

## Research Paper

## From Subordinate to Authentic Governance: Analyzing the Role of Familial Capital in Women's Transition to Political Leadership

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**Abstract**

This article examines the position of women in managerial and political spheres, focusing on their challenges, pathways to access, and leadership characteristics. The objective is to analyze two distinct trajectories: subordinate governance (attaining power through familial/kinship ties with male politicians) and authentic governance (securing positions based on individual merit). The research employs a review methodology, concentrating on empirical evidence and case studies of female leaders, particularly at the international level, due to limitations in domestic studies. Data analysis is conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach, ultimately framing the findings within conceptual and theoretical frameworks to explain factors influencing women's presence or absence in senior management positions. Findings indicate that despite relative progress, women still face profound structural and cultural barriers such as the glass ceiling, stereotypical perceptions, and limited access to informal power networks, often being concentrated in traditional feminine domains like education and health. In societies where women's political participation is limited, derivative governance and family connections play a pivotal role as an initial social capital and a gateway. Conversely, in societies where women's political presence is institutionalized, the path of authentic governance and meritocracy becomes more prominent. The overall conclusion suggests that the future of women's governance depends on balancing the utilization of existing opportunities with an emphasis on meritocracy and inherent capabilities. The continued normalization of women's presence in politics and management can pave the way for a transition from derivative to merit-based governance. This shift would not only lead to gender justice but also result in more effective and humane governance for the entire society.

**Keywords:**

Subordinate Governance,  
 Authentic Governance,  
 Meritocracy,  
 Family Appointments,  
 Women's Leadership.

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

The presence of women in political and managerial leadership positions is considered a key indicator of political development in societies. However, despite relative progress in recent decades, women continue to face numerous structural, cultural, and social barriers that limit their access to senior decision-making roles. This article, focusing on the two models of "authentic governance" (merit-based) and "subordinate governance" (family ties-based), examines the role of familial capital in facilitating or restricting women's pathways to political power. The primary objective is to explain the complex interplay between individual competencies and family ties in women's governance processes and to provide a conceptual framework for understanding these dynamics across different socio-political contexts.

Global statistics indicate that women hold a negligible share of political leadership positions. By 2025, only 29 countries had a woman serving as head of state or government, and women's representation in parliaments worldwide averaged just 2.27%. This is despite the fact that women often have similar levels of education and career trajectories as men, yet their actual pathways to power differ significantly. Studies show that female leaders require greater access to resources, networks, and family connections than men to attain high-level political positions. This reality raises the issue of "subordinate governance" versus "authentic governance" and poses the fundamental question of what proportion of each model contributes to women's attainment of power and what factors influence the dominance of one over the other.

### Research Method

This study employs a review-analytical approach, utilizing authoritative national and international sources, including scholarly articles, reports from international organizations (such as the United Nations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the International Labour Organization), and published statistical data up to 2025. Source searches were conducted in databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science using keywords including "women and political leadership," "family ties in politics," "political dynasties," "merit in women's leadership," and "social/familial capital." The analysis process was based on the stages of preliminary screening, full-text evaluation, extraction of key data, and descriptive-analytical analysis of the findings. In terms of its objective, this research falls under the category of developmental-explanatory studies.

### Literature Review

Historical studies indicate that women's role in governance has primarily been facilitated through familial ties, particularly via the role of a spouse. Examples such as the wives of pharaohs in ancient Egypt, the spouses of Chinese emperors, and the mothers of crown princes illustrate this reality. In the modern era, female leaders such as Isabel Perón (Argentina), Indira Gandhi (India), and Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan) have also attained power through family connections. A study by Baturo and Gray (2018) on 1,501 political leaders between 1960 and 2010 revealed that 25% of female leaders, compared to 14% of male leaders, originated from prominent political families. Furthermore, female leaders tend to be more frequently appointed to ministerial positions in "traditionally feminine" policy areas (such as health, education, and social affairs). On the other hand, studies such as Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2016) emphasize that women in competitive political environments face obstacles such as limited financial resources, weak support networks, and gender biases among voters.

