

# ECONOMIC UNDERPINNINGS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WESTERN AND EASTERN EUROPE

SHUMAILA SAEED

PHD SCHOLAR, DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, GOVERNMENT COLLEGE UNIVERSITY  
FAISALABAD PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

DR. BILAL BIN LIAQAT

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR (OPS), DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, GOVERNMENT COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY FAISALABAD PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

DR. GHULAM MUSTAFA

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, GOVERNMENT COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY FAISALABAD PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

Correspondence: [bilalbinliaqat@gcuf.edu.pk](mailto:bilalbinliaqat@gcuf.edu.pk)

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## Abstract

Women's political participation is a key indicator of democratic resilience and gender equality in Europe, yet significant disparities persist between Eastern and Western regions. The purpose of this comparative research work is to discover the role of economic indicators in women's political representation, focusing on the research question of how the economic environment has been influencing women's political participation in Western and Eastern Europe. While participating in politics, women have undergone various evolutionary phases that are directly influenced by political, social, and economic factors. The economic environment is considered the key aspect in shaping women's political participation. The economy is the main key to providing women with access to the job market, education opportunities, health facilities, and political participation across Europe. But the economic factors have different impacts on both regions, such as in the West, the wealthiest countries with a developed economic structure support women's political participation via social safety net provision. In contrast, Eastern Europe's economic transitions have produced unique constraints and possibilities, influencing women's political engagement through instability and evolving policy frameworks. This study compares how GDP, social-welfare policies, and unemployment rates shape women's paths to political involvement in the two regions, and examines how economic advancement in Western Europe contrasts with the challenges and opportunities of post-communist transitions in Eastern Europe.

**Keywords:** Political participation, economic development, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Feminism, Socialist regimes, Capitalism

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## INTRODUCTION

The connection between women's political engagement and the economy has drawn a lot of attention and debate in recent decades. Researchers have attempted to comprehend the intricate relationship between economic factors and women's political participation as women's involvement in the formal and informal economies has grown throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, and Europe. (Bonilla, 2009). Women's political participation is still considered a key factor of democratic equity. The persistent gender inequality undermines the unfinished target of global gender-based justice. Women hold half of the world's population and hold only 27.2% of seats in parliaments across the world (UN Women, 2025). This dynamic is greatly influenced by economic factors and policies according to resource mobilization theory; having access to jobs, education, and financial independence enables people to participate in politics. (John D. McCarthy, 1977).

According to feminist political theory, which criticizes the capitalist system is responsible for these disparities. Because it constrains women in low level income and secondary sectors of public sphere. World Bank claims that if women labor participation in low-income areas is 50% then the wage gap will surpass 25%. While in Western and Scandinavian countries, the welfare system is strong and female representation is also 45-50% (Group, 2025).

Europe has been praised for its economic advancement and gender equality and norms, but trends exhibit that there are regional differences. In 2024, the women's ratio was 33.4% in the European Union parliament (Euro Stat, 2025). This number is quite higher than global average which is result of decades long legislations and laws, quota system in many states. But the voter turnout is different on gender grounds. Due to the economic prosperity in urban areas and less involvement in rural and immigrant population the women turnout was 40.2% in EU election larger than men (Matthias Buttner, 2024). EU stand 70/100 on the gender equality index, and the labor participation was also improve up to 74.2% (EIGE, 2024) and the gender pay gap remain 12%.

This also highlights the Europeans' dual perspective on gender grounds, but it also includes the historical legacy of socialism and economic disparity, which led to the unequal distribution of power (Yanatma, 2025). This regional division can be traced back to the historical political representation of women. In post WWII era of reconstruction of western Europe brought welfare state system known as Nordic Model. It was started in 1950s with social and democratic programs in Sweden which help in rise of women labor participation 60-70% till 1970s (Irwin, 2019). The women seats in parliaments had increased from 10-15% from 1960s to 2000s in wake of second wave of feminism during that time period. In which they demanded equal pay rights and maternity leaves, for instance the UK's Equal Pay Act was introduced in 1970 (Sonia Palmieri, 2022).

The communist regimes in Eastern Europe, influenced by the USSR from the 1940s-80s, they had introduced gender quotas, childcare policies, which ultimately led higher number of women in parliament, up to 30-40%. In Eastern Germany, women's labor force stood at 80% but the 1990s uprisings and liberal transformation ended the welfare and safety net systems. Women's unemployment was raised and wage-gap reached 19% higher from men (OECD, 2025). In early 2000s EU expansion of welfare measures brought changes and increased the representation of women 8%. The economic relationships are framed by this historical division, which also exhibits in today's politics. There is a huge difference in both regions political representation of women. In Germany 35.7% and Nordic powers like Sweden 45% and 36.4% averages in parliaments (IPU Paraline, 2025). The social spend expenditure around about 27.9% of total GDP (European Commission, 2025). Sweden has also initiated the parental leave of 480 days to accommodate the women to balance their work and political life (Info Nordic, 2025). The country's female labour participation is also significant about 73.6% (Statistics Sweden, 2025). On the other hand, the Eastern European countries are far behind Hungary 15.13% and Poland stand 31.30% with total representation of 25.3% in parliaments (IPU Paraline, 2025). Its total GDP is of \$45,570 PPP and its welfare spending is 18.2%. Whereas the pay gaps is 14.8%, and labor participation stands 52.1%.

The role of women in politics has evolved over the past century, influenced by various factors like politics, socio-economic and culture. Women's political participation is essential part of democratic governance and gender equality globally. Despite the substantial progress and commitments in promoting women's political participation a significant gap persist between Eastern and Western European countries. The economic disparities in both regions may influence their political participation differently. Eastern and Western region have distinct economic profiles and structure designed by historical, socio-cultural and geopolitical factors. The economic aspects such as income equality, access to basic education, healthcare facilities and social safety nets play a crucial role in shaping women's political engagement, influencing their ability to participate, to contest election and to hold the public offices. The purpose of comparative analysis is to explore how the economic environment affects women's political participation.

