

# An Analysis of Women Empowerment and Economic Development in India

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## Abstract

The intertwined relationship between women's empowerment and economic development is profound. On the one hand, more equality can be fostered by the substantial reduction of gender differences brought about by economic progress in society. On the other hand, women's empowerment, which gives them more access to resources, education, and decision-making authority, can spur development initiatives and have a positive impact on society as a whole. This mutually reinforcing relationship emphasizes how crucial it is to acknowledge and support women's empowerment as a major force for long-term economic advancement. The main objectives of this paper is

1. To study the relationship between women empowerment and economic development of India.
2. To analyze the relationship between women empowerment and education of the women in India.
3. To examine the gender development index with economic development.

For the study data has been collected from annual periodic labour force survey reports, world development indicators, and report on all India survey on higher education. To measure economic development, GDP has been taken as proxy variable and women labor force participation rate and gross female enrolment ration has been taken to show women empowerment. The results of the study show positive association between women empowerment and economic development. As per the results it has been suggested the women should encourage to participate in labour force and should get training required for today's employment profile.

**Keywords:** Women empowerment • Economic development • Work participation • Political participation • Gender development index • Education • Poverty

## Introduction

Women are power of Universe. Women are a nature; without women nothing is possible. Every biotic life journey starts with motherhood. Women are the backbone of the development of economy 74.8 percent of rural depends on agriculture but only 9.3 percent own the land (NSSO). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for a new and transformative vision. It establishes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are integrated and indivisible, with gender equality as a central priority [1].

Women's Economic Empowerment is one of the most important goals of SDG, it included in Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 5: Achieving Gender Equality). Gender inequalities are witnessed in the world the current status of labor force participation rate globally for women is 47% compared to 72% for men (ILO 2022a). In India, women's workforce participation rate is 23.5%, men are 57.5% it is very high compared to women in 2020–2022 (MOSPI2022).

India is celebrating the progressive 75 years after independence under 'Azaadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' and propagating the mission of ensuring women as "Empowered women- Empowered Nation". Investing in women's economic empowerment sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication

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and inclusive economic growth. Women make enormous contributions to the economy by way of doing businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs, as employees or by doing unpaid care work at home [2].

The Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) is a composite index it measures the level of women's empowerment in five dimensions that are

1. Life and good health (two indicators)
2. Education, skill-building and knowledge (two indicators)
3. Labour and financial inclusion (two indicators)
4. Participation in decision making (three indicators)
5. Freedom from violence (one indicator)

Gender gap index India occupies 127th position out of 146 countries. And India position in women empowerment index value is all time low. In 2022 the WEI is- 0.520 it indicates the WEI groups is low. And GGPI 0.560 (low) HDI (Medium) this is the overall situation of India.

Women empowerment and economic development both are interrelated. When women empowerment is rapidly going on automatically economic development of the country is possible. 3.1 billion women and girls—more than 90 percent of the world's female population—live in countries characteristics of low or middle women's empowerment and low or middle performance in achieving gender parity. Now the world economic nearly 60% of the women potential them self (Unwomen 2023). 8% of the girls live in low and middle empowerment countries. Women have less access to paid work than men, they are paid less. Less than two-thirds (61.8 percent) of prime-working-age (ages 25–54) women globally are in the labour force, a rate unchanged over the past three decades compared with more than 90 percent of prime-working-age men.

This paper reviews the evidence on both sides of women empowerment and economic development. Women empowerment directly or indirectly

depends upon the poverty, education, and gender gap index. When the poverty line uplifting the women, women empowerment also enhancing. Due to some barrier empowerment of women till facing the numerous problems in the world. Gender equality is one of the prime goals of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Hence, the key highlights of the Global Gender Gap Report tend to reflect on the performance of the world towards the achievement of Goal 5 of the SDGs among other goals [3,4].

