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Why Are Chinese Women Underrepresented in Government: A Comparative Analysis of Women's Political Representation in China and Vietnam

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Abstract

Women's political representation serves as an indicator for measuring governments' commitment to achieving gender equality. This paper aims to investigate the reasons behind China's weak female political representation compared to Vietnam, the world's second-largest economy[1], through comparative analysis. As a socialist country with a Confucian influence[2], the Vietnamese Communist government improved women's political representation during the revolution by establishing effective national institutions for guaranteeing women's rights, implementing gender quotas, and decentralizing power. In contrast, the Chinese government did not implement a similarly effective program, which led to differences in how women have been incorporated into the political system of the two countries during the revolutionary period. Moreover, public opinion in both countries seems to be influenced to varying degrees by public opinions on traditional women's roles, making the impact of public opinion on women's political representation a widely debated topic.

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[1] China Economy Ranking. https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/china
[2] Vietnam is influenced by Confucianism. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam

Introduction

In 1995[3], governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women signed the Beijing Declaration in Beijing, aimed at realizing the human rights of women and girls, and its importance continues to this day. The Beijing Declaration covers a reform agenda in 12 key areas[4], which mentions empowering women to participate in decision-making processes and wield power in all fields of society, as the foundation for achieving equality, development, and peace; it is necessary to involve, implement, and test effective and complementary gender-sensitive policies and guidelines implemented at all levels, with the full participation of women, that are conducive to the empowerment and advancement of women. At that time, governments around the world depicted a better world: a world where every woman and girl could exercise their freedom and realize their rights, such as participation in decision-making, freedom from violence, and equal pay for equal work.

However, 28 years later today, no country is close to fully fulfilling its commitments at that time. According to the latest report from the United Nations[5], it is estimated that achieving full gender equality may take nearly 300 years at the current pace of progress: it will take 286 years to eliminate legal protection gaps and abolish discriminatory laws, 140 years for women to gain equal representation in power and leadership positions in the workplace, and at least 40 years for women to achieve equal representation in national parliaments. Such astonishing report data indicates that gender equality cannot be overemphasized, and global governments still need to keep in mind the commitment made to women in the Beijing Declaration: to enable all girls and women of all ages to develop their full potential, ensure their full and equal participation in building a better world for all, and

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[3] Beijing Declaration. https://www.un.org/zh/documents/treaty/A-CONF-177-20-REV.1
[4] Beijing Declaration goals. https://www.un.org/zh/documents/treaty/A-CONF-177-20-REV.1
[5] United Nations 2022 report. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2022/09/achieving-full-gender-equality-is-still-centuries-away-warns-the-un-in-new-report/

strengthen their role in the development process. Especially in terms of political

representation, women need more space.

As the host of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Chinese government

seems to have prioritized gender equality and projected a positive image, but the political

representation of Chinese women falls short of the desired standard. The guiding ideology,

line and direction of the Communist Party's leadership of the women's movement are clearly

stated in the laws on the women's movement adopted at several sessions of the Second to

Fifth National Congresses of the CCP(Chinese Communist Party). For centuries, however,

political activity in China has been dominated by a handful of powerful male leaders,

resulting in the underrepresentation of women in political office. Although the CCP wields

significant political power in China, women have limited representation in the party

leadership. Men dominate the legislative, executive, and other key decision-making roles in

national, central, and local bodies, resulting in the underrepresentation of women.

Understanding why Chinese women are underrepresented in politics is critical to developing

effective strategies and policies to increase their participation. Although the Chinese

government has implemented a number of policies to promote gender equality and women's

political participation, there is still a significant gender gap in political representation. This

may be related to the Communist Party's political system and Chinese society's expectations

of women's roles. China ranks 102nd[6] on the World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Gender

Gap Index, and China's Communist government has never elected a woman as its top leader.

Vietnam, a socialist country in Asia, ranks 83rd[7] in the Global Gender Gap Index,

which is well above China, the largest economy in Asia. Currently, there are only four

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[6] China Ranking.
https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/in-full/1-2-global-results#:~:text=The%20Global
%20Gender%20Gap%20in%202022%20is%2068.1%25,covered%20in%20both%20the%202021%20and%2020
22%20editions.
[7] Vietnam Ranking.
https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/in-full/1-2-global-results#:~:text=The%20Global
%20Gender%20Gap%20in%202022%20is%2068.1%25,covered%20in%20both%20the%202021%20and%2020
22%20editions.

countries in the world recognized as Marxist-Leninist socialists: China, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam[8]. Vietnam, a Marxist-Leninist, Confucian-influenced socialist country, has the rare distinction of having the highest-ranking female political leader. While Asian countries such as Taiwan and South Korea have had high-ranking female political leaders, these roles functioned under a capitalist system[9]. It is possible that the implementation of Vietnam's gender quota policy[10], which aims to increase women's representation in political institutions, is related to the emergence of top-level female political leaders in the country. Furthermore, the VWU(Vietnam Women's Union)[11] was an influential organization that advocated for women's rights and political representation.

However, despite sharing a similar socialist system, being influenced by Confucianism, and having better economic development, why does China not have more female political leaders than Vietnam? The reasons behind the underrepresentation of women in politics in China can be attributed to the institutional development of the CCP (i.e., selection mechanism of political leaders, implementation of gender protection policies, etc.) and traditional public opinion towards women. Understanding these reasons will help to increase the representation of women in politics in China and improve their political status.

