Oh Jin, 2016). Moreover, more than half of female PR members who served between 2008 and 2012 left politics after their term was over, compared to 30 per cent of their male counterparts

(Huang, 2019). In India, women representatives in local self-government elected based on quotas were referred to as 'proxy women', whereas the actual administration was performed by their spouses, colloquially known as *Panchayat Pati*, as in many cases, women fought election from the reserved seat as a substitute for their husbands (Rai & Sharma, 2000). Many women councillors from Pakistan complained that they do not receive invitations to council meetings, and many times they are not even consulted on policy matters (Rai 2005).

The numeric increase of women in politics in China and the presence of women in the highest political positions in Bangladesh have not resulted in women-centric policies producing larger societal gains for women. A diverse group of women legislators who join politics due to quotas may not be keen on pursuing women's issues (Krook, 2010). Even those countries with higher participation, like China, are balanced only at the middle level while not having any women either in the topmost positions because of the 'glass ceiling effect' or more women at the very grassroots due to lack of sufficient initiatives (Zeng, 2014). The women leaders get opportunities primarily for symbolising gender stereotype values of docility, family virtues, moral characters, and portrayal as mothers or sisters of the suffering nation. They are mostly given deputy positions and softer portfolios like women's affairs, family and child affairs, health, education and culture. Also, incidents such as impeachment or charges of abuse of power, as in the case of women leaders like Park Geun-Hye in South Korea and Yingluck Shinawatra in Thailand, respectively, were projected as women's inefficiency in politics, negatively influencing their larger participation.

Conclusion

Based on region-specific studies, this paper illustrates how particularities of a region influence women's political participation and helps understand why women's political engagements have failed to bring any substantial change in Asian societies. Gender analysis of political practices discussed in the paper demonstrates how the domain of politics is shaped by the masculine discourse, denying space and recognition to women by excluding them from the corridors of power. Gender quotas adopted to increase women's representation in Asian countries have produced complex and varied outcomes. Comparative gender analysis requires more studies to compare regions to identify the general trends and specificities underpinning gender exclusions. Bringing such regional gender-based analysis into the centrality will not only democratise comparative politics but will also create spaces for non-Western countries to be part of the larger discourse of the discipline.

Specific reflections from Asian countries show that though quotas can considerably impact women's agency and may catalyse the transformation of politics at the grassroots, participatory exclusion remains the norm for women (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Ahmed, 2020). Even when they participate, their engagements seldom translate into their empowerment. The significant reasons include cultural attitudes, multiple identity structures, patriarchal family norms, socioeconomic status, and religious constructs that have a tremendous impact on gender exclusions in politics and may thwart any effort toward women's political empowerment. These categories mutually reinforce each other and coproduce an overall exclusion of women in politics and society. Therefore, gender quotas and efforts towards gendering political spaces have limited outreach. Hence, to achieve an overall gain in women's status and empowerment in such societies, coupling

these policies with other structural and ideological changes is necessitated. Comparative politics require more gender-specific case studies from different regions that can speak to each other to develop a generalised understanding while maintaining the particularities of regional experiences. However, it remains a challenge to fully incorporate such gender-based analysis and see how it could make the discipline more representative distinctively. In this way, the article suggests that comparative gender mapping of women's political representation can create a better canvas for the narrative of comparative politics as a discipline and politics as it is practised.

