Women in the Legislature's Impact on Economic Growth and Women's Labor Force Participation

Ashley Elizabeth Docherty

University of Texas at El Paso

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WOMEN IN THE LEGISLATURE’S IMPACT ON ECONOMIC GROWTH AND WOMEN’S LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

ASHLEY DOCHERTY

Master’s Program in Political Science

APPROVED:

Taeko Hiroi, Ph.D., Chair

Rebecca Reid, Ph.D.

Ann Horak, Ph.D.

Stephen Crites, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
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Ashley Docherty

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WOMEN IN THE LEGISLATURE’S IMPACT ON ECONOMIC GROWTH AND
WOMEN’S LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

by

ASHLEY DOCHERTY, B.A.

THESIS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes whether women in the legislature improve economic growth and women’s participation in the labor force. The number of women in national legislatures and parliaments has increased dramatically in the past thirty years as over half of all countries have implemented gender quota laws. When women join the legislature, government spending on education and healthcare tends to increase. This leads to an increase in economic growth. Economic growth, along with the visibility of women in government, helps more women participate in the labor force. Women in government have a descriptive and substantive effect on women’s economic empowerment. This paper uses a worldwide panel dataset from the World Development Indicators from 1990 to 2020 to conduct a regression analysis. Additionally, this paper uses two case studies, Argentina and Costa Rica, to explain the causal relationship of women in the legislature on economic growth and women’s labor force participation rates.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... v

Table of Figures ................................................................................................................................ v

Table of Tables ................................................................................................................................. ix

Chapter 1: Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2: Theory and Literature Review ......................................................................................... 4
  2.1 Economic Development ................................................................................................................ 4
  2.2 Women and Economic Development ......................................................................................... 5
  2.3 Women and Health Outcomes .................................................................................................. 6
  2.4 Women and Education Outcomes ............................................................................................ 7
  2.5 Women and the Workforce ........................................................................................................ 7
  2.6 Women’s Political Representation and Substantive Versus Descriptive Impact ...................... 9
  2.7 Theory ...................................................................................................................................... 11
  2.8 Hypotheses ............................................................................................................................... 13
  2.9 Endogeneity ............................................................................................................................. 13

Chapter 3: Methods .......................................................................................................................... 15
  3.1 Dataset ..................................................................................................................................... 15
  3.2 Operationalization of Independent and Dependent Variables ................................................. 15
  3.3 Control Variables ...................................................................................................................... 16
Chapter 4: Results .......................................................................................................................... 17

4.1 Statistical Analysis .................................................................................................................. 18

4.2 Model 1: Political Empowerment and Public Policy ................................................................. 20

4.3 Model 2: Public Policy and Economic Growth ........................................................................ 22

4.4 Model 3: Economic Development and Women’s Economic Empowerment ......................... 23

4.5 Model 4: Political Empowerment and Economic Empowerment ......................................... 24

4.6 Sub-Setting the Dataset by Gender Quota Legislation ........................................................... 25

Chapter 5: Case Studies ................................................................................................................ 30

5.1 Argentina .................................................................................................................................. 30

5.2 Costa Rica ............................................................................................................................... 36

Chapter 6: Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 40

References ....................................................................................................................................... 43

Vita .................................................................................................................................................. 48
### Table of Figures

- **Figure 1**: Relationship Between Women's Political Representation, Public Policy, Economic Development, and Women's Economic Empowerment .......................................................... 12
- **Figure 2**: Women's Labor Force Participation and Women in the Legislature ............................................. 19
- **Figure 3**: GDP per capita and Women in the Legislature.............................................................................. 19
- **Figure 4**: Women's Labor Force Participation and Women in the Legislature for Countries with Gender Quotas ............................................................................................................ 26
- **Figure 5**: Women's Labor Force Participation and Women in the Legislature for Countries with No Gender Quotas........................................................................................................... 26
- **Figure 6**: Rank of Percentage of Women in Legislature.........*[Error! Bookmark not defined.]*
- **Figure 9**: Women in Legislature and Women’s Labor Force Participation Rate in Argentina .... 34
- **Figure 10**: Women in Legislature and Women's Labor Force Participation Rate in Costa Rica . 38
Table of Tables

Table 1: Model 1—Regression Analysis of Women in the Legislature’s Impact on Health and Education Spending ................................................................. 21

Table 2: Model 2—Regression Analysis of Health and Education Spending’s Impact on GDP per capita ............................................................................................. 22

Table 3: Model 3—Regression Analysis of GDP per capita’s Impact on Women’s Labor Force Participation .......................................................................................... 23

Table 4: Model 4—Regression Analysis of Women in Legislature’s Impact on Women’s Labor Force Participation .............................................................................. 24

Table 5: Women in the Legislature's Impact on Labor Force Participation in Gender Quota Versus No Gender Quota Countries ........................................................................ 28
Chapter 1: Introduction

In the past thirty years, women have seen unprecedented strides in equality. Around the world, women have joined the workplace, succeeded in higher education, ran for political office, and enjoyed healthier lives. However, more advancement is needed so that women gain the same level of empowerment as men, particularly in the workplace and in government (Cornwall 2016). To understand how women have made such great strides toward equality, this thesis will investigate the impact women’s political empowerment has on economic growth as a whole country and the economic empowerment of women using quantitative global research and qualitative research focused on Latin America.

Beginning in the 1990s, many countries adopted quota systems to increase women’s political representation. Initially, the addition of women in the government through quota systems was mostly descriptive with little substantive impact on improving policy outcomes for women (Jalalzi 2015). Since then, however, women have made substantive advances passing policy that improves gender equality in the workplace and in education (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). Furthermore, all countries in Latin America have some form of proportional representation, a system that tends to increase the number of women elected to the government (Schmidt 2008).