Literature Review

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the discussion on the inadequate political representation of women in China. According to some scholars, the marked disparities between urban and rural China have led to an under-representation of rural inhabitants, particularly women, who constitute the majority of China's population(Zhang, Li, and Xue 2015; Tzeng 2020; Brandt and Turner 2007). Conversely, other scholars have

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[8] Four countries recognized as Socialists.
https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-that-are-considered-socialist.html#:~:text=Countries%20That%20Are%20Considered%20Socialist%20%20%20,Party%20in%20Power%20%2027%20more%20rows%20
[9] Taiwan and South Korea have female presidents.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_the_first_women_holders_of_political_offices_in_Asia#South_Korea
[10] Vietnam gender quota policy. https://vietnam.unfpa.org/en/publications/policy-brief-law-gender-equality
[11] Vietnam Women's Union. http://vwu.vn/

concluded that female participation in politics is also low in urban regions, exemplified by the low proportion of women in the central government(Tian and Li 2022; Howell 2002; Wang 1999). Furthermore, while some scholars claim that an excess of personnel power vested in authoritarian male leaders hinders female involvement in politics(Zeng 2018; Setzler 2019; Svolik 2009; Cheung, Chung, and Lin 1998), others posit that women's reduced interest in political leadership roles stems from the fear of being perceived as powerful women(Howell 2006; Welch 1983; Gao 2003).

According to some Chinese scholars, the literature on women's politics now uncovers the dilemmas encountered by female political actors in both rural and urban areas, which renders political representation challenging for Chinese women. Achieving political leadership equality for women in China is challenging and places rural women at an even greater disadvantage, limiting their participation in policy decisions. Due to China's vast land area, a major portion of its population resides in rural areas, limiting political representation for rural women as men continue to dominate political participation opportunities (Beaver, Hou, and Wang 1995; Zhong 2013; Guo 2007). Rural women are more likely to be unable to become politically represented in the future due to their inability to cross over to male possibilities for political participation. Chinese women's choice of career and political life is thus not truly autonomous, but rather a forced choice. Focusing on grassroots women's political participation can be truly effective in promoting Chinese women's political representation (Zeng 2014; Wang and Dai 2012; Ho and Li 2013; Song 2016).

However, according to other scholars, women's role in politics is not determined by educational attainment or local economic development, Chinese women living in urban areas remain underrepresented in politics, and urban women are unable to occupy significant positions in political activities; for example, women rarely appear in the Politburo Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (Wang 1999; Chen

and Ge 2018). In addition, due to urbanization in China, many rural people choose to work in cities. Due to the lack of relevant regulations and policies, those women who come from rural areas to work in cities are denied the ability to participate politically. Political marginalization deprives them of the right to speak up for female migrant workers and weakens women's ability to reproduce social capital, negatively impacting social development (Wang and Tang 2020). This implies that the lack of political representation of women in China is not related to the location of their lives. Even when rural women come to live in cities, their political representation cannot be improved.

In addition to the arguments made by scholars in the literature suggesting that the rural-urban distinction would lead to insufficient female political representation, it has also been noted that China's authoritarian leaders could exploit their hold over the personnel of regional government leaders to boost the presence of officials in collective forums of political parties, particularly in the economically prosperous regions of China (Sheng 2009). Following the reform and opening up under Xiaoping Deng, the CCP ceased to regard itself as the propagator of the proletarian revolution, instead positioning itself as the authoritative representative of the political community. Such representation had no relation to the commonly understood notion of "democratic" representation since the CCP aimed to act as a mediator of social conflicts by representing both the affluent and the downtrodden (Duan 2019). This implies that mid-level political leaders are cautious in expressing their genuine views, such as initiating policies aimed at augmenting women's representation in politics, and are more inclined to adhere to higher-level political leaders for chances of career progression.

Given that the Chinese government and political scene are still male-dominated, authoritarian leaders prioritize increasing their influence within political parties which often results in senior political positions being occupied by men. This scenario creates a substantial challenge for women to establish a professional identity in politics. The aforementioned

literature suggests that the lack of female political representation in China may also be due to reformist policies, such as the increasing influence of male political leaders and the reduced need for greater political representation, resulting in women's lack of access to senior political management rather than women's unwillingness to serve as political leaders themselves. Conversely, some scholars contend that Chinese women are reluctant to assert their professionalism, primarily related to their gender and adopting specific professional identities that may harbor controversy. The inadequate political representation of Chinese women is primarily due to their insufficient confidence which affects their eligibility as political candidates (Howell, 2006). Women who become more capable professionally are often labeled as "strong women," implying that they lose their femininity. Additionally, some women's values may be readily integrated into this management style (Tian 2013). Chinese women have a belief that they should not display a strong character in both their work and personal lives. Women's behaviors and value beliefs in this context often result in their underrepresentation in leadership roles. Women may also feel uneasy about exhibiting an assertive and authoritative side of themselves, particularly evident in politics. As women, their gender can lead them to perceive their role as subordinates rather than as equals. To achieve adequate representation in politics, women must display a greater level of interest and commitment to participate.

The lack of political representation of Chinese women has been attributed to various reasons by different scholars. This study tries to provide a more robust explanation for the lack of women's political representation in China. Specifically, it examines whether the political leadership mechanism of the Communist Party of China, which has hindered the effective integration of women into the political system at different periods, is responsible for this phenomenon. In addition, it explores the possibility that public opinion on traditional gender roles may have further constrained women's representation. In summary, this research

examines how institutional-building during the revolutionary era has contributed to the inability of women to integrate into the political system in China. Furthermore, it investigates whether public opinion plays a significant role in shaping women's political representation.

Argument

Institutional-Building: China's Political Leadership Mechanism

The lack of representation of women in politics in China, while always a problem, has been an issue that the central government has attempted to address in the past. Historically, the CCP government's policies aimed to increase women's representation. However, over time, institutional changes such as the competitive appointment system and electoral reform have undermined these previously supported guarantees.

