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Women's political participation in the United States after women's suffrage: women's representation in the legislature of the house of representatives and the senate

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ABSTRACT

Historically, women have confronted formidable barriers to political participation, entrenched by patriarchal norms. Despite the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in the United States, which granted women voting rights, substantive representation remains elusive. This study investigates the persistent gender gap in political representation, focusing on the 113th congressional elections. Employing liberal feminist theory and democratic principles, it aims to elucidate the urgency of addressing women's underrepresentation in legislative bodies. Through literature review and quantitative analysis of electoral data, this research seeks to uncover the impact of electoral systems on women's political engagement. Results reveal stark contrasts between countries like the US and Rwanda, emphasizing the critical role of electoral mechanisms in fostering gender parity. By illuminating these disparities, this study underscores the imperative for policy interventions to ensure equitable political participation for women, thereby advancing democratic ideals and societal progress.



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Introduction

The entry of women into politics is part of the great history of human civilization. Patriarchal culture, which is built into the very fabric of human life, is detrimental to women in politics and in various aspects of life. Women experience subordination and marginalization, which makes them fighters for their own freedom. Despite progress, women's political representation remains disproportionately low, hindering the realization of democratic ideals and the full participation of half of the population in decision-making processes. This systemic exclusion perpetuates gender inequalities and undermines the principles of justice and equality.

In the United States (US), the discourse surrounding women's rights and demands began to emerge in the 1950s. However, women's struggles had been discussed long before that year, with US women demanding their rights as early as 1824-1920 (Miller, 2008). In countries that utilize elections for political regeneration, the number of female candidates elected tends to be low, with some countries producing no more than 30% of women (Ondercin & Key, 2020). However, a ranking of countries with female representation in the legislature reveals that the United States itself is not among the top countries for the number of women in the legislature ("Interchange: Women's Suffrage, the Nineteenth Amendment, and the Right to Vote," 2019). The table lists the countries that comprise the top 25 rankings for women's participation in parliament (Burden & Ono, 2021).

This indicates that, despite the United States' status as a pioneer of democracy, women's representation in the country's legislative bodies remains relatively low. The United States was ranked 85th with 18% of seats in the House of Representatives (HoR) and 20% of seats in the Senate (Dowe, 2023a).

In developed regions, women's representation in ministerial positions exceeds 30%, yet none of the regions exceed 30% for women's representation in parliament (Dahlum et al., 2022). However, developed countries such as Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Denmark) have the highest percentage of women in parliament (44%) (Erikson & Josefsson, 2024). Against the backdrop of the 1776 U.S. Declaration of Independence, which asserted the inherent equality of all humans, and based on the principles of that declaration, the July 19 women's convention demanded that the same liberal principles be applied to both women and men. Feminist Elizabeth Cady argued that, in the American Constitution, the words "all people" included women (Feng, 2023). In 1920, the American women's movement, spearheaded by the National Women Suffrage Association, established a framework for women to claim their rights, namely the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution (Prameswari et al., 2023).

While women's representation in the US legislature has increased over time, it has not reached a significant level. Although the United States can be considered the country where feminism originated, the opportunities for women in the United States were not as extensive as those for women in other countries, even in developing nations. Prior to the 111th Congress, which was elected in January 2009, men held 83% of the seats in the United States Congress, with only 17% of the seats occupied by women (Cardo, 2021). In the 112th Congress, which was elected in 2011, only 95 women were elected out of 535 seats in Congress, representing a mere 12% of all seats in the US Congress (Håkansson, 2023).

It is noteworthy that a country where the feminist movement originated and continues to advocate for women's rights in detail does not facilitate women's easier access to government institutions such as the House of Representatives (HoR) or the Senate (Holqi et al., 2024). Rwanda, for instance, has achieved 48.8% female representation in parliament, while the United States has not reached 20% female representation in the 113th Congress during the 2013-2015 period. The United States has established laws pertaining to women's political participation. However, these legal provisions do not ensure an increase in women's political engagement (Dowe, 2023a). The period between the 1950s and the 1970s, commonly referred to as the "golden age" of women in the United States, saw a rise in female activism and a greater utilization of their voting rights in general elections (Saputri et al., 2023).

The political participation of women in the United States originated from the movement carried out by American women to fight for their rights, specifically the right to use their votes in a general election. This movement was known as the women's suffrage movement or the women's rights movement. The inaugural gathering of the women's rights movement was convened by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott on July 19-20, 1848. The meeting resulted in the Declaration of the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls on July 19, 1848 (Sundström & Stockemer, 2022). The meeting yielded a new development that significantly impacted women's political engagement, yet it did not inevitably lead to a surge in women's enthusiasm for exercising their electoral franchise. Following their acquisition of the suffrage, the women's movements experienced a hiatus until the mid-20th century when women once again asserted their rights.