Today, women across Latin America have organized *Ni Una Menos* and *Vivas Nos Queremos*—movements to address domestic violence against women and increase access to legal abortion (Chenou and Cepeda-Másmela 2019). These movements have spurred a national dialogue about health policy and women’s empowerment. Around the world, women in power have taken on new roles as prime ministers, presidents, and lawmakers. Understanding the benefits of women in charge helps solidify their power as leaders. This research is significant because understanding
the economic benefits of gender equality will encourage societies to invest in opportunities for women, which will benefit the collective good.

Political empowerment of women tends to mean that the government passes more laws improving education and health. Additionally, when women have more access to education and healthcare, they are more likely to join the workplace. The causal mechanism of political empowerment on economic development and economic empowerment is public policy that improves the lives of women (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008).

Throughout history, women have worked as much as men. However, women’s work, especially when the work is focused on the home or in the informal economy, has been undervalued. This has made it difficult for women to achieve gender parity because men have more access to financial resources and more power outside of the home. Women joining the workplace represents an increase in gender equality because this allows women to become heads of households in many instances and gain more autonomy over their money and lives. When a society sees women in positions of power, this opens the door of opportunity in the lives of women (Kabeer 2005).

This paper will begin with a discussion of the existing literature on economic development and gender equality. Then I will discuss the theory that guides this research. Next, I will discuss the quantitative measures I will use to understand the relationship between women’s political representation, economic development, and women’s economic empowerment. Using a worldwide panel dataset from the World Development Indicators from 1990 to 2020, I will conduct multiple regression analyses to understand the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Next, I will include qualitative analysis using two case studies from Costa Rica and Argentina to understand how women in political offices have improved health and education.
policy spurring economic growth in their countries. Finally, I will discuss the results of this paper more generally and conclude with suggestions for future areas of study.
Chapter 2: Theory and Literature Review

2.1 Economic Development

Many scholars have examined the relationship between equality and economic growth. In early scholarship related to this relationship, scholars (Kuznet 1954) believed that inequality was often inevitable in the early stages of industrialization. This led some scholars to believe that instead of focusing on equality, governments should focus first on economic development in the hopes that equality would follow development. More recently, scholars (Ostry and Berg 1997) believe that equality has no impact on economic growth. Theoretically, scholars have focused on income equality as it relates to economic development. However, in the last twenty years scholars have begun to look at the relationship between gender equality and economic development.

Even the way that inequality is studied has changed significantly in the last sixty years. At first, scholars focused on the income inequality between different states using Gross Domestic Product as a way to measure economic development. This then shifted to looking at differences in population among nations and the way demographic structures impact the economy. Finally, today income inequality between nations is more focused on income inequality of individuals within countries (Milanovic 2017).

At the end of World War II, scholars began to look at the determinants and stages of economic development. Rostow (1959) asserted that each economy passed through five stages of development: first, an agrarian society, then, an industrialized society, and finally, an economy based on mass consumption and services. Modernization theory posited that the world’s economies would converge. This occurs when late industrializing countries catch up to industrialized countries with a convergence of income levels (Passé-Smith 2014). In theory, convergence makes for an optimistic future. However, in reality, a divergence has occurred where individuals in high-
income countries enjoy an ever-improving quality of life, and individuals in low-income countries are faced with higher rates of poverty. While middle-income and high-income countries may be converging, the bottom billion of individuals living in low-income countries have seen the economic development in their country stagnate (Collier 2008).

Political scientists agree that an income gap exists between economically wealthy countries and economically poorer countries, but the reason why this gap exists has been widely debated. As the existence of this gap between the world’s over-resourced countries and under-resourced countries grows larger, scholars have debated why this gap exists. Some believe that this income gap is caused by geography and resources naturally allocated to individual countries (Diamond 1997). Others believe that the gap in economic development is caused by culture (Huntington 1991). Meanwhile, others believe that institutions, like property rights and democratic elections, have the most significant effect on economic development (Robinson, Acemoglu, and Johnson 1995). Finally, some believe that history, as it relates to recent colonization and imperialism, has the most significant effect on economic development. Countries that exploited other countries for resources tend to be more economically developed than the countries that were exploited for resources (Rodrik 2017).

2.2 Women and Economic Development

Scholars began discussing the relationship between gender and development following World War II. First, researchers focused on women in development (WID), which used modernization theory to posit that women will experience improved positions in society as the society experiences economic growth and democratizes. Critics of this theory use Marxist frameworks to argue that capitalism and “modernization” will only further stratify and solidify
hierarchical systems in our society; this school of thought is called women and development (WAD) (Visvanathan 1997). Then, in the 1980s, a new framework called gender and development (GAD) was introduced to discuss the disparity between men and women. This framework looks at the relations between men and women in a variety of settings (Young 1997). However, some scholars criticized the characterization of women as one homogeneous group when Western feminists use the category of women as a way to continue Western colonization and hegemonic control over the less developed world (Mohanty 1984).

Recently, scholars have turned their attention to the gap between men’s and women’s economic development, educational attainment, health outcomes, and representation in the government. The United Nations uses the Gender Inequality Index to quantify this gap. Many scholars have debated the degree to which this gap exists and the causes and effects of the gap. Unlike the gap between richer and poorer countries, the gap between men and women seems to be converging in the last fifty years (United Nations Development Programme 2020).

2.3 Women and Health Outcomes

An increase in economic development causes an increase in the health outcomes for a country. Additionally, the disparity between women’s and men’s health has been studied extensively. Most alarmingly, Sen (1990) used demographic information and statistical analysis to uncover that the world is missing over 100 million women because of health disparities. Women are “missing” around the world because of gender-based infanticide, domestic violence, and lack of societal support for widows. Since Sen’s ground-breaking work, sub-national, national, and intranational governments have worked to increase gender equality. Finally, when a nation experiences poverty or a crisis, the health of women is more negatively impacted than the health
of men (Duflo 2012). When a nation is experiencing a crisis or poverty, infant mortality rates are also negatively impacted (Ross 2006). Infant mortality rates are closely linked to the health of the mother.