Currently, in China, women are not adequately represented in politics, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has not had any female leaders at the top. Nevertheless, the CCP has always emphasized the importance of women's representation in leadership roles. Since its founding, the CCP has had a tradition of gender equality: it has made it a key goal to "abolish all laws that constrain women and to enable women to enjoy equal rights in politics, economy, society, and education" (Shi 1999, 213). Since the beginning, the CCP has recognized that equal rights for women is an urgent goal, and the government has recognized that Chinese women had been oppressed for a long time during the previous feudal period. Consequently, some scholars argue that Chinese women were formerly well-represented in political activities a few decades ago because the CCP implemented gender protection policies for cadre selection (Zhang 2014; Tang 2008; Min 2012). The policy aimed to protect gender equality by mandating a minimum number of female leaders. In the early years of the People's Republic of China, the CCP government had strict guidelines concerning the number of women in leadership positions. The appointment system for the political system facilitated

women's participation in politics to some extent, where they were directly appointed for life by the Chinese leadership (Tang 2011; Li and Wu 2011). The appointment system has given women the opportunity to access senior political leadership. As a result, they have become more active in political work and activism, working towards enhancing political representation for women. However, the CCP's protection of women's political equality and the number of women in leadership positions is temporary. However, when the percentage of female leaders in politics is fixed, it can harm female candidates. Female promotions and elections stop once the mandated minimum percentage is reached, and this negative effect is more pronounced when the minimum percentage is low (Zhong 2014). For example, if the number of female leaders is set at five, the appointment and promotion of female political leaders will stop after the number of female leaders reaches five; especially when the number becomes two or one, the proportion of women among leaders will become a fixed minority, so this so-called "proportional protection" does not last long.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the CCP implemented a system of differential elections and competitive appointments. This policy weakened gender protection measures substantially and resulted in a considerable decline in the proportion of female leaders (Rosen, 1995). The CCP introduced this change in response to its policy of reform and opening up, aimed at introducing a market economy into China. Gender protection regulations on the number of female political leaders became increasingly lax in many places after gender equality began to take hold. This was especially true in an environment that promoted equal competition and where traditional patriarchal culture began to flourish (Tang, 2011). These opponents argue that gender-protection policies are sympathetic to women and that women should not be given leadership positions because of their gender. men. In a market economy, gender-ratio policies are in violation of the principle of fair play. Women who aspire to become political leaders must take exams and interviews alongside men.

However, opponents of gender-protection policies overlook the fact that the re-emergence of traditional patriarchal culture can create barriers to women becoming political leaders. The removal of gender-protective policies has also had a detrimental effect on the number of female political leaders.

Criticism by scholars of CCP's early idea of gender equality can be considered a guise, concealing the dominant position of a patriarchal society. According to some scholars, male leaders of the Communist Party of China deliberately positioned themselves as leading figures in the revolutionary liberation movement by using the rhetoric of gender equality, while relegating the women's movement to a more supportive role(Li 2000). The women's liberation movement has been viewed by some as a slogan for the Communist Party's government establishment, rather than a movement truly aimed at bringing women's status equal to men's in politics, economy, and culture. This is evident from the fact that despite a significant number of female participants, men continue to be the leaders of this movement, and they still hold high-level leadership positions (Zhang 2007). Over time, the CCP gradually adopted marketization as a principle and modified its leadership selection process. Consequently, laws safeguarding women's rights have been compromised and substituted with a system of selection and appointment. The organization designates individuals based on exam scores and ranks them through open competition within this fresh system (Tang 2011; Sun and Li 2017). Despite this framework providing several venues for women to actively engage in politics, they still encounter substantial impediments while striving to ascend to senior leadership positions. Gender disparities are perpetuated within the Communist Party organization as men hold the majority of decision-making power, hindering the advancement of women to higher levels of leadership. During the Communist Party's seizure of power, female political participants were not placed equally in leadership positions but relegated to subordinate support positions. The existence of female political leaders only as symbols of

gender equality in the early stages of the revolution laid a certain tone for the hierarchy of female leaders in the future Communist Party, which retains a promotion system that deprives them of actual decision-making power but serves to demonstrate advanced party ideology.

Public Opinions about The Traditional Role of Women in China

One reason for the weak representation of women in Chinese politics is the political leadership mechanisms of the Chinese government, including institutional-building changes like the competitive appointment system and electoral reform. In Chinese politics, the leadership role of women is often disregarded, and they are perceived more as a label than a genuine political force. The development of this situation may also be associated with public opinions regarding the role of women in Chinese society. Chinese society is strongly influenced by Confucianism, which suggests that Chinese women should adhere to men's ideas, respect them, and primarily focus on the family.

In China, the role of women has traditionally been deeply rooted. Men have typically been considered the primary productive force in society while women are expected to handle household duties and are not necessarily valued for their contributions to society. As previously stated, women are frequently viewed as subordinate to men in Chinese politics, with their status often seen as a reflection of a male-dominated society: this is often done in the name of promoting gender equality (Li and Zhang 1994). When women are promoted to intermediate political leadership positions, it is often to reflect the superficial concept of gender equality held by male authorities, rather than a genuine desire to put women in leadership roles. This is due to the public opinion that women are expected to play in supporting men. For example, male leaders may promote a female subordinate to a leadership position to showcase their supposed contribution to gender equality and enhance their own career prospects, rather than to groom a qualified candidate for a future leadership role. When men witness a woman's excellent work performance, they tend to view her as a supporter

rather than a leader like themselves, due to the belief that women are unable to dedicate as much time to work as men. Ultimately, the primary role of women in China has been to prioritize their family obligations.

The traditional public opinion about Chinese women is more prominently reflected in their lives. The public generally believes that women in China should devote more time to family matters, such as raising children and caring for the elderly(Gao 2012; Bauer et al. 1992; Liu, Dong, and Zheng 2010; Chen and Ge 2018; Deng 1991). Women undertake a significant amount of unpaid household and caregiving work in their families, which is a contributing factor to thousands of women being denied equal opportunities. The traditional definition of women's roles in Chinese society is closely associated with Confucianism. The principle of "husband as the wife"[12] limits the development of women in Chinese society, where women are viewed as assistants to men in work and life, instead of being recognized as important members of society.