The constitution (106<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Act, 2023, reserves one-third of all seats for women in Lok Sabha, State assemblies and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, including those reserved for SCs and STs. The Government of India declared year of 2001 as "Women's Empowerment. The national policy for the empowerment of women came was passed in 2001 the main aim of which is to bringing out the advancement, development and empowerment of women in all the aspects. The constitution of India not only gives the equality to women, and also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. It concentrates women empowerment which is focused on girl rights, health, women education, gender equality, decision making, poverty eradication and violence against women.

The constitution of India 108 Amendment Bill, 2008 seeks to reserve one-third 33% of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies. The allocation of reserved seats shall be determined by Parliament. Opponents argue that it would perpetuate the unequal status of women since they would not be perceived to be competing on merit. They also contend that this policy diverts attention from the larger issues of electoral reform such as criminalisation of politics and inner party democracy. Currently, around 15% of the total members of the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024) are women while in state legislative assemblies, women on average constitute 9% of the total members [5,6].

## Gender gap Index- India

**India's rank:** India has made significant progress, rising from 135<sup>th</sup> (in 2022) to 127<sup>th</sup> out of 146 countries in the report's 2023 edition, indicating an improvement in its ranking. India's neighbours Pakistan ranked at 142, Bangladesh at 59, China at 107, Nepal at 116, Sri Lanka at 115 and Bhutan at 103. The country has improved by 1.4 percentage points and eight positions since the last edition, marking a partial recovery towards its 2020 parity level. India had closed 64.3% of the overall gender gap.

**Gender parity in education:** India has achieved parity in enrolment across all levels of education, reflecting a positive development in the country's education system.

**Economic participation and opportunity:** India's progress in economic participation and opportunity remains a challenge, with only 36.7% gender parity achieved in this domain. While there has been an uptick in parity in wages and income, there is a slight drop in the representation of women in senior positions and technical roles.

**Political empowerment:** India has made strides in political empowerment, achieving 25.3% parity in this domain. Women represent 15.1% of parliamentarians, which is the highest representation since the inaugural report in 2006. 18 countries including Bolivia (50.4%), India (44.4%) and France (42.3%) — have achieved women's representation of over 40% in Local Governance.

**Health and survival:** There is a 1.9%-point improvement in India's sex ratio at birth, after more than a decade of slow progress. However, India, along with Vietnam, China, and Azerbaijan, still has relatively low scores on the Health and Survival sub-index due to skewed sex ratios.

Theories of gender equality are used to explain the strategies that can be utilised to empower women in society. The positive relationship between women empowerment and economic development in the economy it shows that the working nature of women participation in various sectors [7-9]. Women empowerment is a situation in which women are given the opportunity to participate fully in social, political and economic spheres of life. Empowering woman entail creating an enabling environment in which women are allowed to implement government programmes and organisational policies that affect their lives. Women empowerment is the situation in which women move from

the state of being oppressed to the state in which both the oppressor and the oppressed are equal, socially, politically and economically. The concept of empowerment can be understood better when contextualised to social, educational, economic, political and psychological empowerment of women. The social empowerment of women addresses areas of gender inequities that exist between men and women in society.

## Research problem

Women empowerment and economic development is one of the most important burning issue in the world. There are so many publication and research paper which is related to women empowerment and economic development. That studies focus on empowerment, in this study the researcher focus on the women empowerment in the various sectors like agriculture, industrial and service sector, education gap, gender gap and poverty ratios between women and men.

## Objectives of the study

1. To study the relationship between women empowerment and economic development of India.
2. To analyze the relationship between women empowerment and education of the women in India.
3. To examine the gender development index with economic development.

## Hypothesis

1. There is a positive relationship between women empowerment and economic development of India.
2. Factors like education, poverty, participation of women in various fields are significant relation with the women, empowerment and economic development.
3. There is a positive relationship among the gender gap index and women empowerment. (Gender Parity in Education, Economic Participation and Opportunity, Political Empowerment, Health and Survival)

## Methodology and Tools

This study purely based on secondary source of data. The data collected from official sites of the UNWOME, World development indicators. World Bank Reports. NSSO, Mospi. Tools and techniques we are used descriptive statistics, like mean median percentages.