In late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century both regions have gone through divergent political and economic transformations. Western Europe has embraced the economic advancement, democracy, liberal reforms and institutions that assist women's political empowerment. But Eastern countries were part of the socialist bloc, which hindered their progress and the political transformation after the demise of communism in 1991, consequently led to political unrest and economic instability. It directly influenced the women political representation and economic progress. The research explores the link between economic factors and women political participation by comparing two regions. The comparative analysis is mandatory to know how western Europe encounter the economic influence over women's political representation (Thomas, 2017).

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe opened up new avenues for widespread political participation. Women saw democratization as a chance to increase gender equality in all areas of life, in addition to new opportunities for political engagement. The legacy of communist gender relations made it difficult for women in newly democratic Eastern Europe to increase their representation. Women did had access to education and employment options that could have laid the groundwork for their representation because of the goal to increase the number of women in the workforce. On the whole, the study on women's substantive representation in Eastern Europe is very limited. The woman's political representation is directly influenced by socio-cultural and economic factors in both regions of Europe. In Eastern Europe, where limited economic opportunities and low GDP per capita income hinder women's political participation, and reduced economic resources and standard of living limit women's access to basic education, healthcare, and political engagement. They are often relegated to low-paying jobs abs sectors, and weaker social safety nets and partial access to childcare support make it harder for women to balance work and family responsibility, limited political representation (Booth, 2003). The women's political representation in Western Europe is larger as

compared to Eastern Europe. The European Union's Gender Equality Index discloses significant gaps in economic participation and opportunity between Europe. The women's labor market participation and education levels are strongly correlated with their political engagement. The current literature shows how the various economic policies and factors like GDP per capita, education, social safety net policies, and unemployment impact the women's political representation (Hughes, 2017). The findings show a greater gender gap in political activism, with women significantly less likely to participate than men, in Eastern Europe compared to Western Europe, which is consistent with theories on modernization and the re-traditionalization that took place in Eastern Europe following the Velvet Revolution (Coffe, 2013). While there is no gender difference in political participation among Western European people, women in Eastern Europe are far more likely than their male counterparts to participate in electoral politics. Gender disparities are generally less among younger generations in both Western and Eastern Europe. However, there is a trend where women and men participate in electoral politics to a smaller degree than their former generation.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research methodology describes various techniques and procedures used to identify and examine, and analyze information regarding a specific research topic. The process by which a researcher also designs his study by so, he can get his objectives applying the selected research methods or techniques (Johnston, 2017). Data related to the topic was largely collected from secondary sources like journal articles, research reports, books, newspapers, dissertations and official records etc. The qualitative method employed to analyze the discourses, which is most suitable approach to met the goals of this study. Existing literature indicates the importance of economic factors such as GDP, social-welfare policies and unemployment rate in influencing women's political participation. The aim of the research has to fulfilled this gap through investigating of how economic factors impact women's political participation. The major differences in their economic system and policies and more importantly the intersectionality of economic indicators with employment, education and social policies in shaping woman's political participation. The main area of this research is to explore the role of economy in women's political representation in both regions. The different economic factors which have impact their engagement in political process which is rooted in historical, political and cultural grounds.

The theory of feminism of international relations was given by Cynthia Enloe will be used to complete this research work. This framework will explore how gender dynamics, power politics and relations, socio-cultural norms and economy form women's experiences in political context at global level. It can give insights into the structural barriers, obstacles and opportunities for women in European politics. Runyan argues that power is being distributed on the gender basis in economic, political and social setup in which stereotype male leadership and experience is practiced. This forms systematically and institutionalized inequalities at the national and international levels. (Runyan, 2014). In works like *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Enloe investigates the various methods in which militarized societies, economies, and international politics depend heavily on the labor, bodies, and roles of women. She argues that the comprehend global political systems, we need to go beyond state leaders and high politics to the frequently hidden and overlooked accomplishments of women (Enloe, 1989). Her frameworks set stage for the researchers and socio-political activist to critically analysed the role of gender, politics and power. She noted that women's experiences are not just a normal issue rather a foundation to understand the international power politics. The gender-based military and capitalism have been manipulating the women in different roles like factory workers to gender-base violence and military bases to war zone. Further her work critically discovers how feminist theory in International relations can shed light on the nodes between gender relations and political economy. It suggests insight into how economic transitions in post-communist Europe, have impacted women's economic and political roles (R.I.S, 2001). Another scholar's work explores how feminist perceptions in International relations offer broader perspectives into the political participation of women. Which examining the means of political transitions effect gender relations with in post-communist European countries (Peterson, 2004). This theory gives comprehensive framework for understanding the role of the economy in forming women's political representation Europe. This theory also explores the various ways in which both region economic environment and capitalism led institutions undermine their political activism by investigating the gender-based power politics, economic role and state's policies. According to the theory, political representation is directed by both one's aspirations and the political and economic structures that either facilitate or obstruct women's access to authoritative positions.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to the literature, women's political participation in European nations is significantly influenced by economic circumstances. Increased female political participation is a result of advanced social policies, gender equality in the workforce, and higher economic development. However, economic disparities, such as wage inequality and discrimination in the workplace, might make it more difficult for women to participate in politics. Furthermore, depending on the larger socioeconomic environment, women's political participation may rise or fall during economic downturns. The existing literature has explored the intersection of economics and gender in political participation. Coffe's study of women's political participation in economics perspective is based on several important theoretical foundations that highlight interactions between economic situations, resources and gender dynamics. Resource mobilization theory argues that access to socioeconomic resources such income, education and employment that allow individuals, particularly women, to overcome fences to participation, contributes to political participation. This theory suggests that differences in resource distribution can explain differences in female political participation, depending on the region (Hilde Coffe, 2010). Women are more likely to vote and engage in private activism like organizational work, meanwhile men are more vigorous in collective actions, contacts, party memberships and showing gender differences in political participation

By emphasizing how capitalist structures and labor markets sustain gender inequality and have an impact on political activity, feminist political economy offers a critical perspective on how gender believes in itself in economic structure and power relations. According to scientists in this tradition, women's roles in the private and social spheres are primarily influenced by market dynamics and economic policy. This idea has been applied in European contexts to examine how labor laws and welfare states influence women's political prospects (Maria Stern, 2022). Feminist and gender interventions in international political economy (IPE) considers the essential role that gender plays in the shaping of global political economy, and distinguishes between feminism, which includes a broader analysis beyond women's experiences, and feminist IPE, which explicitly identifies gender IPE.