This furthermore indicates that traditional Chinese society recognizes a limited role for women in politics and precludes their leadership in political parties primarily composed of men. Prejudice against traditional gender roles in Chinese society is evidenced by the formulation of public policies; specifically, the retirement age for Chinese men is set at 60 years old, while for women, it is reduced to 55 years old. (Feng et al. 2019; Zeng 2011). The belief that men have greater work capacity than women, which leads to women being required to withdraw from the labor market at middle age, is prevalent. According to traditional Chinese social beliefs, men are believed to possess stronger bodies which enables them to work for longer periods, while women are considered to experience weakened energy during middle age. This regulation has a notable impact on women working in politics, given that senior political leaders require a certain period of time in their roles before being eligible

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[12] Confucianism beliefs. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucianism

to contest public office (the "Regulations on the Selection and Appointment of Party and Government Leaders"[13]). In other words, despite possessing strong political leadership skills and decision-making abilities, a female leader may be unable to reach the top leadership position because of approaching retirement age. Male candidates face an advantage in this situation, being promoted at a younger age and having greater opportunities to get elected compared to their female counterparts.

Overall, China's political leadership mechanisms may prevent female political participants from becoming senior political leaders, which means that it will be more difficult for women to occupy more leadership positions in male-dominated politics after gender protection policies are removed, resulting in their lack of representation in politics. At the same time, public opinions of women's traditional roles in China have forced them to be politically marginalized. It is believed that they need to create more value for their families rather than for social progress. I have tried to add the above two points to the discussion on the lack of representation of women in politics in China: the institution-building of the CCP government during the revolutionary period led to the ineffective incorporation in the political system and was accompanied by the public opinions of the traditional role of women in Chinese society.

Research Approach

To better address the lack of political representation of Chinese women, I am trying to find a country that is similar to China's social system and ideology and currently performs better in terms of women's political representation compared to China to find reasons for differences. Vietnam is one of the few Socialist states in the world with a party system and

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[13] Regulations on the Selection and Appointment of Party and Government Leaders.
https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-03/17/content_5374532.htm

believes in Marxism–Leninism. At the same time, Vietnam is also one of the Southeast Asian countries most heavily influenced by Chinese Confucianism.

However, in such a similar situation to China, according to the results of the election of the 15th National Congress deputies and deputies to the people's congresses at all levels from 2021-2026 announced by the Government of Vietnam, the proportion of women deputies to the National Congress is 30.26%[14], and the proportion of women deputies to the people's congresses at all levels is nearly 30%[15], while the total number of women deputies to China's 14th National People's Congress is 26.54%[16]. It is noteworthy that among the latest members of the Central Politburo, Vietnam boasts two female senior national political leaders, whereas the Chinese government does not have any female leaders at this level. Therefore, investigating how Vietnam has made progress in women's political representation over time could be relevant to the study of women's political representation in China.

While Vietnam may not be extensively involved in world affairs, the Vietnamese government is actively engaged in promoting the women's movement, which has roots dating back to the 19th century. The Industrial Revolution marked the beginning of European colonization of Asia. Vietnam's experience of French colonialism in the 19th century brought Western influence and progressive culture, particularly fostering women's access to the political sphere. As a result of attending French schools, some Vietnamese women were introduced to a wide range of topics and materials, such as newspapers and literary works, at a young age(Thai Hi 2018; Thi 1996; Hien 2020). This exposure afforded them early opportunities for political discourse and taught them how to communicate their political opinions through protests and strikes. Vietnamese women experienced constant oppression and exploitation during the period of French colonial rule(Nguyen and Rydstrom 2022). This

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[14] Proportion of women in Vietnam's National Congress. https://en.baucuquochoi.vn/
[15] Proportion of women in Vietnam's People's Congress. https://en.baucuquochoi.vn/
[16] Proportion of women in China's National Congress. http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/c2846/column2.shtml

process has contributed to young Vietnamese women's participation in politics and

recognition that women have a significant role to play in social development beyond their

families. Young Vietnamese women have come to realize the absence of female political

participation thanks to these foreign language books, which motivated them to pursue work in

this field.

Vietnamese women not only focus on the representation of women's rights in society

but also integrate this spirit of resistance into Vietnam's national independence movement. At

the start of the Vietnam War, the government tried to portray women as war victims and those

who had faced difficulties, assigning them tasks of working behind the scenes for male

family members (Pettus 2003). Yet in the early years of the 20th century, Ho Chi Minh, the

Vietnamese political leader, made De-Sinicization one of his political objectives, which

aimed to reduce China's cultural influence on Vietnamese politics (Willmott 1972; Singh

2000). To secure Vietnam's independence, Ho Chi Minh chose to eliminate the Han culture

that had been present in Vietnam for centuries. Specifically, regarding Chinese characters,

culture depends on textual heritage, and if De-Sinicization is not accomplished, Vietnam

would find it hard to prevent the pervasion of Chinese culture. Completing De-Sinicization

has, to some degree, eradicated some of the effects of Confucian culture on Vietnamese

society, in particular, the restructuring of traditional gender roles. In addition, the feminist

movement in Vietnam started early and made certain progress in a specific war environment.

Vietnamese women established the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) in 1930[17] to uphold

women's rights during wartime in Vietnam. The primary objective of the alliance was to

achieve national independence (Turley 2009; Turner and Taylor 2000). The VWU has

emerged as the cornerstone of Vietnam's quest for independence, strengthening the national

consciousness and spirit of women. During the final phases of the war, Vietnamese women

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[17] Vietnam Women;s Union information. http://vwu.vn/

actively participated in guerrilla warfare, impeding their opposition's deployment and providing respite for the large-scale Vietnamese army (Stur 2011). The Vietnam War of Independence heightened society's awareness of women's significance, and women's efforts to fight for feminism garnered them more respect and recognition.

Compared with China, the beginning of the Vietnamese women's movement was not accompanied by the male-dominated political movement, but because Vietnamese women themselves were inspired by the literary works and newspapers brought by the French colonialists, and realized that the rights of women had been oppressed for many years in the past and began to resist. Especially after the Vietnam War of Independence, Ho Chi Minh intentionally removed the Chinese language, Confucianism, and other elements from Vietnam to reduce China's influence on Vietnam(Singh 2009). Although this action is aimed at ensuring the ideological independence of Vietnam, it also lays the foundation for improving the political representation of Vietnamese women and strives to eliminate the influence of Confucianism (male superiority and female inferiority) on society. In addition, the women's movement in Vietnam was carried out under a stable organization. The establishment of the Vietnam Women's Union marked that Vietnamese women began to start the movement for women's rights under effective organizational leadership, and became the backbone of the Vietnam Independence War, including joining the guerrilla ranks to participate in the war in the late war. This also laid the foundation for the political representation of Vietnamese women in the future, as Vietnamese women worked in separate organizations for the independence war, rather than under male leadership.