From the Table 1 it is clear that from 1951 to 2011 the literacy rate of female and male in rural area is increasing from 4.87 percent to 57.93 percent and 19 percent to 77.2 percent respectively. Similarly, in urban area the female and male literacy rate is again showing a positive trend from 22.33 percent to 79.11 percent and 45.6 percent to 88.8 percent respectively. Further the total increase in female literacy rate is from 8.86 percent in 1951 to 64.63 percent in 2011 while the male literacy rate shows total increase of 27.2 percent to 80.9 percent [10]. Thus, it is clear that female literacy is increasing at a shaper rate however the overall ratio of male literacy is much higher than female counterpart. In 1951, the literacy rates were relatively low, with significant gender disparities observed. However, there was a noticeable increase in literacy rates by 1961, reflecting early efforts towards educational reforms.

The above Table 2 shows us the education level of women in both rural and urban India from 2016 to 2020 in different categories of education level which include illiterate, literate, without any formal education, below primary level, primary level, middle school, up to class X, up to class XII and graduation and above. From the data it is clear that, from 2016 to 2020 the maximum educational qualification of women in rural area are- primary level with 91.1 percent in 2016, below primary level with 96.5 percent in 2017, graduation and above with 89.3 percent, 88.9 percent and 81.2 percent in 2018, 2019,2020 respectively. Further in urban area, the maximum education qualification of women is either below primary level with 68.3 percent, 78.1 percent, 68.4 percent and 62.2 percent in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 respectively or up to class XII with 59 percent in 2020.

**Table 1.** Trend in literacy rates in post independent India.

Year	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
1951	4.87	19	12.1	22.33	45.6	34.59	8.86	27.2	18.32
1961	10.1	34.3	22.5	40.5	66	54.4	15.35	40.4	28.31
1971	15.5	48.6	27.9	48.8	69.8	60.2	21.97	46	34.45
1981	21.7	49.6	36	56.3	76.7	67.2	29.76	56.4	43.57
1991	30.17	57	36	64.05	81.1	67.2	39.29	64.1	52.21
2001	46.7	71.4	59.4	73.2	86.7	80.3	53.67	72.3	64.83
2011	57.93	77.2	66.77	79.11	88.8	84.11	64.63	80.9	72.98
Increased % 2011%	24	8	12	8	2	5	20	7	13

**Source:** Census of India, Office of Registrar General, India.

**Notes:** 1. For 1951, the population male, female and persons refers to effective literacy rates and the break up of Rural, 2. Literacy rates for 1951, 1961 and 1971 relate to population aged 5 years and above whereas literacy rates for 1981, 3. The 1981 literacy rates exclude Assam where the 1981 Census could not be conducted. 4. The 1991 literacy rates exclude Jammu & Kashmir where the 1991 Census could not be conducted due to disturbed. 5. The 2001 literacy rates exclude Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul Sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur

**Table 2.** Important women related vital rates in India.

Indicators	2016			2017			2018			2019			2020		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Illiterate	80.2	51.7	75.2	77	54.7	73.1	78.4	51.6	73.7	25.9	23.7	25.4	72.3	55	69.2
Literate	82.7	60.4	74.6	80.7	58.6	72.6	77.6	57.3	70.3	58.9	51.1	56.3	74.2	54	67
Without any formal education	72.2	51.2	67.7	72.1	54.7	68.4	73.8	58.4	70.6	35.3	30.3	33.9	67.5	49	63.6
Below primary	90.6	68.3	85.4	96.5	78.1	92.2	89	68.4	84.2	35.3	62.2	40.6	72.1	46	66.1
Primary	91.1	67.5	84.8	87.9	68.3	82.5	83.9	58.9	77	34.8	34.9	34.8	72.6	46	65.5
Middle	80.5	59.5	74.2	76.8	59.3	71.5	73.2	51.3	66.6	44	43.5	43.9	70.2	49	63.9
Class X	76.4	56.5	68.9	75.7	52.9	67	69.6	52.3	63.2	82.4	60.5	74.8	77.7	55	69.7
Class XII	81.3	56.4	70.2	78	57.3	68.6	78.4	55.9	68.4	86.7	53	73	80.1	59	70.9
Graduate and above	89.8	64.3	73.2	80.8	54.7	63.6	89.3	65.5	73.7	88.9	56.4	69.4	81.2	59	67.1