Feminist theory emphasizes gender liability of International political economy (IPE) making gender an important principle in socio-political, cultural, historical and economic analyses (Griffin, 2022). International political economy gender's scholarship seeks to transform knowledge by attacking the marginalization of gender analysis in IPE. Recent theoretical developments have criticized the simple association between genre and physical identity, recognizing that one's genre alone cannot fully encompass one's experience. Promising research areas in the field of gender IPE include gender, sexuality and the soil of 'illicit international political economy'.

The theory of modernization claims that economic growth is associated with vital social shifts like women's political participation and gender equity. Although this dynamic play different role in communist regimes and in advanced democracies. The women's political participation can be enhanced if tradition role of society is constraint and societies are being industrialized and economies grow higher (Amy C. Alexander, 2012). Tubman noted that women political role is influenced by various economic factors. Like women labor force participation and employment opportunities and researches indicates the positive relation between both factors (Alliyah Tubman, 2021). This is calculated by job opportunities, qualities and wage-gap on the gender bases. Higher education help women's to take active role in Western Europe's politics where capital investment on human education is mandatory.

One of the famous scholarly work argues that a lot of research has been done about female representatives in Parliament, only a few have studied gender representatives in the 27 European Union countries. Previous studies of female representatives led around the world highlight the different kind of electoral system, allocation, the economic prosperity of the country, the timing of women's suffrage, and political culture (Stockemer, 2008). In this calculation, these commonly used indicators are supplemented by two less used factors one, the proportion of women in management positions and the other is that political ideology of parliamentary parties. This cross-ethnic analysis shows that the type of electoral system, the number of women in leadership positions, and the number of years women have been eligible to vote are the most significant factors defining women's representation. By influencing the availability of resources, income levels and wealth distribution have an impact on participation, higher representation is fostered by greater economic empowerment minimize by less inequality. The capacity of women to balance economic and political responsibilities is directly impacted by welfare state provisions like child or day-care and social protections. That are considered vital enablers due to the effective system in Western region as compared to the Eastern.

Feminists perspective on political and gendered base economy are two main theoretical agenda. It exhibits that how political economic policies and structure can assist or constraint the women's political authority. Various Scholars have observed that the gender quota systems, state policies, social security safety nets and open access to labor markets have played important part in women's political empowerment especially in Western Europe. Because of their sophisticated social systems and progressive labor market laws, nations like Norway, Sweden and Denmark are frequently highlighted as role models for women's political participation (Bakker, 2020). The circumstances in Eastern region is quite nounced. The socio-political setup under the communist regimes encouraged the gender equality in labor work. But they preferred to serve state interest rather than advocating gender-based justice.



Women were disproportionately affected by the economic issues and labor market changes brought forth by the decline of socialism, which also raised economic insecurity. Because of this, economic instability, an absence of helpful legislation, and persistent patriarchal political institutions have made it difficult for women to participate in politics in many Eastern European nations. In spite of all of these differences, the need of economic measures that encourage women's political participation has been acknowledged at a larger level. For instance, women in Eastern Europe do dive into political activism when they have access towards education and economic opportunities. Additionally, it should be recognized that women and socioeconomic growth are strongly correlated, as described by (Jutting, 2006). Nord argues that while women can contribute to economic growth, the socioeconomic standing of women is reliant on the certain degrees of economic development in a particular economy. Alternately, the relationship between women and development is reflexive and directly proportionate for instance higher employment rates for women can raise the average income in society (Nord, 2016). Subsequently, additional factors like the family model and code, civil liberty, individuality and her property rights all influence her economic role (Arif, 2019). The literature on gender and economic growth shows how various factors that limit women's representation in politics are correlated. According to Ceridwen, women undoubtedly have the limited financial means to compete with men in terms of family wealth and educational opportunities. Male candidates are favoured by institutional impediments which found in the economic and educational institutions. Lastly, religion and culture are also significant since they influence views that are unfavourable to candidates and frequently limit women's access to the job market and public sphere (Ceridwen Spark, 2019).

#### **An Overview of Women's Political Participation in Politics in Post-Communist Era**

The political climate of Europe portrays a multifaceted picture of women's representation which is highly impacted by historical events and economic transitions. Trends in political participation indicate that women hold more political office in many Western European nations, female political activism varies in the developing democracies of Eastern Europe. The statistical gaps in women's civic competency by region shows that countries in Southern and Western Europe typically score higher on ideas that advocates political representation (Bryony Hoskins, 2008).

One of the scholarly works argue that in European Parliament the presence of women significantly depends on the nature of society and economic advancement of a given state as the authors marked these both determinants the most difficult ones to change (Joanna Hernik, 2020). Felger claim that making women activism in politics can be divided into six groups (arguments). Firstly, justice argument, women constitute about the half number of the population therefore have the right to be present. Secondly, experience argument, women's experiences are quite different from males so they must be part of discussions leading towards formation and implementation of policies. The third interest argument, stated that men and women's interest are often various and even contradictory hence women are needed in political institutions to prompt the interests of their groups. Fourth, critical mass argument, in order to notice the role of women their presence must be reaching on a certain critical mass. Fifthly, the symbolic argument argues that women are attracted to politics if they have role models. Lastly, democracy argument that the equal representation of men and women strengthen the democratization of governance both in countries going through political transition and flourished democracies (Branimir Felger, 2018).