References

- Ahmed, N. (2020). *Parliament in South Asia India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*. Routledge.
- Baldez, L. (2010). The Gender Lacuna in Comparative Politics. *Perspective on Politics*, 8(1), 199-205.
- Beckwith, K. (2010). Comparative Politics and Logics of a Comparative Politics of Gender. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(1), 159- 168.
- Burghoorn W., Iwanga, K., Milwertz, C. & Wang, Q. (2008) *Gender Politics in Asia: Women Maneuvering within Dominant Gender Orders*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press.
- Chappell, L. (2010). Comparative Gender and Institutions: Directions For research. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8 (1), 183-189.
- Chappell, L. (2006). Comparing Political Institutions: Revealing the Gendered “Logic of Appropriateness. *Politics and Gender*, 2, 223-235.
- Chattopadhyay, R. & Duflo, E., (2004). Women as Policy Maker: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India. *Econometrica*, 72 (5), 1409-1443.
- Chao, C. & Louisa, H., (2020). *Asian Women Leadership: A cross-national and cross-sector Comparison*. Routledge.
- Chew, P. (2008). “No Fire in the Belly’: Women’s Political Role in Singapore”. In W. Burghoorn et al. (Eds.), *Gender Politics in Asia: Women Maneuvering within Dominant Gender Order* [p. 185-216]. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press.
- Cho, Y., Ghosh, R., Sun, J. Y., & McLean, G. N. (Eds.). (2017). *Current perspectives on Asian women in leadership: A cross-cultural analysis*. Springer International PU.
- Connell, R. (2005). Advancing Gender Reform in large Scale Organisations: A new Approach for Practitioners and Researchers. *Policy and Society*, 24 (4), 5-24.
- Dahlerup, D. & Freidenvall, L., (2005). Quotas as a “Fast Track” to Equal Representation for Women: Why Scandinavia is no longer the model. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(1), 26-48.
- Dahlerup, D. (Ed). (2006). *Women, Quotas, and Politics*. Routledge.
- Derichs, C. & Thompson, M., (2013). *Dynasties and Female Political Leaders in Asia: Gender, Power and Pedigree*. LIT Verlag Munster.
- Eto, M. (2008). “Community Based Movements of Japanese Women: How Mothers infiltrate the Political Sphere From Below”. In W. Lundström-Burghoorn (Ed.), *Gender politics in Asia: Women manoeuvring within dominant gender orders* (pp. 43–67). essay, NIAS Press.
- Fleschenberg & Derichs, C. (2011). *Women and Politics in Asia: A Springboard for Democracy?*. LIT Verlag Munster.
- Folke, O. & Johanna, R. (2016). All the Single Ladies: Job Promotions and the Durability of Marriage. IFN Working Paper No. 1146. Research Institute of Industrial Economics. <https://www.ifn.se/wfiles/wp/wp1146.pdf>.

- Fubing, S. (2006). Gender Inequality in Chinese Politics: An Empirical Analysis of Provincial Elites. *Politics & Gender*, 2, 143–163.
- Huang, C. (2019). Gender Quotas and Women's Increasing Political Competitiveness. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 15 (1), 25–40.
- Hughes, M. (2011). Intersectionality, Quotas and Minority Women's Political Representation Worldwide. *American Political Science Review*, 105 (3), 604–620.
- Hillman, B. (2017). Increasing Women's Parliamentary Representation in Asia and the Pacific: The Indonesian Experience. *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*, 4 (1), 38–49.
- Iwanga, K. (2008). Women and politics in Asia: A Comparative Perspective (Introduction). In I. Kazuki (ed.), *Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia: Obstacle and Challenges*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2016) Sexism, harassment and violence against women Parliamentarians. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>.
- Jahan, R. (1987). Women in South Asian Politics. *Third World Quarterly*. 9(3), 848–870.
- Kage, R., Rosenbluth, F. M. C., & Tanaka, S. (2017). What explains low female political representation? evidence from survey experiments in Japan. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2961748>
- Kashyap, S. G. (2017, September 10). *Why an assam MLA wants feeding room for baby in Assembly*. The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/why-an-assam-mla-wants-feeding-room-for-baby-in-assembly-4836511/>
- Kittilson, M., & Schwintbayer L. (2012). *The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagements and Participation*. Oxford University Press.
- Shin, K.-young. (2016). Women's mobilizations for political representation in patriarchal states: Models from Japan and South Korea. *Gender and Power*, 344–365. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137514165_21
- Kronsell, A. (2005). Gendered practices in institutions of hegemonic masculinity: Reflections from a Feminist Standpoint Theory. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(2), 280–298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740500065170>
- Krook, M. L. (2010). Studying political representation: A comparative-gendered approach. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(1), 233–240. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592709992817>
- Kubo, M., & Lee, A.-R. (2017). Electing women to the Japanese lower house : The impact of the electoral system. *Asian Women*, 33(2), 69–99. <https://doi.org/10.14431/aw.2017.06.33.2.69>
- Kumar, R. (2019). *The history of doing: An illustrated account of movements for women's rights and feminism in India, 1800-1990*. Zuban.
- Park, K.-A. (1999). Political representation and South Korean women. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 58(2), 432–448. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2659403>
- Lovenduski, J. (2005). *Feminizing politics*. Polity.
- Matland, R. E., & Studlar, D. T. (1996). The contagion of women candidates in single-member district and Proportional Representation Electoral Systems: Canada and Norway. *The Journal of Politics*, 58(3), 707–733. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2960439>
- Mobrand, E. (2018). On parties' terms: Gender quota politics in South Korea's mixed electoral system. *Asian Studies Review*, 43(1), 114–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2018.1512554>
- Moon, K., Chun, K. Kim, M & Kim, E. (2008). A Comparative Study of Electoral Gender Quotas in Sweden, Germany, and South Korea: Focusing on the Interplay of the Main Actors in the Processes of the Implementation of Quota Policies. *Asian Women*, 24 (1), 75–100.