Similarly, the minimum qualification of the women in rural area includes without any formal education is 72.2 percent, 72.1 percent, 67.5 percent in 2016, 2017 and 2020 respectively, Middle with 73.2 percent in 2018 and illiterate with 25.9 percent in 2019. In urban area the minimum qualification is again without any formal education (2016), class X (2017), middle (2018), illiterate (2019) and below primary and primary (2020). Thus, from the data it is clear that the minimum education level in women living in both rural and urban area is without any formal education while the maximum education qualification is below primary. Thus, it is clear that the qualification level is low in term of women and it is improving with the passage of time [11].

From the Table 3 it is clear that the, among different broad industry division the majority of workers in agriculture are from rural area with 53.2 percent to 55.4 percent of male and 71.1 percent to 75.9 percent of female from 2018-19 to 2021-22. However, in urban area, the percentage of male and female worker is low ranging from 4.9 percent to 5.4 percent and 7.8 percent to 11.1 percent respectively.

In mining and quarrying, the percentage of workers is relatively low compared to other sector and the share of worker female show reducing trend from 0.2 percent to 0.1 in rural area and 0.2 to 0.1 percent in urban area. Also, the male worker share increases from 0.3 to 0.4 percent in rural area and reduces from 0.6 percent to 0.4 in urban area from 2018-19 to 2021-22.

In manufacturing, the percentage of work force is nearly stagnant with 7.3 percent to 7.9 percent rural male participation and 9 percent to 7.9 percent rural female participation. Similarly, in urban area 21.9 percent to 21.5 percent of male and 24.5 percent to 24.3 percent female are engaging in mining. Here participation of women is slightly higher than males.

In electricity, water, etc. the percentage of worker is relatively low in both rural and urban area with male participation of 0.4 percent to 0.5 percent from rural area and 0.2 percent to 0.1 percent from urban area. Similarly, the female participation is 1.2 percent to 1.5 percent in rural area and 0.5 percent to 0.5 percent in urban area from 2018-19 to 2021-22. In construction, the presence

of workers is significant with higher percentage in rural area with percentage 16.6 compared to urban with percentage 12.9 in 2018-19 to 2021-22. Further the male and female worker percentage are fluctuating over the year.

In trade, hotel and restaurant the urban worker are higher with percentage 25.2 percent. Further the male participation increases from 9.8 to 10.6 in rural area while 25.2 in urban area. Similarly, the share of female worker is 4.3 to 3.7 in rural area while in urban area it share is 13.8 percent to 14.8 percent [12,13]. In transport, storage and communication, the percentage of worker is relatively low compared to other industry with slight variation over year and male domination particularly in urban area with 12.5 percent share while female contributes only 0.3 in rural to 4.6 in urban.

Lastly, in other services, the percentage of workers is significant with male participation of 8 percent to 7.5 percent from rural area and 22.3 percent to 20.7 percent from urban area. Similarly, the female participation is 9.1 percent to 6.8 percent in rural area and 45.6 percent to 40.7 percent in urban area from 2018-19 to 2021-22. Overall, the analysis indicates variations in the distribution of workers across different industries and regions over the years, highlighting the dynamic nature of the labor market in India.

From the Table 4 it is clear that the Rural Unemployment Rates exhibit higher unemployment than urban area from 2017-18 to 2021-22. The total unemployment rate of male population in the labour force in rural area decreased from 5.8 percent in 2017-18 to 3.8 percent in 2021-22. On the other hand, female unemployment in rural area also witnessed a declining trend from 3.8 percent in 2017-18 to 2.1 percent in 2021-22.

In urban area, the male population unemployment rate is 7.1 percent in 2017-18 which decline to 5.8 percent in 2021-22. The female unemployment population in 2017-18 was 10.8 and in 2021-22 it again reduces to 7.9 percent. Therefore, the overall, the analysis indicates a gradual decline in unemployment rates across both rural and urban areas over the years.