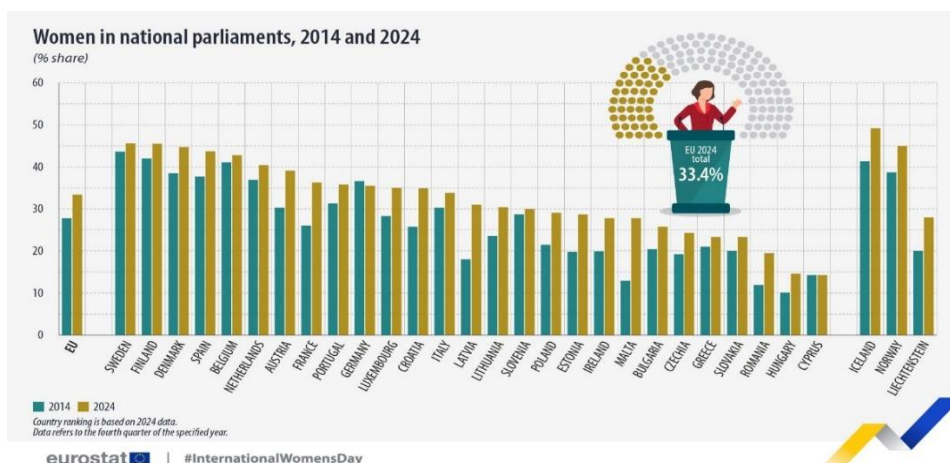
Another research shows that women reach political positions in four ways. First political family, women on this path come from families with long histories of political engagement. Secondly substitution, women who take over positions, often temporarily, after their recently deceased fathers, husbands, or brothers. Thirdly Party member, women start at the bottom of the political ladder and work their way up, performing necessary functions to show their loyalty and usefulness to the party. Lastly Political outsider, women usually lack political experience, but they keep up with new political changes and are an alternative to the status quo (Sarah L. Henderson, 2013). The historical background of both regions has affected the women political role through various changing governance, economic structure and gender patterns. The Eastern Europe had deeply affected of governing challenges posed in post-socialist regimes. That challenges directly assimilating in women's political rights (Einhorn, 2006). The other scholar noted that different waves of feminism, socio-economic and political circumstances have played a significant role in forming women's political engagement. Through the access towards economic freedom, education opportunities and awareness of basic rights which led them to political activism (Jenson, 1987).

Country like Spain and France have prioritized and enhanced the gender quotas which help women to play active role in politics. There are many political parties which favors gender equality and advocate the women rights. For example, the women political leadership in administrative roles across Europe like Netherlands, France, Germany and Italy are the role models. Even though women were more officially represented in communist governments in Eastern Europe but the numbers fell after the collapse of communist regimes. Economic problems can restraint women to pursue their career into politics, as well as less work opportunities and low wages and increasing unemployment. A patriarchal society was also affected by the economic shift, where women were frequently marginalized in favour of governmental systems that have historically been dominated by men. On the other hand, the problems encountered by Eastern European countries are exacerbated by communist legacy problems that have impeded the development of strong democratic institutions and gender equality. In order to understand this dynamics there is dire need to highlight the

importance of political and cultural norms in influencing women's political activism in Europe and the effect of economic circumstances.

Two issues have raised concerns for researchers studying women's representation in politics in post-communist Europe. First, what has caused women to be underrepresented in politics in all of the region's states since the decline of communism? Second, why have women's advocates been comparatively successful in their efforts to bring about change? This comparative study of Europe's new democracies argues that these issues are best understood as questions about male dominance, about the mechanisms that perpetuate or change long-standing patterns of male representation in politics throughout the time (Chiva, 2017). The weak status of women in Eastern Europe is impeding the region's democratic transformation and economic growth. Women have suffered from decreased access to the labor market, more vulnerability to crime, especially human trafficking, loss of family-oriented social benefits, and extremely low representation in parliaments as a result of the shift from communism to capitalism. These elements have come together to create the alarming feminization of poverty that is seen in many states (Hunt, 1997). Additionally, many nations are still without laws or practices in place to shield women from domestic abuse, rape, or physical assault at work. All of this overlooks the fact that women, as dependable workers and creative business owners, contribute to the fundamental social elements of political stability and stimulate economies. Another research effort focuses at how women's political participation changed in the Visegrad nations like Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic as a result of the shift from communism to democracy. It focuses on labor market changes and financial reform and how they affect women's political participation and gender equality (Kurekova, 2023). However, another scholar explores the means in which women's political engagement in Eastern Europe has been affected by economic shifts since the collapse of communism. It draws attention to subjects including economic inequality, gender equality, and the political obstacles women suffer in post-communist countries (Figueiredo, 2023). Kosinsko comparative research work focus on women's political activism in post-socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the impacts of the economic policies in nationalist politics (Kosinska, 2024). The reunification of East and West Germany offers an intriguing case study of how post-communist shift shaped women's political participation in the Eastern part of the country contrasted to the economically prosperous western regions, specifically since Germany itself was not a part of Eastern Europe during the Cold War (Krainz, 2022). Economic empowerment has impact on the women's political representation, ideas of leadership roles are influenced by ongoing employment and income inequalities. These economic factors ultimately lead to the constant gender-gap in political culture across Europe (Albertson, 2015). On the other hand, in the political dynamics of the Soviet Union's led bloc there was an opposite relationship between women's presence and their power influence. Despite holding one third seats in parliaments, women were mostly present in symbolic roles. Because real political power was seized at the highest levels of the Communist Party, where women were hardly found (Sperling, 2004). It indicates the absurdity of women while keeping the significant number of parliamentary seats and deprived from real power.