The period from 1848 to 1920 spanned 72 years. In the 1950s, following the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, women's rights movements began to gain momentum once more. However, despite this renewed activism, women in the United States continue to face challenges in achieving equality in political participation. The skepticism surrounding women's abilities to assume leadership roles in political positions persists (Wängnerud, 2009). Despite various efforts to promote women in politics, women continued to be underrepresented in well-paid positions in Congress until the 1970s in the United States. In 1979, for instance, less than 5% of women held seats in the House of Representatives (HoR), and only about 10% occupied state legislative seats across all states. This persistent underrepresentation highlights a significant gap in gender equality and political participation, both in the United States and globally. In response to this gap, some countries, including Indonesia and several African countries, enacted affirmative action policies to provide women with more opportunities.

Furthermore, India employs a quota system for women in the Senate, a practice also observed in Europe, where 40% of women are permitted to occupy senior roles in companies. Despite these measures, challenges persist in achieving gender parity in political leadership roles worldwide. Therefore, this research aims to explore the effectiveness of affirmative action policies and quota systems in promoting women's participation in politics and to identify potential barriers and strategies for increasing women's representation in political institutions. Through a comprehensive analysis of global practices and their outcomes, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality and political empowerment.

Method

The methodology employed in this research is descriptive research. Descriptive research is a type of research that provides a detailed and comprehensive account of a situation without any intervention or manipulation of the object under study. In addition to descriptive research, this study employs qualitative research, which is based on phenomena that have occurred. This research relies on library research, specifically sources of books that support and recognize the validity of the data. These sources include newspapers and journals related to the development of gender equality in the United States and its relationship to women's political participation in Congress. Despite conducting a comprehensive literature analysis, the author encountered several challenges in meeting the needs of references in the library. To address these challenges, the author sought to supplement the library's resources by identifying additional sources, including online books, articles, journals, data, news, and information pertinent to the research topic. These sources were obtained from official websites, such as those of international institutions, book download sites, and electronic newspapers. However, it is important to note that the author still performed the necessary data validation and sorting to ensure the reliability of the data obtained.

Results and Discussions

Authors	Title	Method	Result
Henry B Mayo in Abidin & Kurnia (2022)	Implementasi Nilai-Nilai Demokrasi dalam Pemilihan Kepala Desa di Kabupaten Bandung Barat	Literature Review	A democratic country is founded upon a number of values, one of which is the organization of a change of leaders. To conduct an election, each country employs a distinct methodology to reach the votes of its citizens
KAM, C., BERTELLI, A. M., & HELD, A. (2020)	The Electoral System, the Party System and Accountability in Parliamentary Government. American Political Science Review	Literature Review	Electoral accountability requires that voters have the ability to constrain the incumbent government's policy-making power. We express the necessary conditions for this claim as an accountability identity in which the electoral system and the party system interact to shape the accountability of parliamentary governments. Data from 400 parliamentary elections between 1948 and 2012 show that electoral accountability is contingent on the party system's bipolarity, for example, with parties arrayed in two distinct blocs. Proportional electoral systems achieve accountability as well as majoritarian ones when bipolarity is strong but not when it is weak. This is because bipolarity decreases the number of connected coalitions that incumbent parties can join to preserve their policy-making power. Our results underscore the

Authors	Title	Method	Result
			limitations that party systems place on electoral reform and the benefits that bipolarity offers for clarifying voters' choices and intensifying electoral competition
Tripp, A. M. (2023).	War, Revolution, and the Expansion of Women's Political Representation. Politics & Gender.	Literature Review	During these critical junctures, women's rights activists gained opportunities to advance their demands. The context of changing international gender norms also influenced these moments. I consider two key moments in the worldwide expansion of political citizenship: the struggle for women's suffrage and the struggle to expand women's representation in local and national representative bodies.
Dowe, P. K. F. (2023)	The Radical Imagination of Black Women	Literature Review	Political science's approach to ambition negates and disregards mechanisms beyond voting that Black women often engage in, such as doing political work through community and civic organizations. That data provided from interviews reveal the complex dynamics that contribute to the nuanced process that Black women emerge as candidates and engage as politicians.
Delahaye, C., & Ramdani, F. (2022)	Introduction: The Complex and Reciprocal Relations between Suffrage and Other Forms of Activism. Transatlantica	Literature Review	This issue will thus focus on the mobilization for enfranchisement in the United States in the manner it was and still is related to questions of racial justice, the labor movement, and the fight for other economic, social, political, and reproductive rights for women and other minorities. By including gender, race, class, geographical, and cultural perspectives to the long history of the vote, the articles in this thematic dossier offer new narratives to the complex and