From the Table 5 it is clear that, in rural area, the WPR for male is decreasing with age from 55 percent in 15-29 age group to 75.3% in the 15+

**Table 3.** Percentage distribution of workers in usual status (ps+ss) by broad industry division.

Broad Industry Division	Category of Workers		2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Agriculture	Rural	Male	53.2	55.4	53.8	51
		Female	71.1	75.7	75.4	75.9
	Urban	Male	4.9	5	5.3	5.4
		Female	7.8	8.2	10.4	11.1
Mining and Quarrying	Rural	Male	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4
		Female	0.2	0	0.1	0.1
	Urban	Male	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.4
		Female	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Manufacturing	Rural	Male	7.3	7.3	7.7	7.9
		Female	9	7.3	7.4	7.9
	Urban	Male	21.9	20.3	19.5	21.5
		Female	24.5	22.4	23	24.3
Electricity, water, etc	Rural	Male	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5
		Female	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
	Urban	Male	1.2	1.4	0.4	1.4
		Female	0.5	0.6	1.4	0.5
Construction	Rural	Male	15.4	15	15.6	16.6
		Female	6	5.6	5.9	5.3
	Urban	Male	11.6	12	13.1	12.9
		Female	4.1	4.9	4.4	3.9
Trade, Hotel and Restaurant	Rural	Male	9.8	9.2	9.7	10.6
		Female	4.3	3.7	3.5	3.7
	Urban	Male	25.2	28.9	27.4	25.2
		Female	13.8	22.3	16.2	14.8
Transport, Storage and Communications	Rural	Male	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.6
		Female	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3
	Urban	Male	12.2	12.1	12.2	12.5
		Female	3.6	3.6	3.7	4.6
Other services	Rural	Male	8	7	7.1	7.5
		Female	9.1	7.3	7.5	6.8
	Urban	Male	22.3	19.8	20.7	20.7
		Female	45.6	37.9	41.6	40.7
		All	100	100	100	100

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), NSO, MOSPI (4.11)

**Table 4.** Unemployment rates in the labour force according to usual status.

Year	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
2017-18	5.8	3.8	7.1	10.8
2018-19	5.6	3.5	7.1	9.9
2019-20	4.5	2.6	6.4	8.9
2020-21	3.8	2.1	6.1	8.6
2021-22	3.8	2.1	5.8	7.9

Source: Periodic labour force survey, NSO, MOSPI

Notes: 1. Figures relate to usual status adjusted labour

age group. Similarly, for female the WPR decreases with age, from 20.4% in the 15-29 age group to 35.8% in the 15+ age group. Lastly, the total WPR for both genders combined in rural areas is 40.8%.

In urban area, WPR for males decreases with age, from 49.6% in the 15-29 age group to 70.4% in the 15+ age group and in female, the WPR decreases with age, from 15.9% in the 15-29 age group to 21.9% in the 15+ age group. Lastly the total, WPR for both genders combined in urban areas is 36.6%, with majority of males having higher ratio compared to females. Further the total WPR for males decreases with age, from 53.5% in the 15-29 age group to 73.8% in the 15+ age group and for females, the total WPR decreases with age, from 19.1% in the 15-29 age group to 31.7% in the 15+ age group. Lastly combined WPR for both genders across rural and urban areas is 39.6%.

From the Table 6 it is clear that, in rural area, the WPR for male is decreasing with age from 55 percent in 15-29 age group to 75.3% in the 15+

age group. Similarly, for female the WPR decreases with age, from 20.4% in the 15-29 age group to 35.8% in the 15+ age group. Lastly, the total WPR for both genders combined in rural areas is 40.8%.

In urban area, WPR for males decreases with age, from 49.6% in the 15-29 age group to 70.4% in the 15+ age group and in female, the WPR decreases with age, from 15.9% in the 15-29 age group to 21.9% in the 15+ age group. Lastly the total, WPR for both genders combined in urban areas is 36.6%, with majority of males having higher ratio compared to females.