In 2024, women kept (33.4%) of the seats in national parliaments across the European Union, marking a 5.6 % increase as compared to 2014. Finland 45.5%, Sweden 45.6%, and Denmark 44.7% had the maximum shares of female representatives. Meanwhile, Cyprus, 14.3%, Hungary, 14.6% and Romania, 19.5% had the minimum. Compared with 2014, 3 EU countries enhanced the share of female representatives by 10% or more: Malta (+14.9), Latvia (+13.0), and France (+10.3) (Euro Stat, 2025).



Source of data: European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)

### Economic Landscape and Policies Influencing Women's Political Participation

Due to the different historical background, governing systems, economic approaches and political ideologies of Eastern and Western region stand quite opposite to each other. The sustainable social structure, capital led market

economy and EU integration have long been benefiting the Western Europe. It includes the most developed and prosperous countries such as France, Netherlands, Germany, France, and Sweden. Higher GDP per capita, comprehensive social safeguards, net policies, and progressive gender policies that increase women's economic involvement have all been facilitated by these changes. However, Eastern Europe which includes nations like Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland, has seen substantial transformation since the fall of communism, marked by waves of EU membership, market liberalization, and privatization. In addition to promoting growth and institutional changes, EU membership has subjected these economies to austerity measures in the wake of the Financial crisis and Pandemic, which have slowed their convergence to Western standards and aggravated inequality. The political, social, and economic life of women was badly affected from switching communism to capitalism.

women did not have access towards job market which enhanced the criminal activities includes loss of social security net and welfare for their family, human trafficking, and mainly out of politics as a result of this drastic change. A strike of poverty abrupted in Eastern Europe (Hunt, 1997). Another scholarly work has challenged the gender-based political regimes in Eastern Europe.

Women's workforce participation in the West and the downfall of communism in the East have destabilized the systems and assumptions of the Western male breadwinner and dual-worker models of Eastern Europe. Political reworking of the work/welfare relationship into active welfare has individualised responsibility. Social, political, and economic variations have not been matched by the growth of new gender models at the national level(Pascall, 2004). Political participation is implicitly designed by economic progress and prosperity. Women's political participation and economic empowerment are highly correlated in both regions. Economically independent women can take charge of their lives and families, which increases their political autonomy. Financially stable women are supposed to participate in politics at a larger level through joining political parties, voting, and running for office. Economic deprivation makes it more difficult for women to have access to education and job opportunities. It ultimately hindered their ability to actively participate in politics.

Thomas argues that the economic factors have played an extensive role in shaping women's political representation across Europe. In Eastern Europe, the communist era provided women with access to education and job opportunities, which could have formed a foundation for women's activism (Thames, 2017). William found that women are more involved in politics in economically developed European nations. Higher gender equality has been made possible by economic stability, which gives women more financial resources and political engagement. This includes having access to basic education, which allows women to adopt political leadership positions(William Mishler, 2001). The gender wage gap and the division of labor are two examples of economic inequality that have a substantial impact on women's political participation. Countries with a lower degree of gender imbalance in the workforce tend to have more female political representation.

This argument is supported by the work of Bjarnegard, which shows that the political participation of women is higher in Scandinavian countries. There, it has inclusive gender equality in the labor force. Opposite to this, in states where the gender disparity and wage gap are higher and there will be less representation of women. The political progress can be made by giving women's opportunities toward open market, social safety net, and gender equality (Bjarnegard, 2013) . To empower women in society and every sphere of life, it is particularly important to have welfare economic policies that reduce their dependency on male counterparts.

The economic model of Western countries is distinguished by extensive welfare states, high productivity and growth driven by innovation especially in the Nordic nations like Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The model is often referred as Nordic Model. The Nordic model is based on four pillars. It gives preference to the mass investment of families, education facilities, and health. The strong and established labour unions have set the wages in industries according to the laws. Social protection against disabilities, illness and unemployment is being provided. Finally, these amenities are financed or funded by high taxation policies and unemployment (Magne Mogstad, 2025).

Professor Anton Hemerijck believes that Nordic welfare state is considered an economic asset, not a responsibility, to control poverty and high competitiveness. The Nordic approach was more reliable in crises such as the economic recession of 2007-09, as compared to the US liberal model. It has been effective because of its initial investment in citizens, childcare policies, education and a decent amount of social insurance, which enhanced employment and financial security of women (Dahlstrom, 2023). Further this Nordic model promotes private sector through increasing the productivity of basic levels and macro-economic stability. Thus, this strategy is no longer considered a fence to economic development but rather as an example for other nations.Unlike the Nordic countries, Western economies like Germany and France have the same strength with GDP per capita around 39441.26USD in 2024 (Economies, 2025) which driven by EU market access, more advanced manufacturing and services.

The social welfare protection spending averages 30% of GDP and supports work-life balance policies by limiting gender inequality, flexible working hours, and subsidized childcare policies (OECD, 2024). However, constant challenges like an aging population and post-pandemic recovery pressure have prompted incremental reforms in order to maintain productivity. These progressive and successful economies encourage women's economic freedom and empower them politically through the accumulation of resources and reduced inequality.

Eastern Europe's period of transition has involved in swift privatization, foreign direct investments, and EU accession. The average annual GDP growth was 3-5% in early 2000s, which helped millions of slum dwellers and poverty and parting with the legal framework of EU gender equality directives (Zuk, 2018).

But the progress has not been even due to the of deindustrialization and austerity measures in the wake of the financial crisis. Women in socialist regimes used to have a higher number of female workers, but the quality issues such wage gap hinder the sustainable participation in economic sectors. EU accession has significantly influenced gender equality by enforcing anti-discriminatory laws and funding programs that enhanced women's education at higher level and entrepreneurship. Countries like Poland and Hungary have experienced a huge number of female enrolments, a rise 20 to 30% which assisted them in politics (Skora, 2018). But austerity measures negatively affect the welfare spending and reinforce traditional gender roles due to the surge in women immigrants. The recent Ukraine issue has further aggravated the economic crisis, limited EU accession, and budgetary pressure and constrained the women's political and economic progress.