Authors	Title	Method	Result
			reciprocal connections between the key grassroots movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries
Kannabiran, K. (2024)	Political Reservation for Women: The (Un)making and Futures of the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023	Literature Review	This context is examined through a close reading of parliamentary debates and reports of parliamentary committees in 1996–1997 and 2009–2010 and a brief glimpse at the other backward classes and Muslim feminist engagements within larger movements for equal citizenship.
Howard, N. O., & Owens, M. (2022).	Organizing Staff in the U.S. Senate: The Priority of Individualism in Resource Allocation. Congress & the Presidency	Literature Review	Results of a time series model show that increasing allocations for a staff area actually promotes greater allocations for other areas rather than undermining them, and that changes in membership and eras shape how senators collectively choose to allocate staff resources
Bos, A. L., Holman, M. R., Greenlee, J. S., Oxley, Z. M., & Lay, J. C. (2020)	100 Years of Suffrage and Girls Still Struggle to Find their “Fit” in Politics. PS: Political Science & Politics	Literature Review	This is a pressing issue because children’s perceptions are likely to influence their participation as adults. This article explores whether and how girls and boys differently view politics and their role in it. We report survey data from more than 1,600 children ages 6 to 12 to explore basic gender gaps in political interest and ambition. We argue that these results may reveal the roots of a larger problem: 100 years after women gained suffrage, girls still express less interest and enthusiasm than boys for political life and political office.
Clayton, A., O’Brien, D. Z., & Piscopo, J. M. (2024)	Founding Narratives and Men’s Political Ambition: Experimental Evidence from US Civics Lessons. British Journal of Political Science	Literature Review	Men who watched a video featuring the accomplishments of the Founding Fathers reported significantly more political ambition than men assigned to the control group. Additional studies indicate

Authors	Title	Method	Result
			that the effects are specific to the Founding Fathers (as compared to early American statesmen). Men are also more likely than women to identify the Founding Fathers as inspiring figures and to feel pride when considering them. Our findings suggest how history is told contributes to men's persistent political overrepresentation.

Henry B. Mayo in Abidin & Kurnia (2022) posited that a democratic country is founded upon a number of values, one of which is the organization of a change of leaders. To conduct an election, each country employs a distinct methodology to reach the votes of its citizens. This method is known as the Election System. Every democratic country has its own system for organizing the election of legislative candidates or the election of the president and vice president. This system is referred to as the Election System. An electoral system is a method for organizing and enabling citizens to elect representatives among themselves. Andrew Reynolds defines the electoral system as a means by which the people can participate in the election process. It is a system of organization that is used in a country to determine the procedures for organizing and determining the results of election winners. In essence, it is a mechanism for selecting decision-makers when the community has become too large for every citizen to be involved in every decision that affects the community. In another definition, an electoral system is a mechanism for selecting decision-makers when the community has become too large for every citizen to be involved in every decision that affects the community. Electoral systems are the methods by which votes are generated from elections and translated into seats won in parliament by parties and candidates.

As important as it is to know about electoral systems, there are several reasons why a country chooses one of the many electoral systems of its choice, depending on its function and benefits to the country. At the most fundamental level, electoral systems serve to translate votes cast in general elections into seats won by political parties and candidates. In the study "The Electoral System, the Party System and Accountability in Parliamentary Government" by (KAM et al., 2020), the relationship between electoral systems, party systems, and the accountability of parliamentary governments is meticulously examined. The authors argue that electoral accountability hinges on the ability of voters to constrain the policy-making power of incumbent governments. This article elucidates the necessary conditions for this form of accountability, framing it within an "accountability identity" where the electoral system and the party system interact to influence the level of accountability in parliamentary governance.