2.4 Women and Education Outcomes

An increase in economic development also leads to an increase in educational opportunities for women. Duflo (2012) explains that in times of crisis women are more negatively impacted than men. Furthermore, the link between women’s education and economic development has been widely studied. Similar to education, when the economy improves, women have more opportunities to join the workforce. Many of the strides made in gender equality in the workplace have been made through policy, although there are limits to policy efficacy (Chiva 2009). Scholars in economic development have found that an increase in education spending leads to economic growth as more people gain skills to use in the workplace (Khattak 2013). Education spurs innovation and provides people with new skills needed for a growing economy (Gilpin and Gilpin 2003).

2.5 Women and the Workforce

As economies develop, women choose to work outside the home. In agrarian and early-industrializing economies, women tend to work at home as caregivers. While not formally recognized as a job, this labor is critical to the well-being of children, the productivity of men in the workplace, and the economy’s growth as a whole (Wezerek and Ghodsee 2020). In late-industrializing and service-based economies, women frequently take jobs outside of the home. Furthermore, the parity of men and women in the labor force is seen as an indicator of gender
equality. While many women choose to stay at home because of their personal preferences and societal expectations, societies with high levels of gender equality create structures that allow women to make that choice (Kabeer 2005).

In agrarian and early industrializing countries, many women work in the informal economy. Some examples of jobs in the informal economy include domestic work, childcare, and farm work. These jobs are valuable parts of the economy that contribute to the overall productivity of a country. Research suggests that over 60% of everyone employed in the world have employment through the informal economy (ILO 2018). Women are more likely than men to gain employment in the informal economy. Women tend to initially join the workforce as a part of the informal economy. Then, as gender equality increases and the economy grows, women transition to the formal economy (Kabeer et al. 2013).

When women join the workplace, women face higher levels of gender-based discrimination at work. Many advanced economies have passed legislation to prevent gender-based harassment in the workplace. The European Union, in particular, has created rigorous standards for its member countries to prevent workplace discrimination (Avdeyeva 2010). Furthermore, many countries around the world, and in particular in Latin America, have passed laws that provide women with ample maternity leave so that women can continue to be a part of the workplace even as they start families (Blofield and Martínez Franzoni 2018). The United States lags behind the rest of the world because it has failed to pass comprehensive labor regulations that support pregnancy for women in the workplace (Forsyth 2018).

In addition to workplace discrimination, women and men also face conflict in the home when women join the workplace. Women take on full-time jobs outside of the home, but also must continue to complete the majority of the domestic work and child-rearing tasks at home. Women
take on a “second shift” that leaves families fractured and over-worked. Even when women work full time, they continue to perform the majority of the domestic tasks thereby forcing women to perform two jobs instead of only one. Horchschild (1989) argued that conflict between women and men over informal and unpaid labor at home is a result of the transition from single income family structures to double income family structures. Furthermore, public policy lags behind families’ needs for higher wages, workplace regulations that end gender-based discrimination, and subsidized childcare (Blair-Loy et al. 2015).

2.6 Women’s Political Representation and Substantive Versus Descriptive Impact

When looking at women in the government, many scholars have looked at substantive versus descriptive representation. Ideally, women will move on from merely descriptive representation where women in office act as tokens to give the perception of gender equality. Instead, women will achieve substantive representation where women have political representation and achieve equality in society. The presence of women in leadership positions does not always mean that more women will achieve that same position (O’Brien et al. 2009). The barriers to women passing legislation and holding true power in the government exist, but Kerevel and Ankeson (2013) find that these barriers are because of a lack of incumbency, not gender-based discrimination. However, more women making policy means that women’s equality issues are better represented in society (Campbell et al. 2010). Women tend to pass policies focused on women’s issues, such as health and education, because of traditional gender norms imposed by men and also a focus on feminist issues that promote women’s equality (Schwindt-Bayer 2006).

Moreover, women’s descriptive representation, also called symbolic representation, alone encourages more women to join the labor force as women see themselves in positions of power.
When women see themselves in new roles outside the home, this provides women with new ideas to pursue opportunities (Alexander 2012). Seeing women in popular culture and positions of power provides women with cues that encourage women to take on new roles (Kabeer 2005). Descriptive representation encourages women to engage politically (Atkeson 2003). As highly visible public figures, women in legislatures and in the presidency provide women with a cue to change social norms.

Much of the literature on gender parity in the government around the world includes analysis of gender quotas. The majority of democracies in the world have enacted gender quotas to reserve a certain percentage of the seats in government for women. More governments include gender quotas at the sub-national level. Eighty-six nations reserve seats in the legislative branch for women in the lower house. Even fewer countries reserve seats in the legislative branch for women in both the lower and upper houses (Dahlerup 2009). Some scholars have found that gender quotas do not have a statistically significant impact on women’s representations in the government. Instead, other factors, such as electoral institutions, are more salient indicators of gender equality, but this depends on the region (Adams 2018). However, even when gender quotas do not provide women with substantive representation, gender quotas spur changes to societal norms and descriptive representation (Lloren 2014). Although gender quotas precede my theory on the impact of women in the government on economic empowerment, gender quotas have pushed more women into government and have had an impact on changing gender norms in society.

While many scholars have written about the connection between gender equality and economic development, I hope to fill in the gap in the research by addressing women’s labor participation rates. My research is based on World Bank research that analyzes the connection between women empowerment and economic empowerment (Ghani et al., 2013). This research
primarily analyzed India. I will extrapolate Ghani, Mani, and O’Connell’s (2013) research to a more global dataset and take a closer look at women’s empowerment in Latin America. Additionally, I hope this research sheds new light on the positive impact women’s empowerment has on economic development.

2.7 Theory

Women in the legislative branch have a positive impact on education and healthcare spending by the government (Schwindt-Bayer 2006). The majority of countries in the world have quotas that ensure that women make up a percentage of the sub-national government, upper legislative houses, and/or lower legislative houses. Even in countries without gender quotas, women are a part of the legislative process; however, countries with gender quotas tend to have a higher percentage of women in the legislature than similar countries in their regions (Dahlerup 2009).