In Europe, women have been underrepresented in the labour market almost 67.7% employed, whereas the males ratio was recorded 78% in 2021. It is noted that the gender pay gap ratio has only declined by 2.8% since 2010. According to the EU Commission report the gender separation is another issue 8 out of 10 women work in lower-income social sectors like education, health and services. Meanwhile, every third of the men is employed in the field of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. But only 7% of women are working their in highly paid sectors (Commission, 2022).

Table 1: GDP per Capita(PPP Current USD)

Region/Country	2000	2024
Western Europe		
<b>Germany</b>	39,370	62,830
<b>France</b>	36,888	54,465
<b>Sweden</b>	40,035	63,259
Eastern Europe		
<b>Poland</b>	24,642	50,378
<b>Hungary</b>	20,840	40,402
<b>Romania</b>	10,010	40,608
<b>Bulgaria</b>	11,949	34,083

Sources:(Trading Economies, 2025) and (World Bank Group, 2025)

Table 2: Female Labour Force Participation Rate (% of female population ages 15-64 modelled ILO managed)

Region/Country	2000	2024	Trend Description
<b>Western Europe</b>			Rapidly increase and driven by welfare support
<b>Germany</b>	49	55.6	Rise of post-reunification
<b>France</b>	48.5	51.7	Childcare expensive rates
<b>Sweden</b>	58.1	61.7	Peak of Nordic Model
<b>Eastern Europe</b>			High base from communism, but inactive in post-crisis
<b>Poland</b>	49.9	51.6	EU accession enhanced
<b>Hungary</b>	45.7	53.9	Changes due to austerity measures
<b>Romania</b>	42.5	41.8	Emigration problems
<b>Bulgaria</b>	44.3	50.9	Slow recovery

Sources:(Our World in Data, 2025).

Table 3: Gender Pay Gap (Man vs Women 2024)

Region/Country	2023 Gap	Trend (2010-2023)
<b>Western Europe</b>		Narrowing via policies/ quotas
<b>Germany</b>	17.6	-2.5 pp
<b>France</b>	12.2	-1.9 pp
<b>Sweden</b>	11.2	-3.2 pp
<b>Eastern Europe</b>		Constant, higher in private sector
<b>Poland</b>	7.8	-1.3 pp
<b>Hungary</b>	17.8	Stable
<b>Romania</b>	3.8(women higher)	Improving



<b>Bulgaria</b>	13.5	-0.3 pp
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Sources: (Statista, 2025)

Table 4: Social Protection Benefits Spending (% of GDP, 2023 Estimates)

Region/Country	2022 % GDP	Trend (2010-2022)
<b>Western Europe</b>		Rising in crisis
<b>Germany</b>	28.8	+3.1 pp
<b>France</b>	32.0	+1.9 pp
<b>Sweden</b>	46.1	Remained high
<b>Eastern Europe</b>		Post-accession growth
<b>Poland</b>	18.4	+4.2 pp
<b>Hungary</b>	16.0	+2.5 pp
<b>Romania</b>	16.1	+2.9 pp
<b>Bulgaria</b>	19.5	+4.1 pp

Source: (Euro Stat, 2025)

Furthermore, it discovers how economic disparities in education system, income inequality labour market and welfare safety net system, based on feminist political economy interact with gender discourse to either hamper or support women's political participation in Eastern and Western Europe. Women participation in the labour market is a significant economic backbone to assist them to their political career. Because it gives them financial sovereignty through social networks and resources to undertake political participation like election campaigning or voting.

The theory of resources mobilization (RMT), cohesive with feminist perspectives, suggests that access to paid work helps women to challenge conservative and patriarchal barriers in every sphere of life and to pursue their desired goals (Edwards, 2021). Studies show that a positive correlation between women's political participation and economic independence. The OECD member countries found that a higher number of women labour force helps to reduce gender inequality. It also helps make an international system that protects and advances women's rights, a mechanism to promote pay transparency, budgeting, gender mainstreaming, address gender-based violence, and policy perspective on gender equality to include foreign direct investment (OECD, 2025). In European Union where the employment gap has declined from 11.2 % in 2013 to 10.2% in 2023. It shows the great improvement in gender parity in the workforce. Women's working part-time share continued to be higher than that of men, but the part-time employment gap has reduced from -23.9% in 2013 to -20.2% in 2023. This ultimately led towards women seats in parliaments from 27.8% in 2010s to 33.4% in 2024 (Euro Stat, 2025).

The flexible work-hour policy has been playing a key role in boosting women's political participation and advancing their political rights in Western Europe. The Netherlands holds the largest number of women labor force up to 62.88%, it includes part-time job opportunities without influencing their career progress(Global Economy, 2025). So they can easily manage family responsibilities and take part in politics too. Currently, the average ratio of females in Western European parliaments is 36.4%. Sweden has with highest ratio of 45% and also enjoys the perks of labour laws (Women Mayous, 2025). In the Eastern region, women were being highly employed in communist regimes with the ratio of 70% in 1980s. With the passage of time, the benefits of being employed have been fading. In Romania, only 42.72% of women were being employed in low wage income sectors back in 2023 (Trading Economics , 2025). Resultantly, the women's representation in Eastern parliaments stands at 26.1% (Europe and Central Asia, 2025). The 50% participations in the region show the absence of reliable policies. But higher education provides females with authentic networks, platforms and skills that is acquired for political activities. In 2024, only 49.9% of women in the EU between the ages of 25- 34 had finished high schooleducation compared to 38.7% of boys (Euro Stat, 2025). This difference is huge, but the wage gap still hinders their success and use of the education in practical fields. Western Europe holds an inclusive number of women in the education system at a higher level, like France has crossed 80% enrolment (Trading Economics, 2025) and holds 37% women's seats in parliament in 2022 (Statista, 2025) and only 43% of Bulgarian women are enrolled in higher education(European Commission, 2025), women hold only 20% seats in parliaments (Trading Economics, 2025) and a wide gender pay gap is also exists.