Besides the earlier start of the women's movement in Vietnam, the government, although also led by the Communist Party, has a different political leadership mechanism compared to China. Vietnam is a one-party state. Though it appears authoritarian, Vietnam's political system is deemed 'more diversified' than China's according to scholars (Hiep 2017).

Vietnamese citizens have broader civil liberties and more dispersed political power. Vietnam's one-party state regime encompasses four components: the Communist Party of Vietnam, the People's Armed Forces, the state bureaucracy (central and local governments), and the Vietnamese Fatherland Front mass organization umbrella (Thayer 2010). Vietnam's political system of "four pillars" is connected to the civil war, as it is a socialist state. Ho Chi Minh led the Vietnamese Communist Party in a fight against the United States and France for Vietnam's reunification. The conflict lasted nearly thirty years, and reunification was achieved in 1975 (Bradley 1999). Despite the reunification, differences persisted between the North and South regions, which led to the establishment of a "four pillars" system aimed at coordinated development of the Vietnamese Communist Party, driven by the development of both regions (Kassim 2021). The "four pillars" political leadership mechanism was reintroduced in Vietnam in 2021. Vietnamese women are more likely to have access to the highest political authority under this political leadership mechanism. Achieving complete consensus is difficult due to the checks and balances among the four top authorities. Therefore, female political leaders have the opportunity to represent the power and perspective completely different from that of male leaders in the highest Political power and propose relevant measures for women's political rights. Even if one party does not recognize women's political power, there will be another party restraining it, which gives women more opportunities to demonstrate their political representation in Vietnam. For example, Đặng Thị Ngọc Thịnh, who was elected as the head of state of Vietnam in 2018, is a political leader from the Vietnam Women's Federation and once served as the vice president of the country. In her work, she constantly emphasizes the importance of ensuring gender equality and empowering women with more opportunities in society. Her election indicates that a single highest authority cannot deny women as the highest political leaders, and to achieve a restraining effect, other authorities will express support for women as the highest political

leaders. Vietnam's decentralization system makes it more difficult for leaders power to enter a stable state(Kassim 2021).

In addition to the history of the women's movement and the decentralization system, the gender quota system is the reason why Vietnamese women have a certain degree of political representation. Before deciding to implement the decentralization system, the Government of Vietnam legislated to insist on the choice of a gender quota system to solve gender political problems. Some scholars believe that the gender quota system of VCP will allow women to gradually enter the power stage while enhancing their specialization and abilities in parliament; Although the National Assembly of Vietnam is a one-party state parliament, it has a long-term gender quota (Joshi and Timothy 2019). In 2015, the Vietnamese Legislative Council updated the election law, which stipulated that the number of female candidates for parliamentary elections should be estimated by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly based on the recommendations of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Vietnam Women's Federation. At least 35% of women are on the official list of candidates for the National Assembly. According to the report jointly issued by the Vietnamese government and the UN Women[18], in December 2020, 40.0% of ministries, ministerial institutions, and government agencies held key leadership positions by women. Among them, female-led ministries account for 38.9%, ministerial-level institutions account for 50%, and government institutions account for 37.5%. These data show that Vietnam's newly established gender quota system has made efforts and achieved some results in terms of female political representation, although it also indicates that more efforts are needed to achieve gender equality as soon as possible and minimize the gender gap in key positions in the political field.

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[18] Gender Statisic in Vietnam 2020 report.
https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/gender%20statisics%202020.pdf

Women were integrated into Vietnamese society as early as 1930 through their involvement in the influential VWU. Women played an active role in the political and military activities of the Communist Party of Vietnam and began to establish their own initiative during the revolutionary period, instead of simply following men's political power. In contrast, during the revolutionary period in China, there was no strong alliance to advocate for women's rights, and the China Women's Union was established in 1949. The work goals of the China Women's Union[19] focus on the importance of educating and guiding women to promote Chinese culture, support and provide family education, and establish strong family traditions, which align with women's family responsibilities. In contrast, the work goals of the VWU[20] prioritize the social responsibility of supporting women's overall development, building a happy Vietnamese family, participating in party building and political system construction, promoting supervision, and proposing social opposition to view women as social protagonists.

Following the Vietnam War of Independence, the Communist Government introduced a gender quota system and decentralized the political leadership structure, providing female politicians an entry point to the central leadership. This enabled Vietnamese women to hold certain positions of authority through the gender quota system. Also, implementing the decentralization system, made it more complicated for top political leaders to have a stronghold on power. In contrast, the CCP government does not have a similar plan. Despite establishing a gender quota system, this policy has not been strictly followed. No decentralized system has been implemented, resulting in an excessive concentration of political power among a few male-dominated political circles or individuals.

Although Vietnam had previously been heavily influenced by Confucianism, Vietnamese women's first notions of gender equality were developed during the French

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[19] Goals of China Women's Union. https://www.women.org.cn/
[20] Goals of VWU. https://vwu.vn/vwu-action-plans

colonial period through foreign-language literature, newspapers, and the like; and the influence of French culture shaped Vietnamese women's willingness to participate in politics in a way that was different from that in China. In the subsequent War of Independence, the actions initiated by Ho Chi Minh continued to reduce the influence of Confucianism on Vietnamese women within their society. In contrast, China has been impacted by Confucianism for millennia, and even after the formation of the Chinese Communist government, the influence of Confucianism on society has not diminished, and it still focuses some family-related roles on women.

Institutional-building differences, such as the strength of effective women's institutions on the level of women's political participation, the adherence to gender quotas, and the decentralization of the highest levels of political power, have had a lasting impact on women's representation in the country's political system. These differences demonstrate that the institutional development of China and Vietnam during the revolutionary period affected women's integration into the political system differently.