As women in the government pass laws that increase education and healthcare spending by the government, women gain skills that allow them to participate in the formal and informal economy. The increased spending on health and education naturally causes the economy to grow, which creates more opportunities for women in the workplace (Amarante and Rossel 2018). Improvement in education leads to greater productivity and innovation which leads to economic growth. Improved healthcare also leads to economic growth. Longer life expectancies, lower infant mortality rates, and higher access to healthcare improve productivity in the economy (Gilpin and Gilpin 2003).

When economies grow, women have more opportunities to take jobs outside of the home. Initially, women tend to join the informal economy, especially in developing countries. As a
country industrializes, more women join the formal economy. As women participate in the formal and informal economy, productivity in a country also increases thereby increasing the GDP per capita of a country (Amarante and Rossel 2018).

Finally, descriptive representation alone encourages women to take on new roles outside the home and join the work force to increase financial independence and create new social norms. Studies have shown that women in political office encourages women to engage politically (Atkeson 2003). I will argue that, in addition to political engagement, women gain economic empowerment by joining the work force when they see women in power.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 1: Relationship Between Women's Political Representation, Public Policy, Economic Development, and Women's Economic Empowerment*
2.8 Hypotheses

I hypothesize that an increase in women in the legislature will lead to an increase in education and health care spending by the government. This then leads to an increase in economic development and women’s economic empowerment. I predict that the relationship between women in the legislature and women in the workplace will be stronger than the overall economic development of a country. I predict that the relationship between women’s political representation and women’s economic empowerment will be stronger than the impact on economic growth. This is because economic policy has more confounding variables and changes in the policy take time to impact the economy. This theory consists of three different hypotheses:

H1: An increase of women in the legislature will increase government spending on health and education.

H2: An increase in spending on health and education will increase the GDP per capita.

H3: An increase in GDP per capita will cause more women to enter the workforce.

H4: An increase of women in the legislature will increase the percentage of women in the labor force.

2.9 Endogeneity

Scholars studying economic development and economic growth often struggle with determining the causal direction of equality, economic development, and economic growth (Clark, Golder, and Golder 2018). In my theory pictured in the graphic above, I acknowledge that an increase in economic development will likely create a feedback loop with women’s labor participation rates. As the economy develops, more women will join labor force, and as more women join the labor force, the economy will develop. This feedback loop also exists between
women’s political empowerment and women’s economic empowerment. An increase in women in the legislature will have a positive impact on women’s economic empowerment; however, as more women are empowered economically, more women will have the financial independence and social capital to run for office. One way to address this endogeneity is to run statistical analyses that flip the dependent variable and independent variable to discover which direction has a stronger statistical relationship. Another way to address the causal direction is through case studies. I will attempt to demonstrate the causal direction outlined in my theory. However, future research should address the endogeneity issues inherent in this type of research.
Chapter 3: Methods

For this research, I will conduct quantitative analyses related to political empowerment and economic empowerment. Using data from the World Development Indicators from 1990 to 2018 for 162 countries, I will test the relationship between women’s participation in the legislature on the overall economic development and women’s economic empowerment. I have created four different statistical models to explain the relationship between women’s political representation, women’s economic empowerment, and economic growth. Following the statistical analysis, I will use two case studies, Argentina and Costa Rica, to further illustrate my theory.

Finally, changes in unemployment and labor force participation rates often take time to change. Labor force participation rates tend to be “sticky,” and changes in employment often takes several years to respond to policy. I do not expect dramatic changes, only slight changes, with labor force participation rates.

3.1 Dataset

I have gathered most of my data from the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2020). I have narrowed down my dataset to include the years 1990 to 2020. This databank has all indicators except for the PolityIV score. I gathered data for the PolityIV score from the Center for Systemic Peace’s website. Data for the PolityIV score is available for most countries since its founding in 1997 (Center for Systemic Peace 2020).

3.2 Operationalization of Independent and Dependent Variables

I will operationalize women’s political representation with the percentage of women in the legislature or parliament. Public policy in health and education will be operationalized using
government spending on health and education spending as a percentage of the country’s Gross Domestic Product. I will operationalize economic development with Gross Domestic Product per capita. Finally, I will operationalize women’s economic empowerment with the percentage of women in the labor force. Data for all dependent and independent variable is from the World Development Indicators. The World Bank publishes this annual worldwide dataset (World Bank 2020).

3.3 Control Variables

The control variables will be secondary school enrollment, population, democracy rating based on the PolityIV score, and life expectancy, which are control variables widely used in the literature on economic development and gender equality. All data for the control variable comes from the World Development Indicators, except for the PolityIV score, which is from the Center for Systemic Peace’s Polity Project (Center for Systemic Peace 2020).
Chapter 4: Results

This section will discuss the results of the statistical analysis using a worldwide dataset. I have created four models to analyze the relationship between women’s political representation, public policy, economic development, and women’s economic empowerment. I will conduct a panel regression analysis using cross-sectional data. Data is collected for the same country over time. All dependent variables will be logged to account for autocorrelation and the lapse of time that the independent variable takes to impact dependent and control variables.

Initially, I ran both random effects and fixed effects models. Using the Hausman test, I determined that the random effects model best fit my statistical analysis and data. In addition to the random effects test, I will use the cluster effect to help control for autocorrelation. Moreover, I will lag all dependent variables. The lagged dependent variable will address the autocorrelation.

Additionally, I will log the Gross Domestic Product and population. Using a natural logarithm helps address the skewness of the data. This is consistent with statistical analysis methods in the field.