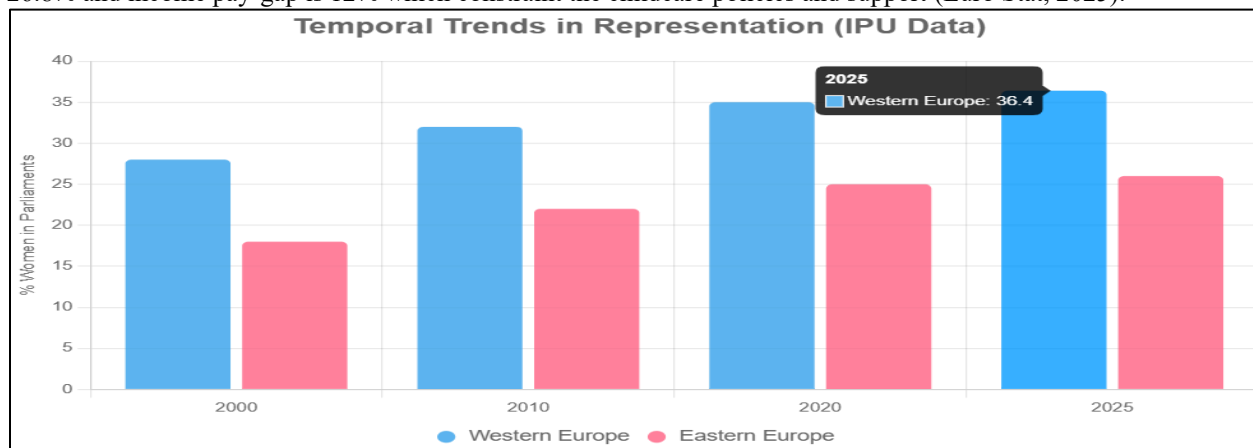
Childcare subsidies and maternity leave are examples of welfare provisions that have a pivotal effect on the political involvement of women, as they alleviate caregiving responsibilities and make women more financially stable. Feminist political-economy approaches view these tools as gendered processes that may reproduce or relieve inequities; this is based on strong welfare states, which are linked to higher levels of political participation due to the release of women from domestic oppression the Europe spend total 26.5% of its GDP on social safety net policies back in 2023 (Berut, 2025).

Due to the comprehensive and advanced welfare social system, Western Europe spends 26.8% on social protection and 93.1% on childcare in 2022 (European Commission, 2025). France also consumed the largest part of its budget of social protection, 31.3% and 36% of women in parliament (IPU Paraline, 2025). Meanwhile, Eastern Europe is still

in the recovery phase and spends 15-20% with limited resources available. Like hungry spend 16.6% (HCSO, 2025) and women ratio in parliaments stands 15.23 (IPU Paraline, 2025). The regional collaboration through EU programs which reduced the persistent gap. Like women in political activism has increased in Eastern Europe up to 15-25%. Whereas in the Eastern region, the cultural and economic disparity hinders the progress but in West the effective welfare (Nordic) models provide the strong association between politics and economy. According to the EU statistic figures only 33.4% women are in parliaments (Euro Stat, 2025). 26.0% in East and 36.4% in West respectively (IPU Paraline, 2025).

The above results show strong trends in the economic foundations of women's political engagement in both Eastern and Western Europe. The findings, which are based on feminist political economy, which examines how gender and capitalist systems interact to maintain inequality, show a strong correlation between increased political participation and economic independence through welfare, educational equity, income equality, and labor market access. The analysis, which draws from recent data from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Inter-Parliamentary, European Union, European Commission, and other research sources. It discovers the link in the Western region where income gap is very small 12.5% due to strong social security safety nets (Euro Stat, 2025).

In Western Europe, economic progress is being considered as a tool of women's political representation where average GDP per capita recorded \$51,960 PPP in 2025 (IMF, 2025). The most developed countries such as Netherlands, Sweden, and Luxembourg have 35-47% representation in politics and 54.19% in labor market respectively (Global Economy, 2025). On the other hand, Eastern Europe GDP per capita stand \$45,570 PPP (IMF, 2025), 52.1% contribution in labor market (World Bank Group, 2025) so these factors hinder political representation 26% despite EU quota system in different countries (IPU Paraline, 2025). More importantly the social protection expenditures only 26.8% and income pay-gap is 12% which constraint the childcare policies and support (Euro Stat, 2025).



Sources of Data: (IPU Paraline, 2025)

The findings from the above-discussed analysis indicate the multifaceted ways in which economic factors arbitrate the gender role in international politics. It has been revealed that access to resources and structural barriers shape women's political participation in both East and West. The feminist approach of political economy critiques the nature of the international capital system based on gender. Their connection with a powerful hierarchy system and it emphasizes that economic autonomy is not just an organizing tool but a power force with challenges the patriarchal norms of society and enable women to grab opportunities in public spheres usually occupied by men. Peto and Thissen have noted that EU has been playing important role through its policies regardless of their gender, cultural, and social identities. EU has also initiated gender contract for a fair and more equal EU for all (Laeticia Thissen, 2024).

In the western region, the effective and successful policy of social safety net and minimum wage gap was recorded at 12% in 2023, and the childcare policy helped women to manage their work-life balance, which increased women's participation in parliament by 36.4%. Conversely, in the East, the social spending is very limited 26% and a wide gender pay gap, 14.8% which constrains the women representation in parliaments 26% (IPU Paraline, 2025). Due to these practices, the feminist scholars affirm the resources mobilization theory and argue that the distribution of economic resources challenges the male-dominating role in society, institutions, and government. Because they believe that "the personal is political" (Hyde, 1987). If economic resources reduce the barriers for women, but other factors like class, race, ethnicity, and migration hamper their survival.