Electoral accountability refers to the capacity of voters to hold incumbent governments responsible for their actions and policy decisions. In a democratic context, this accountability is essential as it ensures that governments remain responsive to the electorate's preferences and needs. Kam et al. argue that for electoral accountability to be effective, voters must be able to restrict the policy-making power of the ruling parties, thereby preventing them from acting solely in their self-interest. The study by Kam, Bertelli, and Held offers valuable insights into the complex relationship between electoral systems, party systems, and electoral accountability in parliamentary governments. By demonstrating that the effectiveness of electoral systems in ensuring accountability is contingent on the bipolarity of the party system, the authors underscore the importance of a holistic approach to electoral reform. Strengthening party system bipolarity can clarify voter choices and intensify electoral competition, thereby enhancing the overall accountability of parliamentary governments.

In her 2023 study "War, Revolution, and the Expansion of Women's Political Representation" published in *Politics & Gender*, (Tripp, 2023) explores the critical junctures that have allowed women's rights activists to push for greater political representation. The study emphasizes the significance of changing international gender norms and their impact on pivotal moments in the expansion of women's political rights. Two key moments are highlighted: the struggle for women's suffrage and the ongoing efforts to enhance women's representation in local and national representative bodies. The struggle for women's suffrage marked a significant turning point in the fight for gender equality. Gaining the right to vote was not only a victory for women's rights but also a crucial step towards broader political representation. Tripp's research indicates that these gains were often made

during periods of upheaval, such as wars and revolutions, which created opportunities for activists to advance their demands.

Majoritarian systems tend to entrench existing power dynamics, while proportional representation systems, particularly when combined with gender quotas, have proven more effective in promoting women's political representation. The ongoing struggle for gender equality in political representation underscores the importance of supportive electoral systems and the influence of global gender norms in shaping national policies. P. K. F. Dowe explores the multifaceted ways Black women engage in political work beyond traditional voting mechanisms. This study delves into the unique dynamics and challenges faced by Black women in their journey to becoming candidates and politicians, emphasizing the importance of community and civic organizations in their political activities (Dowe, 2023b). Dowe's research highlights that the traditional political science approach to ambition often overlooks the significant roles that Black women play in community and civic organizations. These roles are crucial for their political engagement and development as candidates. Black women frequently use these platforms to address social issues, mobilize communities, and build networks that support their political ambitions.

P. K. F. Dowe's study "The Radical Imagination of Black Women" underscores the importance of looking beyond traditional voting mechanisms to understand the full spectrum of political engagement by Black women. The correlation between electoral systems and women's suffrage is influenced by broader social dynamics, including the vital role of community and civic organizations. Majoritarian systems often present significant challenges for women, particularly Black women, while proportional representation systems offer a more inclusive framework for political representation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering a more equitable and representative political landscape. In their 2022 study "Introduction: The Complex and Reciprocal Relations between Suffrage and Other Forms of Activism" published in *Transatlantica*, C. Delahaye and F. Ramdani examine the intricate connections between women's suffrage and various forms of activism in the United States. This study sheds light on how different electoral systems and legislative bodies have influenced the fight for women's suffrage and their subsequent political representation in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate.

The struggle for women's suffrage in the United States was significantly shaped by the country's electoral system. The U.S. uses a majoritarian electoral system, specifically first-past-the-post, for both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This system tends to favor larger, established parties and can create barriers for minority groups, including women, trying to gain political representation. The U.S. House of Representatives, with its single-member districts and majoritarian electoral framework, has historically posed challenges for women seeking political office. This system often reinforces existing power structures, making it difficult for women to break through the male-dominated political landscape. However, over the decades, activism and changing social norms have led to a gradual increase in the number of women elected to the House. Delahaye and Ramdani's study highlights the intricate relationship between electoral systems, legislative bodies, and women's suffrage in the United States. The majoritarian electoral system of the U.S. presents challenges for women's political representation in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. However, persistent activism and changing social norms have gradually improved women's representation. Understanding this complex interplay is essential for continuing to advance gender equality in U.S. politics. (Delahaye & Ramdani, 2022).

In her 2024 study "Political Reservation for Women: The (Un)making and Futures of the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023," K. Kannabiran explores the significant impact of electoral systems on women's suffrage and political representation in the United States, particularly focusing on the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate. This study sheds light on how structural changes and political reservations can influence the inclusion of women in these legislative bodies. The fight for women's suffrage in the United States was a landmark achievement that significantly transformed the political landscape. However, the electoral system in place plays a crucial role in shaping the extent of women's political representation. The U.S. employs a majoritarian electoral system, specifically first-past-the-post, for both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This system tends to favor larger, established parties and can create barriers for minority groups, including women, in gaining political representation.