Following the initial regression analyses, I also separated the data into countries with gender quotas in the legislative branch and countries without gender quotas in the legislative branch. Eighty-nine countries have gender quotas on either the upper house, lower house, or both. Ninety-nine countries do not have gender quotas on the national legislative branch; however, a handful of the countries in this dataset do have legislated gender quotas at the sub-national level.
4.1 Statistical Analysis

Based on initial scatter plot graph, there appears to be a slight upward correlation between women in the legislature on women’s participation in the labor force. Still, labor force participation rates seem to be a sticky number with the majority of observations hovering around forty to fifty percent. Another fact to consider is that this data set begins in 1990; however, most countries only meaningfully instituted gender quotas in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Another factor to consider when looking at labor force participation rates is that economic recessions tend to have a negative impact on labor force participation rates. Therefore, the worldwide recession in 2009 may also negatively affect labor force participation rates.

The correlation between women in the legislature and the GDP per capita appears to be weaker than the correlation between women in the legislature and labor force participation rates. One reason for this difference maybe because there is a greater variance in GDP per capita around the world. Even though there appears to be a weaker relation, there is still a slightly positive correlation between the two variables.
Figure 2: Women's Labor Force Participation and Women in the Legislature

Figure 3: GDP per capita and Women in the Legislature from 1990 to 2020
Next, I will regress the independent variable, women in the legislature, and dependent variable, women’s labor force participation rate to determine which causal direction has a stronger relationship. Based on the initial regression analysis, the two variables have a stronger relationship when women in the legislature is the independent variable and women’s labor force participation rate is the dependent variable. This supports my theory. However, this also provides evidence that the relationship between women in government and women in the workforce is somewhat endogenous. The table is not shown here and is omitted from this paper.

After the initial regressions to determine the causal direction of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables, I will provide panel regression analysis for the four models a part of my theory. Depending on the model, independent variables and control variables, including women in the legislature, government spending on health and education, women’s labor force participation rate, life expectancy, Gross Domestic Product per capita, population, and democracy score will be lagged by one year. Gross domestic product per capita and population will be logged to correct any autocorrelation from previous years. I will run both the lagged and unlagged dependent variable for all models.

4.2 Model 1: Political Empowerment and Public Policy

This model will test whether an increase of women in the legislature has a positive relationship with government spending on health and education as a percentage of the GDP. Next, I will complete a regression analysis for the first hypothesis. In this regression analysis, the independent variable is women in the legislature and the dependent variables are health and education spending as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product. This model tests whether an increase in spending on health and education will increase the GDP per capita.
The dependent variables are health and education spending by the government. I will use data from the World Development Indicators for healthcare and education spending as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product. I will lag these variables by one year to address autocorrelation. For the first hypothesis, the independent variable is women’s political representation. This is operationalized with the percentage of women in the legislature or parliament.

**Table 1: Model 1—Regression Analysis of Women in the Legislature’s Impact on Health and Education Spending**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Spending</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Education Spending</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
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<td>0.010</td>
<td>Education Spending</td>
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<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
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<td>Women in Legislature</td>
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<td>0.002</td>
<td>Women in Legislature</td>
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<td>0.002</td>
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<td>Education Spending</td>
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<td>0.015</td>
<td>Health Spending</td>
<td>0.024**</td>
<td>0.012</td>
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<td>GDP per capita</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.005</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>0.400</td>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td>0.276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Number of obs        | 982.000     | Number of obs | 898.000           |
| Overall r-squared    | 0.936       | Overall r-squared | 0.924           |
| Chi-square           | 18014.478   | Chi-square    | 10872.513         |
| R-squared within     | 0.554       | R-squared within | 0.568           |

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Cross-national time-series regression models with country robust effects and country clustered. The independent variables are lagged by one year. A lagged dependent variable is used in all models.

Here, women in the legislature has a more positive impact while women in the legislature does not have a statistically significant relationship with education spending. This supports my
theory that women in the legislature have a positive impact on health care spending, which typically creates improved health care access and outcomes.

4.3 Model 2: Public Policy and Economic Growth

For the second hypothesis, the dependent variable is economic development. This variable is operationalized with Gross Domestic Product per capita. I will log this variable to account for autocorrelation. The independent variables is public policy, which is operationalized with the amount of spending on health and education as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product.

Table 2: Model 2—Regression Analysis of Health and Education Spending’s Impact on GDP per capita

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GDP per Capita</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>GDP per Capita</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP per Capita</td>
<td>0.991***</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>GDP per Capita</td>
<td>0.991***</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Spending</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>Education Spending</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Spending</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>Health Spending</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Labor</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Expectancy</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Enrollment</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.098***</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.098***</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Number of obs                | 1051.000    | Number of obs | 1051.000    | Overall r-squared | 0.999    | Overall r-squared | 0.999    |
| Chi-square                   | 1188930.123 | Chi-square    | 1188930.123 | R-squared within   | 0.956    | R-squared within   | 0.956    |

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Cross-national time-series regression models with country robust effects and country clustered. The independent variables are lagged by one year. A lagged dependent variable is used in all models.

Here, neither spending on healthcare and education has a statistically significant positive impact.

Furthermore, an increase in GDP per capita appears to have a negative impact on spending on education as
a percentage of the GDP. Many political scientists and economists have encouraged governments to increase spending on education to spur innovation (Gilpin and Gilpin 2003). However, from this data, it appears that increased spending on education does not have a positive impact on economic development.

4.4 Model 3: Economic Development and Women’s Economic Empowerment

For the third hypothesis, I will conduct a regression analysis where the independent variable is economic development, operationalized with Gross Domestic Product per capita, and the dependent variable is women’s economic empowerment operationalized as labor force participation rate.

Table 3: Model 3—Regression Analysis of GDP per capita’s Impact on Women’s Labor Force Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women in Labor Force</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women in Labor Force</td>
<td>0.992***</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Spending</td>
<td>-0.036*</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Spending</td>
<td>-0.026*</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Legislature</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Expectancy</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>-0.051****</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Enrollment</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.444</td>
<td>0.507</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of obs 1052.000
Overall r-squared 0.996
Chi-square 271623.649
R-squared within 0.790

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Cross-national time-series regression models with country robust effects and country clustered. The independent variables are lagged by one year. A lagged dependent variable is used in all models.