Data and Methods

In order to explore the connection between institutional construction in various revolutionary periods and the political representation of women in China. Therefore, I intend to utilize the shifts in the number of women in China's top authority after the introduction of the gender quota system by the CCP government in 1939. In addition, whether public opinions about traditional female roles will affect women's political representation can be determined through a questionnaire survey in WVS.

1. The Political Bureau, also known as the Politburo, is a key decision-making body within the CCP Central Committee. It is responsible for formulating and implementing the party's policies and directives, as well as making decisions on major

issues related to the governance of the country. The Political Bureau consists of a group of senior leaders who hold significant positions within the CCP and the Chinese government. The number of members in the Political Bureau varies but is typically around 20 individuals. https://www.gov.cn/test/2008-09/09/content_1091158_15.htm

2. World Value Survey WVS: https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp

The composition data of the Politburo will be used to investigate the correlation between the number and proportion of female political leaders in different eras and the gender policies of the respective periods. For instance, the CCPB can shed light on the frequency of female political leaders in different periods. The CCP implemented a gender quota system from the establishment of the CCP government until the Reform and Opening Up period when the quota system was replaced by an electoral system. Analyzing the proportion, distribution, and trends of female representatives in the Politburo facilitates a gender analysis of the degree of representation of women in Chinese politics. This analysis expedites an understanding of women's representation and equal participation in political decision-making. According to the latest data, the 20th CCP Politburo has 24 members, none of whom are women. Although the CCP has low gender awareness, this situation is a significant setback for women's representation in Chinese politics. The absence of women's political representation became more apparent after the CCP's failure to reform and open up by eliminating the gender quota system. In 2002, Yi Wu became the first woman to be a member of the Politburo. Since then, only Yandong Liu and Chunlan Sun have become members of the Politburo and maintained women's positions. Before that, during the Mao era, there were two or three women who were members of the Politburo.

On the other hand, the World Values Survey will serve as a supplemental database. This survey covers various nations, including China and Vietnam. This feature allows for a comparative analysis of the underrepresentation of women in politics in these countries and

helps to uncover similarities and differences in their backgrounds. The WVS includes several variables related to political engagement, gender roles, and attitudes toward women's rights. These variables facilitate the investigation of factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics, such as cultural norms, socio-economic environment, and personal beliefs.

Empirical Analysis

During the initial phase of the CCP, to mobilize greater participation from women, women were encouraged to join politics. In 1939, the First Senate passed the Bill for the *Improvement of Women's Political, Economic, and Cultural Status*[21]. This bill emphasized the importance of women's direct participation in the new regime, as it would help to establish women's initiative. Women held positions in the Communist Party not only to tackle their personal life issues but also to contribute to building the country for the war effort. This bill required that 25% of the Senate members at all levels be women[22]. However, women's participation in politics did not see significant improvement after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Particularly after the Reform and Opening Up, there were no female political leaders in the Politburo of the Central Committee. The members of the Politburo of the CPC Central Committee primarily occupy significant positions within national institutions, such as the State Council, important military commissions, the National People's Congress, or party and government organs in provinces and cities. Therefore, these people have entered the power centers of the CCP government and are a reflection of political representation. Thus, statistical analysis of the female members in the Politburo of the Central Committee can serve as an indicator of women's political representation in China.

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[21] Improvement of Women's Political, Economic, and Cultural Status.
http://dfz.shaanxi.gov.cn/sqzlk/xbsxsz/szdyl/zwz/201610/t20161024_693371.html
[22] Proportion of women senate members.
http://dfz.shaanxi.gov.cn/sqzlk/xbsxsz/szdyl/zwz/201610/t20161024_693371.html

The following table shows the number of female members and alternate members of the Politburo since 1939.

Table I. The number of female members and female alternate members of the Politburo after 1939

Year	Session	Number of female members of the Central Politburo	Number of alternate female members	Total number of members of the Politburo(Official, Alternate)
1945	7th	0	0	13
1956	8th	0	0	17, 6
1969	9th	2(Qun Ye, Qing Jiang)	0	21, 4
1973	10th	1(Qing Jiang)	1(Guixian Wu)	21, 4
1977	11th	1(Yingchao Deng)	1(Muhua Chen)	23, 3
1982	12th	1(Yingchao Deng)	1(Muhua Chen)	25, 3
1987	13th	0	0	17, 3
1992	14th	0	0	20, 2
1997	15th	0	1(Yi Wu)	22, 2
2002	16th	1(Yi Wu)	0	24, 1
2007	17th	1(Yandong Liu)	0	25
2012	18th	2(Yandong Liu, Chunlan Sun)	0	25
2017	19th	1(Chunlan Sun)	0	25
2022	20th	0	0	24

Source: Previous leadership institutions of the Central Committee of the Communist
https://www.gov.cn/test/2008-09/09/content_1091158_17.htm

As we can see from the table above, Mao's slogan "Women can hold up half the sky"[23] has not been realized since the Mao Zedong era, the initial stage of the People's Republic of China. The original intent of this slogan was to promote women's ability to perform the same physical labor as men and to work together to build a new socialist China. Despite the introduction of gender equality as a banner of the CCP government, there has been no significant improvement in the political representation of women in China.

It was not until 1969 that two women, Qing Jiang and Qun Ye, were appointed to the ninth Politburo of the Central Committee. As seen in the table above, the fact that both Qing Jiang and Qun Ye were women in the Politburo at the same time was the highest level of political representation for women in China in the following decades. However, Jiang and Ye were the spouses of Zedong Mao and Biao Lin[24]. And both of these male leaders were initial members of the Communist government and had extremely high positions in the Communist government. It is therefore likely that such a situation was due to a female reward for the loyalty of male political leaders and a symbol of the power of male political leaders, rather than for one's own political accomplishments and contributions to society(Powell and Wong 1997). This has resulted in the fact that there were other good female cadres during this period who were not properly trained and most of the women who entered the leadership were not highly educated. Most of the female cadres during this period were young model working women or women associated with senior male political leaders.