Further the total WPR for males decreases with age, from 53.5% in the 15-29 age group to 73.8% in the 15+ age group and for females, the total WPR decreases with age, from 19.1% in the 15-29 age group to 31.7% in the 15+ age group. Lastly combined WPR for both genders across rural and urban areas is 39.6%.

**Table 5.** Age group wise Worker Population Ratio (WPR) (in %) 2021-22.

Gender		Area			
		15-29	15-59	15+	All
Male	Rural	55	78.7	75.3	54.7
Female		20.4	38.4	35.8	26.6
Person		38	58.6	55.6	40.8
Male	Urban	49.6	76.2	70.4	55
Female		15.9	24.3	21.9	17.3
Person		33.6	50.9	46.6	36.6
Male	Total	53.5	77.9	73.8	54.8
Female		19.1	34.3	31.7	24
Person		36.8	56.3	52.9	39.6

**Source:** Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS, July 2021 - June 2022), National Statistical Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

**Note:** The ratio is according to Usual Principal & Subsidiary Status Approach(ps+ss)

**Table 6.** Unemployment rates in the labour force according to usual status.

Year	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
2017-18	5.8	3.8	7.1	10.8
2018-19	5.6	3.5	7.1	9.9
2019-20	4.5	2.6	6.4	8.9
2020-21	3.8	2.1	6.1	8.6
2021-22	3.8	2.1	5.8	7.9

**Source:** Periodic labour force survey, national statistical office, ministry of statistics and programme implementation

**Notes:** 1. Figures relate to usual status adjusted labour force

**Table 7.** Gender gap in literacy rate for persons of age 7 years and above for rural & urban population.

Area	Rural				Urban				Total Gender gap
	Male	Female	Person	Gender Gap	Male	Female	Person	Gender Gap	
NSS64 <sup>th</sup> round: 2007-08	77.0	56.7	67	20.3	90	78.1	84.3	11.8	18.2
NSS 71 <sup>st</sup> round: 2014	80.1	61.9	71.4	18.2	91	81	86.1	10.1	15.8
NSS 75 <sup>th</sup> round: 2017-18	81.5	65	73.5	16.5	92	82.8	87.7	9.4	14.4

**Source:** National Sample Surveys (NSS), National Statistical Office (NSO) MOSPI

**Note:** A person who can read and write a simple message in any language with understanding is considered literate in NSS

\* Gender Gap= Literacy rate for males-Literacy rate for females.

**Table 8.** Representation of women in the central council of ministers.

Year	Number of Ministers			Number of Women Ministers			Women in Central Council of Ministers (%)
	Cabinet Minister	Minister of State	Total	Cabinet Minister	Minister of State	Total	
1998	21	21	42	1	3	4	9.52
2002	32	41	73	2	6	8	10.96
2004	29	39	68	1	6	7	10.29
2003	30	48	78	1	5	6	7.69
2009	40	38	78	3	4	7	8.97
2011	32	44	76	2	6	8	10.53
2012	31	43	74	2	6	8	10.81
2013	31	47	78	3	9	12	15.38
2014	23	22	45	6	1	7	15.56
2015	23	22	45	6	2	8	17.78
2016	26	49	75	5	4	9	12
2017	27	48	75	6	3	9	12
2018	25	49	74	6	3	9	12.16
2019	24	33	57	3	3	6	10.53
2020	22	32	54	2	3	5	9.26
2021	31	47	78	2	9	11	14.1
2022	29	47	76	2	9	11	14.47

**Source:** Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi

From the Table 7 and Table 8 it is clear that, in 1998, the representation of women in the Central Council of Ministers was 9.52 percent, with only one woman serving as a Cabinet Minister and three as Ministers of State. But, over the years, there have been fluctuations in the percentage of women ministers, with some years showing a slight increase while others show a decrease. The highest representation of women in the Central Council of Ministers was observed in 2015 and 2022, both with a percentage of 17.78% and 14.47% respectively. However, there have also been years with lower representation, such as 2003, 2014, and 2019, where the percentage of women ministers was below 11%.

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None.

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## Conflict of Interest

None.

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