### 1. Pathways to Leadership

Based on the reviewed literature, two primary models for women's attainment of political leadership can be conceptualized: "subordinate governance" and "authentic governance". In the first model, which is particularly evident in societies with strong structural barriers, women primarily accede to power through familial ties with political elites (such as a father, husband, or brother). This pathway, rooted in familial social capital, serves as a compensatory mechanism to overcome barriers to entry (Baturu & Gray, 2018). In contrast, the "authentic governance" model relies on individual merit, higher education, and direct political experience. Studies indicate that with the institutionalization of democracy, the development of political institutions, and the normalization of women's presence in politics, the significance of the dependent model diminishes, paving the way for merit-based governance (Jalalzai, 2008). These two models are not necessarily mutually exclusive; a leader may begin her path through subordinate governance, but the legitimacy and continuity of her leadership depend on proving competence and effective performance.

### 2. The Role of Familial Capital

According to studies, familial capital—comprising kinship or marital ties to political elites—plays a dual role in women's attainment of power. On one hand, in societies with pronounced structural and cultural barriers, these connections act as "initial social capital" and a compensatory mechanism, providing access to necessary networks, resources, and credibility (Watson, 2000). The model of "subordinate governance," in which women attain power through association with powerful male figures (such as a father, husband, or brother)—as exemplified by cases like Isabel Perón or Indira Gandhi—illustrates this facilitating role (Baturu & Gray, 2018). These studies show that a significant share of the world's female leaders (compared to 14% of male leaders) have emerged from prominent political families. On the other hand, with the institutionalization of democracy and the development of formal political institutions, the importance of such capital diminishes, paving the way for "authentic governance" (merit-based) (Jalalzai, 2008). In essence, familial capital often serves as a bridge for entry, but the continuity and legitimacy of leadership depend on competence and performance. Today, even in developing countries, there is a perceived need to reduce appointments based solely on family connections in order to establish more balanced and diverse boards (García-Meca & Santana Martín, 2023).

### 3. Characteristics of Women's Leadership

Female leaders often demonstrate distinctive leadership styles grounded in empathy, intuition, flexibility, and a participative approach (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008). Studies indicate they tend to favor transformational and democratic leadership that emphasizes teamwork and fostering participation (Eagly et al., 1990). These characteristics function as prominent strengths in policy domains related to social services (Baturu & Gray, 2018). However, in traditional and hierarchical environments, these very traits are sometimes interpreted as a lack of decisiveness, placing female leaders in a perceptual "double bind" (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Research suggests that while public perception may sometimes view women as excelling in compromise and men in risk-taking, overall, little significant difference is seen in the leadership characteristics of the two genders (Pew Research Center, 2015).

### 4. Domains of Women's Governance

Women's spheres of governance are predominantly concentrated in "soft" or so-called "feminine" policy domains. They are often present in ministerial positions related to education, health, social welfare, and cultural affairs. In contrast, access to "hard" domains of governance such as defense, macroeconomics, energy, and foreign policy remains

significantly limited. This division reflects deep-rooted gender stereotypes that influence both appointments and, at times, the policy preferences of the female leaders themselves. Nevertheless, a gradual trend is underway to transcend these traditional boundaries and expand women's presence into all areas of governance.

### 5. Challenges and Barriers

Women face multi-layered challenges on the path to attaining political leadership positions, rooted in structural, cultural, and social barriers. On one hand, structural obstacles such as the "glass ceiling" and "concrete walls" restrict access to top executive posts like the presidency or Prime Minister Ship. Informal male-dominated networks, unequal access to financial resources and political support, and a lack of inclusive role models narrow the field for women. On the other hand, deeper cultural barriers\_ such as persistent gender stereotypes, the perception of leadership as a "masculine" domain, and societal attitudes questioning women's ability in tough decision-making and command\_ cast a shadow over their path. Unequal family responsibilities and caregiving commitments also diminish the time and energy required for uninterrupted political engagement. Even when they enter governance, women are often confined to "soft" policy areas like education and health, and are kept away from centers of power in domains such as defense, macroeconomics, and foreign relations. These limitations, combined with the double bind of social expectations (demanding they be both decisive and conform to traditional gender norms), present a complex set of challenges for women leaders.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study, by analyzing the role of familial capital in women's transition to political leadership, demonstrates that two distinct yet intertwined models exist for women's attainment of power: "subordinate governance," which is family-centric, and "authentic governance," which is merit-based. The findings indicate that in many societies, particularly within contexts of more traditional gender norms and more closed political structures, familial ties to political elites function as "initial social capital," paving the way for women's entry into spheres of governance. Historical and contemporary examples such as Isabel Perón, Indira Gandhi, and Benazir Bhutto testify to the fact that subordinate governance acts as a compensatory strategy in the absence of formal support networks and in the face of structural barriers.