Ironically, the relationship between the economy and politics has not always been straightforward. In many developing nations, the increasing ratio of females in the labor force and politics doesn't align with other females working in entrepreneurship and advanced sectors like science and technology. It is noted that safe social safety net system, a progressive economy, and gender equality helped women to actively participate in politics. such as the role of women in Scandinavian and Nordic state, where they have a strong sense of economic and political security. Their policies

assist women in maintaining work-life balance and choosing safe careers. Women have secure political environment without gender discrimination. The feminist movements and their demands for rights of women's quotas in political parties also encouraged them to be part of the legislative system. In Eastern Europe, communist led governments tried to reduce gender disparity especially in the labor market. But they measurably failed to foster women's empowerment as their goals were associated with state. In the post-communist era, many states underwent through multifaceted challenges such as unemployment. Economic problems, privatization, which badly affected the women. The economic transitions have given rise to inflation and poverty, which restrain women's access to medical facilities, childcare, education, and political participation. The economic and infrastructure development in the post-communist period was influenced by political instability. It hindered women role into political activism.

Sylvester has noted how gender led politics and economy eliminate women from international power politics and economic policies. Because the capitalist-led economic structure has assigned tasks in life to establish a sphere of politics that is for men only. The liberal reforms in the East kept the women out of economic and political decision-making bodies (Sylvester, 1994). Violence is common in society against women in every sphere of life. The political economy of violence against women has developed a feminist political economic approach. It identifies the various forms of violence against women from the micro to macro level, structurally designed in national and international politics (True, 2012). For instance, in the socialist time period, many women were part of the labour force. But after the decline of this regime and privatization left many women to work forcefully in low-wage sectors and stay out of politics.

The feminist wave helped women to achieve little power in politics, diplomacy. Tickner has observed that international politics is men world and women have been underrepresented at all levels. She describes women as mice in men's worlds. But women In Western Europe have had a long journey of suffering and enduring, where they have reached today. The feminist wave helped women to achieve little power in politics, diplomacy, and the economy (Tickner, 1992). It can be observed that the quota system, maternity leaves, and work-life balance policy have increased women's political participation to the highest level. Especially in the Nordic countries, which have been considered the pioneers of gender equality. On the other hand, Hernik's work shows that the economic development of the country is directly measured by the GDP per capita. This is correlated with the women's participation in politics because developed and rich countries tend to have more women in politics. He further discovers that the presence of women in EU parliament is also proportional to the economic development measured by the GDP. Where women ratio has not reached 50% yet (Hernik, 2020). The suffrage movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries made women's political and economic autonomy possible. The first and second waves of feminism effectively empowered women in the West. They have been more aware and active in the political process, and have been advocating for their legal right. The example can be found in countries such as Norway, the Netherlands, and Sweden. They have the highest number of women in political role (Lovenduski, 1986). Betan noted that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the gender equality was considered a social development in Europe. Despite women are making remarkable progress in education and other social sectors of the public sphere. But the powerful realm of politics at the national and international level has been resisting change. (Betan, 2025). There is little success in some Scandinavian states, which are labelled as "the last bastion of masculinity," and women's political representation is defined as "stagnation".

The policy of gender equality in Europe at the national level has transformed the politics, economy, and family, which also challenge the gender based political regimes. Women's participation in the labour market in the West and the demise of socialism in the East. It has constrained the systematic idea of the male breadwinner in the West and the dual-work models of Eastern Europe. The concept of individualization is the main trend to follow in the West; meanwhile East has still been facing challenges of state oriented childcare policies. Joni explores European politics, and women are the review of the change in economic and political history in both regions over the past two centuries. In the first wave of feminism, women fought for reforms in work and family life, wages, and educational opportunities. In the second wave, economically liberal feminists were more concerned with reproductive rights, wage earnings, childcare policies, and women's oppression. She is also cynical about the official reports of the women's political activity because this interplay of government ideology and actual political practices has been affecting women's daily lives (Lovenduski, Joni, 1987). The global economy has been dominated by a series of socio-economic and political crises. The social issues have been suppressed by Europe to recover financially. For instance, the government has introduced the budget plans and austerity measures, which continue to badly affect women.

When the economic crisis of 2008 was abrupt, its initial impact was higher on men as compared to women. Later, the situation changed in 2009, when the social benefits were cut back as the austerity measures; the women's labor market also dropped by 12% and 30% of EU citizens were at risk of unemployment. The gender dimensions were not being considered while making crisis response policies. The cutbacks in services and benefits also compromised women's financial autonomy, as it constituted a pivotal source of their income, and they often use public services more than men (Morin-Chartier, 2013). Whenever gender equality initiatives have been delayed or cut back, it will negatively impact women in jobs and hamper the concept of equality. When the economic downfall is used as an excuse, it can also slow the progress of social and work-life policies. The cut in the budget allocated to women to manage their social

and family life, and care services, impacts women's access to the job market. Women's participation in the labor market also affects their political engagement. In the Western region, where a higher % of women in the labor market challenged the traditional role of males as the signal breadwinner. Whereas in the East, the post-communist transition of the political system has brought new challenges to women's active participation in the economy and politics. The alignment between the economic system and women's political engagement is different across Europe. Developed economies of the Western region have more comprehensive social welfare safety net policies, which are family-oriented, whereas countries of the Eastern side have enjoyed these social safety net policies in socialist times, and now they are still experiencing the dismantling of their social welfare system in economic transition. The study on women's political participation and state welfare policy discloses that political representation is directly associated with the distribution of resources. In different sectors where women are extensively active, such as family life and the household. This reveals a reciprocal relationship between economic policies and women's political participation, which assists their social roles. This work has explored the economic factors and policies that affect women's political representation in both regions via comparative analysis by using a feminist political economic approach to illustrate how structural barriers are arbitrating the gender dynamics in every sphere of life. The study has observed that the economic indicators GDP per capita, labor market engagement, social safety net policies, and income disparity through wage gap are not the only enablers. But the role of gender either empowers or hampers women's relegation in politics. These insights highlight the study's importance in the age of multiple crises, geopolitical tensions, and climate issues require women's political inclusion for resilient and effective governance.

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