Here, it appears that an increase in Gross Domestic Product per capita does have a statistically significant impact on women’s participation in the labor force. This, again, negates
my theory that an increase in GDP per capita will also lead to an increase in women’s participation in the labor force.

4.5 Model 4: Political Empowerment and Economic Empowerment

Finally, for the fourth hypothesis, the independent variable is women’s political representation, which is operationalized with the percentage of women in the legislature or parliament. The dependent variable is women’s economic empowerment operationalized with the women’s labor force participation rate. I will test whether an increase in women in the legislature has a positive impact on women’s participation in the labor market.

Table 4: Model 4—Regression Analysis of Women in Legislature’s Impact on Women’s Labor Force Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women in Labor Force</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women in Labor Force</td>
<td>0.992***</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Legislature</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Spending</td>
<td>-0.036*</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Spending</td>
<td>-0.026*</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Expectancy</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>-0.051***</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Enrollment</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.444</td>
<td>0.507</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of obs 1052.000
Overall r-squared 0.996
Chi-square 271623.649
R-squared within 0.790

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Cross-national time-series regression models with country robust effects and country clustered. The independent variables are lagged by one year. A lagged dependent variable is used in all models.

Based on this regression table, it appears that an increase of women in the legislature does not have a statistically significant impact on the women’s participation in the labor force. This
does not support my hypothesis that an increase in symbolic representation where women has a significant relationship with women’s participation in the labor force.

4.6 Sub-Setting the Dataset by Gender Quota Legislation

The next step I will take in this statistical analysis is to break up my dataset into two datasets: one with countries with gender quotas and one with countries without gender quotas. Furthermore, I omitted microstates, territories, and protectorates from both of these datasets. All of the control variables will remain the same. Countries typically institute four different types of gender quotas: optional gender quotas instituted by political parties, subnational gender quotas, gender quotas in the lower house, and/or gender quotas in the upper house (International IDEA 2020). Because this analysis is a national-level analysis, I only included countries in the gender quota dataset that have passed gender quotas in the national legislature in the upper house, lower house, or both.

Ideally, by breaking up the datasets, I will be able to determine more clearly the impact that gender quotas have on women in the legislature, women’s participation in the labor force, and economic development.
Figure 4: Women's Labor Force Participation and Women in the Legislature for Countries with Gender Quotas

Figure 5: Women's Labor Force Participation and Women in the Legislature for Countries with No Gender Quotas
The two different datasets do not yield dramatically different results. There appears to be a slightly stronger correlation between women in the legislature and women’s labor force participation in the dataset with countries with gender quotas. However, the regression analysis below paints a different story. Again, it may be beneficial to look at a smaller subset of years because this dataset is from 1990 to 2020. However, most countries did not meaningfully implement gender quotas until the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Even when I separate the countries with gender quotas from those without, an increase in women in the legislature continues to have a positive statistically significant impact on women’s labor force participation rate. The R-squared is very low, which indicates variance exists in the model. One factor to consider is that some countries have gender quota legislation and regulations on the books but sometimes fail to enforce those rules.

When I subset the data into only countries without gender quota, I find a very similar statistically significant relationship between women in the government and women’s participation in the labor force. The relationship is even stronger than in the dataset with only gender quota countries. Furthermore, the R-square value is high suggesting less variance than in the previous dataset.

Furthermore, in this dataset, the GDP per capita is significantly impacted by an increase in women in the legislature. This statistically significant relationship was not present in the dataset with only gender quota countries. Health and education spending also has a strong positive relationship with women in the legislature. Again, one factor to consider is that many countries with gender quotas do not adequately enforce those quotas, which increases the number of women in the government.
Table 5: Women in the Legislature's Impact on Labor Force Participation in Gender Quota Versus No Gender Quota Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Quotas</th>
<th>No Gender Quotas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Labor</td>
<td>Women’s Labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force Participation</td>
<td>Force Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coef.</td>
<td>St.Err.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in</td>
<td>Women in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>Legislature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.358</td>
<td>0.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov. Health</td>
<td>Gov. Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending</td>
<td>Spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov. Education</td>
<td>Gov. Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending</td>
<td>Spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Expectancy</td>
<td>Life Expectancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.151</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.042</td>
<td>0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.712</td>
<td>5.287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean dependent var</td>
<td>Mean dependent var</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.322</td>
<td>53.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall r-squared</td>
<td>Overall r-squared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>Chi-square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.759</td>
<td>136.753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared within</td>
<td>R-squared within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cross-national time-series regression models with country robust effects and country clustered. No variables are lagged.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women's Participation in Legislature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>70.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>62.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>59.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>57.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>55.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>55.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>54.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>53.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>52.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>51.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>50.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>49.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>48.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>45.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>45.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>44.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>39.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6: Rank of Percentage of Women in Legislature**

Latin America has led the hemisphere in women in the legislative branch. Beginning in the 1990s, many governments in Latin America instituted quota systems that radically changed the make-up of the legislative branch (Lubertino 2003). In many ways, this shake-up also encouraged more women to take on the presidency. Since the 2010s, most countries in Latin America have elected a woman to the presidency. Meanwhile, Canada and the United States of America lag behind the rest of the Western Hemisphere in electing women to the legislature and women to the presidency. Similar to the United States, Canada’s percentage of women in the national parliament is around thirty percent (Lore 2017).
Chapter 5: Case Studies

Both countries I have chosen, Argentina and Costa Rica, for case studies have had gender quotas and a significant number of women in the legislature for the past thirty years. Both countries also have proportional representation systems that have proven influential in encouraging the election of women. While Costa Rica has enjoyed a more consistent path of economic development, Argentina has faced volatile economic crises in the past thirty years. I will use these cases to conduct a most-similar design method of comparative analysis.