- Nelson, B. J., & Caudhuri, N. (1999). *Women and Politics Worldwide*. Oxford University Press.
- Norris, P. (2006). The Impact of Electoral Reform on Women's Representation. *Acta Polit*, 41, 197–213.
- Oh, K. J. (2016). Women's political participation in South Korea and activist organizations. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 22(3), 338–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2016.1205382>
- Park, K.-A. (1999). Political representation and South Korean women. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 58(2), 432–448. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2659403>
- Rai, S. M. (2014). Political performance: A framework for analysing Democratic politics. *Political Studies*, 63(5), 1179–1197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12154>
- Rai, S. M., & Sharma, K. (2000). Democratizing the Indian Parliament: the “Reservation for Women” Debate. In S.M. Rai (ed.), *International Perspectives on gender and democratisation* (pp. 149–165). essay, Macmillan.
- Rai, S.M. (2005). “Reserved Seats in South Asia: A Regional Perspective”. In J. Billington and A. Karam (eds.) *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. IDEA.
- Razavi, S. (2001). Women in contemporary democratization. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 15(1), 201–224.
- Schwindt-Bayer, L. A. (2010). Comparison and Integration: A Path towards a Comparative Politics of Gender.” *Perspective on Politics*, 8(1), 177–182.
- Shim, J. (2021). Gender and Politics in Northeast Asia: Legislative Patterns and Substantive Representation in Korea and Taiwan. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 42(2), 138–155.
- Singh P., & Sharma C., (eds.). *Introduction to Comparative Politics*. Sage.
- Tan, N. (2020). “Women and Politics in East and Southeast Asia”. In S. Maisel (ed.) *Oxford Bibliographies in Political Science*. Oxford University Press.
- Tan, N. (2016). Gender Reforms, Electoral Quotas, and Women's Political Representation in Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore. *Pacific Affairs*, 89(2), 309–323.
- IIAS. (2008). Transnational Flow and the Politics of Dress in Asia. https://www.iias.asia/sites/iias/files/theNewsletter/2019-06/IIAS_NL46_FULL.pdf.
- Thompson, M. (2002). Female Leadership of Democratic Transition in Asia. *Pacific Affairs*, 75(4), 535–555.
- Tremblay, M. (2007). Democracy, representation and women: A Comparative Analysis. *Democratization*, 14 (4), 533–553.
- Tripp, A. M. (2010) Towards a comparative Politics of Gender research in which women matter.” *Perspective on Politics*, 8(1), 191–197.
- Kazuki, I. (ed.). (2008) *Women's political participation and Representation in Asia: Obstacles and Challenges*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.
- Waylen, G., Celis, K., Kantola, J. & Weldon, S.L. (Eds). (2013) *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Waylen, G. (2007) *Engendering Transitions. Women's mobilisation, Institutions and Gender outcomes*. Oxford University Press.
- Weldon, L. S. (2006). The structure of Intersectionality: A Comparative Politics of Gender. *Politics and Gender*, 2(2), 235–248.
- Zeng, B. (2014). Women's Political Participation in China: Improved or Not?. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 15(1), 136–150.