However, the current analysis reveals that the continuity and legitimacy of women's leadership depend on their performance, competence, and effectiveness. Even women who have attained power through familial connections are compelled to subsequently embrace authentic governance to retain their positions and exert influence. This illustrates the dynamic interaction between the two models, where subordinate governance may serve as a gateway, but authentic governance is the condition for survival and impact.

In this regard, the present study emphasizes the importance of the complex interplay between individual merit and environmental contexts. In socio-cultural settings where gender stereotypes are stronger and informal male-dominated social networks dominate the political sphere, familial connections assume a more critical role for women. Conversely, in political-structural contexts characterized by stronger democratic institutions, gender quota laws, and more transparent electoral processes, the path toward authentic governance becomes smoother. Political development and the long-term institutionalization of women's participation diminish the relative importance of subordinate governance. At the same time, findings indicate that female leaders often exhibit participatory, transformational, and democratic leadership styles, possessing traits such as empathy, intuition, flexibility, and attention to detail. These characteristics function as strengths in many contexts, particularly in



policy areas related to social services, education, and healthcare, and can lead to more comprehensive and responsive decision-making.

However, these same traits may be interpreted in masculine, hierarchical settings as signs of "weakness" or "lack of authority." This perceptual duality creates an additional challenge for women leaders, forming a double bind that represents one of the invisible yet powerful obstacles on their leadership path. Furthermore, the study clearly indicates that even when women gain access to governance, they are often confined to "soft" or "feminine" policy domains. The predominant concentration of women in ministerial positions related to education, health, welfare, and social affairs, while "hard" domains such as defense, macroeconomics, energy, and foreign affairs remain largely under male control, demonstrates the reproduction of gender stereotypes at the highest levels of power. This domain-specific confinement not only fails to utilize the full potential of women's leadership but also deprives society of diverse perspectives and approaches in solving complex problems.

The historical trajectory of women's political participation indicates a gradual yet noticeable transition from subordinate governance towards authentic governance. With the institutionalization of women's suffrage, the expansion of higher education, shifts in social norms, and the strengthening of democratic institutions, the relative importance of familial connections has diminished, and merit-based criteria have become more prominent. This transition is progressing at varying speeds across different countries. Ultimately, this article demonstrates that women's governance is not a linear or simple phenomenon; rather, it is the result of dynamic, multi-level interaction among factors such as individual human and psychological capital, familial and social capital, power structures and political institutions, as well as the prevailing culture and gender norms.

The ideal future for women's governance lies not in the complete elimination of either model, but in establishing a dynamic balance. In this future, authentic governance becomes the prevailing norm, and access to power is based on merit and competence. Women will have an active and influential presence in all domains of governance, and the participatory and transformational leadership styles often associated with women will be accepted and reinforced not as "feminine styles," but as "effective leadership styles" for both genders. Structural and cultural barriers will gradually fade through informed policymaking, education, discourse change, and the strengthening of institutions that support justice. Achieving this vision requires coordinated efforts across various levels. Ultimately, a balanced and equitable governance system that harnesses the full participation of women at all levels and in all fields not only realizes gender justice but, by leveraging all the talents and capacities of society, leads to greater efficiency, more widespread innovation, and enhanced legitimacy of the political system for all citizens. Given the limitations of studies in this field, it is recommended that future research adopts interdisciplinary approaches and utilizes mixed methodologies to examine the experiences of female leaders in diverse cultural-political contexts, thereby enriching the literature in this domain.