5.1 Argentina

In many ways, Argentina led Latin America in electing women to office. Argentina was one of the first countries in Latin America to adopt quota laws that encouraged women to participate in government at the sub-national and national levels in 1991 under President Carlos Menem (Lubertino 2003).

The country underwent structural changes after the dictatorship and Dirty Wars. From 1976 when General Jorge Videla took over Argentina up until the election of President Raul Alfonsin in 1983, Argentina experienced a severe authoritarian government where up to 30,000 Argentines disappeared (O’Keefe 2006). Following the dictatorship, Argentina continued to suffer from a revolving door of presidencies as presidents face allegations of corruption and a faltering economy. Menem took power from 1989 to 1999. Similar to presidents before him, Menem was widely criticized for corruption and a failure to address economic crises in the country. Furthermore, Menem opted for temporary and costly solutions to Argentina’s economic problems. Menem powered the economy with loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and privatized important industries such as oil, electricity, and water (Schamis 2002).

Following nationwide protests against Menem, feminist coalitions pushed forward Law 24.012 to institute quotas in the Argentina national legislative branch. This quota required political
parties to put forth more women for political office. Following the passage of the quota system, the national government only somewhat enforced the law. Subsequent Supreme Court cases forced Argentina to more strictly enforce gender quotas. This positively impacted the number of women in the legislative branch (Lubertino 2003).

At first, women in the legislative branch proved to be a way for men to expand their own political power. Many women elected to the legislative branch at least initially were the wives of prominent politicians and leaders. Most famously, Eva Perón led health and education programs during her husband Juan Perón’s presidency in the late 1940s and 1950s. However, over time, more women ran for office separate from their husbands (Jalalzai 2016).

Following the financial crisis in the early 2000s, Argentina elected Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner in 2007 in part to continue the policies of her husband, Néstor Kirchner. Kirchner’s election kicked off the beginning of a new trend of women in power in Latin America. Again, Argentina would prove to be a leader in gender equality in the government (Levitsky and Murillo 2008).

Kirchner faced a severe economic crisis that defined her presidency. Following her election, the world experienced a worldwide recession, and Argentina was not immune. Kirchner took an unusual path during the recession by instituting anti-free trade and anti-globalization measures. Furthermore, Kirchner de-privatized previously state-held energy companies, including Repsol (YPF), an Argentina-based oil company owned by Spanish investors (Laborías 2015). Kirchner focused on heavily taxing multinational corporations and the land-owning elite growing commodities to pay for the social programs that boosted her support with the majority of the country. Unfortunately, even with the widespread social programs and stimulus spending, the country faced economic instability (Levitsky and Murillo 2008).
Like presidents before her, Kirschner passed populist policies that expanded health care and education throughout the country; however, Kirschner faced difficulty stabilizing the country’s economy. Furthermore, Kirschner relied on deficit spending to pay for education and health care spending. This, in part, resulted in later declarations on loans provided to the country from foreign direct investment (Wylde 2016).

Kirschner also instituted measures to limit hyperinflation that plagued the nation’s economy. Kirschner created pegged exchange rates with the Argentine peso pegged to the United States dollar at artificially low levels. The government made it difficult for savers to save in any currency besides the Argentine peso. This led to a robust underground market for the United States dollar. Many Argentines, especially those connected to countries like the United States and Spain, continued to save in dollars and euros. Even with strict monetary policy, Argentina’s hyperinflation continued. However, the hyperinflation worsened even further when the following president, Mauricio Macri, removed the strict monetary policies that Kirschner implemented (Garriga and Negri 2020).
Kirschner’s policies, although sometimes controversial and unpopular, did put the country on an upward trend for GDP per capita. Under Kirschner’s presidency, GDP per capita recovered much of the gains lost during Argentina’s economic depression in the early 2000s. Even amid the financial crisis, Argentina remained committed to health and education. The country provides public health care to its citizens and free public university to top-performing students. Additionally, many social programs such as childcare, public transportation, and household energy costs are heavily subsidized. Although the economic recovery was slow, the country’s economy improved during Kirchner’s presidency but declined rapidly following the election of Mauricio Macri (Garriga and Negri 2020).
Figure 7: Women in Legislature and Women’s Labor Force Participation Rate in Argentina

Labor participation force rates are often low in Argentina, and unemployment is often high. The country has a highly educated workforce and struggles to provide the jobs that meet the skills of its citizenry. In the chart above, one can see a slight pattern where, as women in the legislature increases, the women’s participation in the labor force rate also increases, and vice versa (World Bank 2020).

Today, women in Argentina have high levels of labor force participation as compared to men with about fifty percent of women participating in the economy. Over the last thirty years, men’s labor force participation rate hovers around seventy percent while women’s labor force
participation rate hovers around fifty percent (World Bank 2020). A twenty-point difference seems dramatic; however, this number may be more of a result of the hardships that the Argentine economy has faced rather than women leadership in the government.
5.2 Costa Rica

Ten years ago, Costa Rica elected its first woman president. Since the election of Laura Chinchilla, women have continued to be an influential part of the government in Costa Rica (Funk and Taylor-Robinson 2014). In 2018, Costa Rica elected its first Afro Latina Vice President, Epsy Cambell Barr as a part of Marvin Rodríguez Cordero’s administration, which has a cabinet made up of more than fifty percent women (Valencia 2018).

Costa Rica first adopted gender quota laws in 1996. Prior to the adoption of the gender quota system, women expanded their power through grass roots organizing focused on health, education, and children’s initiatives (Furlong and Riggs 1996). Similar to other countries initially adopting quota laws, Costa Rica struggled to adequately define and enforce these laws. Seeing the struggles of other countries implementing gender quota laws, Costa Rica adopted stricter regulations in the early 2000s that improved implementation and enforcement of gender quota laws. Following these regulations, a dramatic increase of women in the government occurred (Quesada 2003. Community and grassroots organizing also dramatically increased the number of women in the government. This paved the way for Costa Rica’s first woman president in 2010 (Funk and Taylor-Robinson 2014). Women legislators in Costa Rica have supported health and education initiatives more than men, and some women legislators have felt relegated to “women’s issues” in the National Assembly (Scwindt-Bayer 2006).