The House of Representatives, with its single-member districts and majoritarian electoral system, has historically presented challenges for women seeking political office. This structure often reinforces existing power dynamics, making it difficult for women to penetrate the male-dominated political arena. Nonetheless, through persistent activism and evolving social norms, the number of women elected to the House has seen a steady increase over the years. K. Kannabiran's study underscores the significant correlation between electoral systems, legislative bodies, and women's suffrage in the United States. The majoritarian electoral system presents challenges for women's political representation in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. However,

political reservations, such as those introduced by the 106th Amendment, hold the potential to significantly enhance women's inclusion in these legislative bodies. Continued activism and advocacy remain essential in driving progress towards gender equality in U.S. politics. (Kannabiran, 2024)

The struggle for women's suffrage in the United States culminated in the 19th Amendment in 1920, granting women the right to vote. However, the electoral system in place continues to play a critical role in shaping women's political representation. The U.S. employs a majoritarian electoral system, specifically first-past-the-post, for both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This system tends to favor larger, established parties and often creates barriers for minority groups, including women, seeking political office. The House of Representatives operates with single-member districts and a majoritarian electoral system. This structure can reinforce existing power dynamics, making it challenging for women to gain representation. Despite these challenges, there has been a gradual increase in the number of women elected to the House, driven by social movements and advocacy for gender equality.

Activism and social movements have been essential in advancing women's suffrage and political representation. The women's suffrage movement laid the groundwork for broader political participation, and contemporary movements continue to advocate for inclusive practices and policies. These efforts are vital in challenging existing power structures and promoting reforms that support women's political engagement. (Howard & Owens, 2022). This study examines how electoral systems and the structures of the House of Representatives and the Senate impact women's political participation and representation, even a century after gaining the right to vote. The passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 was a pivotal moment in U.S. history, granting women the right to vote. However, the type of electoral system used significantly influences women's political representation. The U.S. uses a majoritarian electoral system, specifically first-past-the-post, for both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This system tends to favor established, larger parties and creates barriers for minority groups, including women, to gain political office.

The House of Representatives, characterized by single-member districts and a majoritarian electoral framework, has historically posed significant challenges for women seeking office. This system often reinforces existing power structures, making it harder for women to enter the political arena. Despite these obstacles, there has been a gradual increase in the number of women elected to the House due to persistent advocacy and evolving social norms. Bos et al. highlight that even after 100 years of women's suffrage, young girls and women still struggle to find their "fit" in politics. Societal expectations and gender norms play a significant role in shaping perceptions of political suitability and ambition. These perceptions are influenced by the electoral system and the broader political environment, which often marginalizes women's political aspirations. (Bos et al., 2020). In their 2024 article "Founding Narratives and Men's Political Ambition: Experimental Evidence from US Civics Lessons" published in the *British Journal of Political Science*, A. Clayton, D. Z. O'Brien, and J. M. Piscopo explore how historical narratives influence political ambition. Their findings provide insight into the broader dynamics of how electoral systems and legislative structures impact women's suffrage and political representation in the United States, particularly within the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate.

The ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, which granted women the right to vote, was a monumental step toward gender equality in the United States. However, the design of electoral systems plays a critical role in shaping the extent to which women can translate their voting rights into political representation. The U.S. employs a majoritarian electoral system, specifically first-past-the-post, for both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This system tends to favor established, larger parties and can pose significant barriers to women and other minority groups seeking political office. The Senate, with its structure of two seats per state and statewide elections, also follows a majoritarian system. Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo's study suggests that this system presents similar challenges to women's representation as seen in the House. However, women have made significant strides in the Senate, often through the support of strong grassroots movements and evolving political landscapes. Despite these gains, women continue to be underrepresented in the Senate.

Conclusions

Patriarchal culture marginalizes women, disadvantaging them in various societal aspects, including politics. In the U.S., women strive for emancipation from discrimination, despite the Declaration of Independence affirming freedom for all. The Women's Suffrage movement, which sought women's right to vote, culminated in the 19th Amendment in 1920. Over time, women entered politics, with Jeannette Rankin becoming the first female House member. Despite these advances, increasing women's legislative participation remains challenging due to lingering patriarchal attitudes and structural barriers. The U.S. ranks low in women's political representation, with only 17% female legislators, compared to higher percentages in countries like Rwanda and South Africa. The U.S. uses a plurality electoral system, which hinders women's legislative success compared to

proportional systems that often employ quotas to boost female representation. This electoral structure emphasizes individual candidate success in districts, disadvantaging women. Consequently, the U.S., despite its historical role in advancing women's political rights, struggles to achieve higher levels of female political representation.

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