Guixian Wu, an alternate member of the 10th Political Bureau of the Central Committee who appears in the table above, was a "national model worker"[25] and was recognized as a representative of the national textile system before entering the political

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[23] Mao's slogan. https://muse.union.edu/aah194-sp22/2022/05/15/women-hold-up-half-the-sky-a-womans-role-during-the-cultural-revolution/

[24] Qing Jiang and Qun Ye background information. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jiang_Qing https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ye_Qun

[25] China National Model worker background information.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Model_worker

arena, eventually becoming China's first female vice-premier. However, Wu became a textile worker in a factory at the age of 13 and had no other higher education. Her entry into the Politburo was most likely based on her status as a workers' representative: during the Cultural Revolution, model workers at the grassroots level could also become leaders of the central government" became a symbol of the CCP government's principle of demonstrating the unity of the people in all spheres of life. This has no obvious benefit for future female cadres in the Politburo(Wu and Ban 2010).

Between the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 (11th term) and 1982 (12th term), the CCP government still had a policy of gender protection, which saw the emergence of Yingchao Deng and Muhua Chen into the Politburo of the Central Committee. Deng entered the CPB as an early participant in the CCP revolution after the death of her spouse Enlai Zhou[26]. Although Deng promoted the liberation of Chinese women during the Chinese Civil War and actively fought for women's rights to join the military and industry, Zhou's status as a leader prevented her from taking up important state positions in her prime. It is worth noting that Muhua Chen, an alternate member of the 12th CCP Committee, made contributions to the political representation of women in China in the 1990s as an early Communist who participated in the revolution.

When the CCP Government decided to reform and open up to the market economy in 1978, it began to adjust the system of selecting cadres for leadership positions, changing it from an appointment system to a competitive system. This change made it more difficult for female cadres to reach the top of the hierarchy and become political leaders. Therefore, the above table shows that the Political Bureau of the Central Committee in the 13th and 14th terms returned to a situation where there were no female leaders. It was not until 1995 that Muhua Chen again proposed a quota system at a meeting of the ACFW, and the new quota

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[26] Yingchao Deng background information. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deng_Yingchao

system stipulated that there should be at least one female cadre in the leadership of party and

government organs at the provincial level and below, aiming to reach two[27]. This may have

contributed significantly to Yi Wu's entry into the Politburo of the Central Committee as an

alternate member in 1997 (15th). Although the new quota system does not apply to the

election of members of the Politburo, the increase in the number of female cadres in other

levels of party and government organizations provides a certain degree of basis for women to

become high-level political leaders.

Thus in the next 16-19 terms, the Politburo of the Central Committee saw at least one

female member, but in the 20th term, it returned to having no women in the Politburo. This

may indicate that the CCP government under Jinping Xi has not really made gender equality

one of its priorities. It can be seen that the CCP government under the gender quota system is

still a single male-dominated government, with women's political representation once again

disappearing.

In general, the political representation of women in China has been affected by the

mechanism of leadership selection. While the gender quota system has had a positive impact

since the Reform and Opening Up, it has not been improving. At the time when the gender

quota system was introduced in 1939, no women were in the Central Committee's Politburo.

Only during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, the wives of male officials were

appointed to the Politburo. Moreover, some women who worked at the grassroots level were

required to enhance the image of the government. Such female leaders may have arisen

because the female role emerged to fulfill the expectations set by male leaders. Following the

Reform and Opening Up, opponents demanded the abolition of the gender quota system, and

women stopped appearing in the CPB after the appointment system was replaced by an

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[27] Muhua Chen Speech at ACFW 1995. Chen, M. A.. "Speech by Madame Chen Muhua at the reception for women from and outside China in celebration of the 86th anniversary of March 8 International Working Womens Day." (1996).

election system. The gender quota system was reintroduced in 1995, enabling women leaders to enter the Politburo. At least one woman appeared in each of the next five Politburo terms. Nevertheless, this trend was disrupted in the twentieth Politburo term, indicating that the CCP government had no plans of adhering to the gender quota system under the electoral system and did not put into practice the policy of gender equality.

Regression Model

An alternative explanation to the institutional account is the public opinion account. To be specific, Chinese and Vietnamese individuals may hold distinct attitudes toward gender roles. As previously mentioned, Confucianism has a varying impact on China and Vietnam, which may result in divergent views on traditional gender roles. Compared to Vietnam, China is more heavily influenced by Confucianism, and Chinese public opinion may exhibit a more family-oriented perspective on the traditional roles of women. To examine whether public opinion regarding gender roles affects female political representation, I linked respondents' answers from the WVS questionnaire to their beliefs on who is responsible for raising preschool children, as well as their views on men's effectiveness as political leaders. If the respondent believes that a preschool child will not suffer with a working mother, it suggests that they hold negative views on men being better political leaders. Indeed, if the respondent feels that children will suffer with working mothers, it suggests that they consider women responsible for childcare, without involving men concurrently. My research goal is to examine whether traditional beliefs will impact my support for political leaders' gender. Thus, I chose Q28 and Q29 as the independent and dependent variables, respectively. The IV in my study is people's perception of the statement 'preschool children suffer when mothers work for compensation'. The DV in my study is people's perception of the statement 'men are more likely to become political leaders than women'. After recoding, the independent and

dependent variables have four possible values each. Respondents use 1 to strongly agree, 2 to agree, 3 to disagree, and 4 to strongly disagree when expressing their opinions.

However, there may be limitations to this survey, and the gender of the respondents may have an impact on the independent and dependent variables. For example, male respondents may perceive preschool children to be more connected to their mothers since birth, with behaviors such as breastfeeding, for example, being less connected to their fathers. In addition to this, other demographic variables will be added as confounders, such as respondents' education and income levels, and referencing the effects of these confounding variables can better test my hypotheses. In order to better compare the difference between the data from China and Vietnam, I extracted the data where the respondents' nationality is China and Vietnam to make a new data subset and present the multiple regression model.