Compared to other countries in Latin America, Costa Rica has enjoyed a long history of a stable democracy. Moreover, Costa Rica has one of the best nationalized health care systems in Latin America. Additionally, the country has a higher-than-average GDP per capita and education compared to the region (Noonan 2002). Furthermore, Costa Rica has avoided much of the civil unrest and security issues that its neighbors have faced. Even in the face of a migration crisis with
an influx of people coming from Nicaragua and Venezuela, Costa Rica has been able to provide a high level of health care and education to its people, including recent immigrants, with over ninety percent of the population covered by government health care (Noonan 2002). In the past ten years, women make up the majority of the Social Issues committee responsible for passing laws on education and healthcare (Funk and Taylor-Robinson 2014).

Chinchilla capitalized on Costa Rica’s dedication to education and health care spending. During her term in office, health care outcomes improved, especially among indigenous people. However, although Chinchilla was committed to general health care, Chinchilla openly opposed abortion access for women. Chinchilla ran on a conservative platform that opposed abortion and gay marriage (Goudreu 2011). In a predominantly conservative Christian country, Chinchilla remained traditional and conservative throughout her presidency despite breaking such a significant gender barrier (Flórez-Estrada 2010).

A border conflict with Nicaragua and an increase in narcotraffic violence defined Chinchilla’s presidency. Nicaragua began dredging near its border with Costa Rica. This caused a major crisis in the country because Costa Rica and Nicaragua had previous conflicts (Frajman 2014). Furthermore, under Chinchilla, Costa Rica experienced increased violence from the drug trade primarily coming from Mexico. Throughout her presidency, Chinchilla remained tough on drugs and the drug trade (Rubio 2012). However, in the final months of her presidency, she faced a scandal when allegations surfaced that Chinchilla used a private plane linked to a narcotrafficker (Frajman 2014).
Again, one can see a slight pattern where an increase in women in the legislature somewhat mirrors women’s labor force participation rate. During Chinchilla’s presidency, the economy grew by 4% (Frajman 2014). Following Chinchilla’s election in 2010, there appears to be a sharp increase in women’s participation in the labor force. Following Chinchilla’s presidential term in 2010, it appears from this graph that there was some type of backlash where the number of women in the government dropped along with the percentage of women in the labor force. This may have been impacted by allegations of corruption towards Chinchilla and her cabinet at the end of her presidential term. Following the initial downturn in the mid-2010s, the number of women in the
government and women’s participation in the labor force increased again. Vice President Epsy Campbell Barr was a part of and likely led this new wave of women and gender equality.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

In conclusion, an increase in women’s political representation leads to both an increase in healthcare and education spending (Funk and Taylor-Robinson 2014). This, in turn, leads to an increase in economic development. This economic development allows more women to join the labor force. Furthermore, women’s political representation also may directly lead to an increase in women’s labor force participation rate. Unfortunately, my statistical models do not indicate this relationship. However, previous literature still indicates that the above relationship exists.

One of the difficulties in studying economic development and equality is the number of confounding factors. Furthermore, endogeneity is inherent in the relationship between economic development and equality. Putting these challenges aside, my research suggests that instating a gender quota likely increases the number of women in the legislative branch, which in turn increases women’s participation in the labor force and the overall economy. When women are elected to office, they are more likely to increase government spending on health and education in the aggregate (Funk and Taylor-Robinson 2014). This provides more women with the opportunity to join the workforce when public services such as health care and childcare are provided to families (Blair-Loy et al. 2015). Furthermore, education provides women with workforce skills to find work outside the home. Finally, women in office provide women with descriptive representation that encourages women to take on new roles in society (Atkeson 2003).

In the past year, the world has faced a pandemic that has completely reshaped families, schools, workplaces, and government. In places especially impacted by the pandemic, women have had to spend extra time caring for children because schools have closed, and domestic tasks take more resources. Now, as the world may be entering the next recession, will gender equality experience a setback? The past ten months have radically changed the world’s economy. States
have responded to the COVID 19 pandemic with different levels of success. Women may be experiencing the negative blowback of this pandemic more so than men (Donner 2020). Even as some states have successfully diminished the health effects of the pandemic, many countries are still experiencing a setback in economic development.

Gender quotas are a popular way to increase gender equality. Countries around the world in all regions have instated gender quotas to increase the number of women in government. Although sometimes controversial, the overall data and literature suggest that gender quotas, along with proportional representation, are powerful legislative and institutional tools to improve gender equality (Schmidt 2008).

Gender quotas also help countries make strides towards gender equality relatively quickly. In just thirty years, the majority of Latin American countries have more than fifty percent of the legislature seats filled by women (Dahlerup 2009). Countries that have strictly instituted gender quotas have seen the number of women in government increase dramatically.

Women in power alone does not achieve gender equality. In Latin America, women presidents have taken traditional stances on issues such as abortion and contraception. Leaders, such as Kirschner and Chinchilla, have had to walk the line between trailblazer and traditionalist. Women in power have been hesitant to fill their cabinets with other women (O’Brien et al. 2015). Finally, women presidents in Latin America have struggled with allegations of corruption that have impeded the potential of economic growth, innovation, and advancement (Reyes-Household 2020).

In conclusion, women’s representation in the government has shown their women constituents new roles outside the home. Furthermore, increased spending on health and education has provided women with the social structures and institutions needed to join the workforce. This
allows women to take on more independent roles, improve their financial independence, and provide innovative solutions to improve their country’s economy.
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Vita

Ashley Docherty graduated from Oberlin College with a degree in Politics in 2013. In college, she spent a semester abroad in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where she studied political science at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. She taught middle school and high school history, government, and economics in El Paso, Texas, for five years. She is currently a law student interested in international law and public policy at the University of Miami School of Law.