We have now obtained four regression analyses that can be presented in this study: bivariate regression and multivariate regression within the Chinese and Vietnamese datasets. The bivariate regression involves determining whether there is a significant relationship between IV and DV, and quantifying the strength and direction of this relationship; Multivariate regression is used to determine whether there is a significant relationship between IV and DV and other confounding variables, including gender, education level, and income level.

Table II: Bivariate Regression Model for China and Vietnam

	Dependent Variable	
	Men make better political leaders than women do	
	(1)	(2)
	China	Vietnam
Pre-school child suffers with working mother	0.132***(0.018)	0.111***(0.032)
Constant	2.135***(0.043)	2.171***(0.068)
Observations	3,022	1,200
R2	0.019	0.010
Adjusted R2	0.018	0.009
Residual Std. Error	0.742(df = 3020)	0.700(df = 1198)
F Statistic	57.119***(df = 1; 3020)	12.474***(df = 1;1198)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Source: WVS survery. https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp

Table III: Multivariate Regression Model for China and Vietnam

	Dependent Variable	
	Men make better political leaders than women do	
	(1)	(2)
	China	Vietnam
Pre-school child suffers with working mother	0.137***(0.018)	0.129***(0.032)
Gender	0.142***(0.027)	0.217***(0.040)
Education level	0.041**(0.017)	0.078***(0.028)
Income level	-0.029(0.026)	-0.006(0.048)
Constant	1.886***(0.076)	1.664***(0.140)
Observations	2.975	1,200
R2	0.030	0.039
Adjusted R2	0.028	0.036
Residual Std. Error	0.739(df = 2970)	0.690(df = 1195)
F Statistic	22.710***(df = 4; 2970)	12.041***(df = 4; 1195)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Source: WVS survey. https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp

Table II and Table III demonstrate that the bivariate coefficient of IV in Chinese data

is 0.13, whereas the multivariate coefficient of IV is 0.14. The multivariate coefficient of IV

increases after accounting for confounding variables, which may have masked the true effect. Similar to the Chinese data, the Vietnamese data shows a bivariate coefficient of IV at 0.11 and a multivariate coefficient of IV at 0.13. These results suggest that the although impact of confounding variables on IV is slightly greater than that of Chinese data, the difference is not obvious. We cannot infer that public opinion in China and Vietnam has a significant relationship with the traditional roles of women and their political representation.

The bivariate coefficients of 0.13 and 0.11 for the China and Vietnam datasets suggest a moderate positive correlation between these two variables. The multivariate coefficients of 0.14 and 0.13 for the China and Vietnam datasets indicate a stronger positive correlation when controlling for other confounding variables. Since these coefficients are different from zero, they are statistically significant. Furthermore, since the p-value is less than 2.2e-16, it can be concluded that the results are statistically significant in both the bivariate regression of IV (China and Vietnam datasets) and the multivariate regression of IV while controlling for confounding variables with a p-value less than 2.2e-13.

The results indicate that public opinion in China and Vietnam share comparable views on women's family responsibilities and their performance in political leadership. This could be attributed to the effect of Confucianism in China on other countries in Asia, which may still have an impact on Vietnam despite the process of "de-Chinaization" in the country. Thus, there is no evidence to support the hypothesis that the differences in women's representation in China and Vietnam can be explained by the differences in public opinion, as analyzed in the regression above. In simpler terms, public opinion cannot account for the disparity in women's representation between China and Vietnam.

However, it should be noted that after adding gender as a confounding variable, the gender coefficients are larger than those of IV(pre-school children suffer with working mothers) for both China and Vietnam. This suggests that the correlation between this

confounding variable and DV(men make better political leaders than women do) may be stronger than that of IV itself. Therefore, it may be more impactful in influencing DV. In particular, for the data from Vietnam, the coefficient is 0.22, which is higher than that of IV's 0.13 after adding gender as a confounding variable. This observation may indicate that in Vietnam, female respondents hold opinions contrary to the idea that working mothers cause suffering to preschoolers. They also believe women should not be solely responsible for raising their children and instead hold the view that women can be better political leaders. The difference may be due to the presence of a gender quota system in the Vietnamese government's leadership selection mechanism, which leads Vietnamese women to perceive that they have higher chances of becoming political leaders and receiving political training. This may lead to another specific research question with female respondents: whether there is a correlation between Vietnamese women's political representation and public opinions about the political environment in Vietnam. Concluding this research question may help China understand the reasons for the insufficient progress in women's political representation and effectively improve the current situation in women's political representation in China as soon as possible.

Conclusion

According to the above research, institution-building during the revolutionary period led to differences in how women have been incorporated into the political system. This indicates that women's political representation is linked to the national government's actions and underscores the significance of their institution-building efforts in achieving this goal.

The results of this study support a portion of my theory that offers a new part of the debate on the causes of Chinese women's lack of political representation. Previous research has linked the political underrepresentation of Chinese women to factors such as limited awareness of political participation due to the underdeveloped rural economy in China, the

low education level of rural Chinese women, and the appointment power given to male authoritarian leaders. Nevertheless, these reasons concentrate on local initiatives and problems regarding the rural economy, which cannot be solved in the short term. In contrast, this study primarily focuses on the impact of national-level institutional development for gender equality on the political representation of women. For instance, the national government can increase the influence of the women's union and propose appropriate measures to implement a gender quota system. Evidence from Vietnam indicates that government efforts towards institutional development can significantly enhance women's representation in politics, serving as a useful reference point.

However, the results of the study did not support the hypothesis that differences in public opinion between the two countries explain differences in women's political representation. This may be due to the representativeness of the sample in the World Values Survey dataset or to issues with the validity and reliability of the measurement methods used. China and Vietnam had only 3,600 and 1,200 respondents, respectively, which might be considered an insufficient sample size relative to their population size. Furthermore, the questions about public opinion on traditional women's roles could be improved. For example, conducting interviews to understand the differences in attitudes towards working mothers and fathers, rather than discussing working mothers separately. This would improve testing whether public opinion on traditional women's roles affects the representation of women in politics.

In summary, women's political representation is a topic that deserves extended discussion. Improving women's political representation will be an essential way to achieve gender equality in the future.

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