



Women Parliamentary Representation in Africa and Growth of Women Businesses

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Abstract: The connection between women representation in parliament and the extent of substantive representation of women's interest remains ambiguous. Objective: this paper aims to understand if women representation in African parliament catalyses growth in women business ownership in Africa. Prior work: the paper inclines on the normative theory of democracy and the theory of politics of presence through the lens of descriptive or substantive representation. Approach: The paper's method is both theoretical and quantitative. It uses a cross-sectional secondary data for women in parliament and women ownership of businesses for a sample of 26 African countries, through the application of simple regression analysis. Result: The regression result, which emerges at $P > 0.05$ indicates that within the confines of the 26 African countries used as the sample, women's representations in these African parliaments have not catalysed a significant effect on women's business ownership in Africa. Implications: The paper provides policy and academic implication as an academic study material in university administration and development classes and for women political manifesto guide. It also provides an agenda for further research. Value: The paper contributes to the political theory of presence by ushering a different result linked to women's business interests based on an African sample. The paper also contributes a framework and suggests a new concept of inquiry for additional gender equality advocacy, namely the inclusion of women-in-women advocacy for political participation and women's interest.

Keywords: women in parliament; democracy; normative theory; politics of presence; descriptive representation; substantive representation; women in business

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1. Introduction

This paper investigates the effect of women parliamentary representations on the development of women's own businesses in Africa. The paper's theoretical foundation is on the theory of politics of presence and slants toward the descriptive and substantive representation. The theory of politics of presence (Phillips, 2000) opines that women political representatives may play a catalytic role in piloting of women's interest in society, which may thus galvanise the aspired gender equity in political and business ownership. Furthermore, Pavlencu (2022) also stresses that social inclusion of women is important in achieving a higher societal standard of living. Accordingly, in this paper, the authors explored the relationship between women representation in African parliament and growth in women business ownership in Africa. Ghani et al. (2014), examined how women political participation contributes to the development of women entrepreneurship; they found a significant positive relationship between women political inclusion and development of women entrepreneurship in India. Therefore, in seeking avenues through which women businesses may be bolstered in Africa, an analogy may be that African women's position in house of parliaments may provide some support in developing women businesses. Currently, this slant of research is somewhat skeletal in existing African literature. Therefore, this paper bridges this gap and aims to understand if and how women representation in African parliaments contribute to improve the growth of women's percentage ownership of businesses in Africa, through the lens of descriptive or substantive representation.

2. Problem of the Paper

There is a global concern that there is still a comparative low inclusivity of women to assume similar positions in public or private institutional decision making and taking up roles in business opportunity positions like men (BerguigaI & Adair, 2021; Mathur-Helm, 2005). Research evidence does show that equal opportunity for women in public managers and commercial development assists to catalyse the capacity of women to contribute their equal talents (in organisational decision and in business ownership). Accordingly, amidst a global society of male dominance in social and economic opportunities (Struthers & Strachan, 2019), there is growing research advocacy on the need for increasing equitable opportunity for women in social, political, and business spheres as this will capacitate women role in economic growth. This includes the important ripple of developmental influence, whereupon

the women in public management and successful businesses could translate to capacitating other women in society. This portends that managerial and business opportunities to women would contribute to building developmental capacity to other women and thus contribute to wider economic development (Duflo, 2012). In line with this, in their paper in Act University Danubius Administration, Pavlencu (2022) also highlights that social inclusion of women enhances a higher standard of living.

However, despite the importance of providing an atmosphere of gender equality in decision making positions and in business ownership; empirical research show that most businesses owned by women are discriminated against in seeking financial credits than male-owned businesses (Wellalage & Locke, 2017). Accordingly, some scholars have argued that allowing equitable representation of women in parliament could foster the wider interest of women's equal opportunities such as in social, economic and managerial spaces, including growth in women's businesses, but other scholars find contrary results, hence empirical results remain somewhat mixed (Wängnerud, 2009). Therefore, the problem of this paper is couched on the shortage of African empirical papers, which links the descriptive and substantive aspects of the theory of politics of presence using the data on African women in parliament to analyse if the growth in African women parliamentarians have been substantive in catalysing growth women's business in Africa. This paper thus bridges this gap in the literature and makes a new contribution to knowledge of normative theory of public management and its link to women's business.

3. Objective of the Paper

The purpose of this study is to analyse if women representation in parliament fosters growth in women's percentage ownership of business in Africa, through the lens of the theory of descriptive or substantive representation of women.

4. Theoretical Foundation

In recent years debates about democracy have paid increasing attention to issues of representation and interest in fairness, and representation of the marginalised, especially women. According to Neethling (2004), the normative theory contends that there is the need to know not simply what is done, i.e. increasing the representation of women, but also what ought to be done in order to effect that

increase in women representation and participation. Importantly, the normative theory states that the representation of women in parliament should be increased because it is ethically and morally good to do so. “Normative theory addresses questions relating to standards of behaviour, obligations, responsibilities, rights and duties as they pertain to individuals, states and the international state system” (Neethling, 2004, p. 3).

However, the question of the representativeness of women in parliaments alone is not enough if the women do not “make a substantive difference” in the development of other women (Lovenduski & Norris, 2003). In addition, according to Chaney (2006) the presence of women in structures that include parliaments “is necessary because, compared to men, women elected representatives can be trusted to a greater extent to promote women’s interests” (Chaney 2006, p. 69). Besides, women have distinct political concerns and policy interests, as well as the fact that they are more likely going to promote gender equity compared to male parliamentarians.

One of the theories that describe women’s political representation, the theory of politics of presence, argues that women’s experiences and needs cannot be adequately addressed by male-dominated politics. As a result, the theory advocates for the equal representation of women in order that viewpoints that were previously disregarded are acknowledged in political decision-making (Chaney, 2006). The argument is based partially on the conviction that the mere presence of women during political deliberations will probably sway the direction that those discussions take. The advocacy for the increase in the number of women parliamentarians is also due to the belief that when a distinct group of people remains as a minority within certain situations their members will have to conform to the rules and regulations of the predominant group (Lovenduski & Norris, 2003). This conformance then does not promote listening to the voices of those groups whose numbers are in the minority. In addition, their voices will never be loud enough to be heard, - “but once the group reaches a certain size, critical mass theory suggests that there will be a qualitative change in the nature of group interactions, as the minority starts to assert itself and thereby transform the institutional culture, norms and values” (Chaney, 2006, p.693). Therefore, this paper contends that in line with the politics of presence, women’s representation is not just for increasing numbers, but it results in a difference in the lives of other women and the resultant betterment of the economy. This paper looked at not only the increase in masses, or rather the increase in women representatives in parliament, but at whether that increase is commensurate with the development of women, in particular growth in women’s business.

5. Conceptual Framework of Paper

Following the previous sections on problem, objective and theoretical foundation, the paper's conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1, which tries to show that all things being equal, both the normative theory of politics and theory of politics of presence should translate to descriptive representation of women in parliament and this combine with substantive representation to affect growth in women's own business. This framework provides the ground for the research model tested in data analysis section.

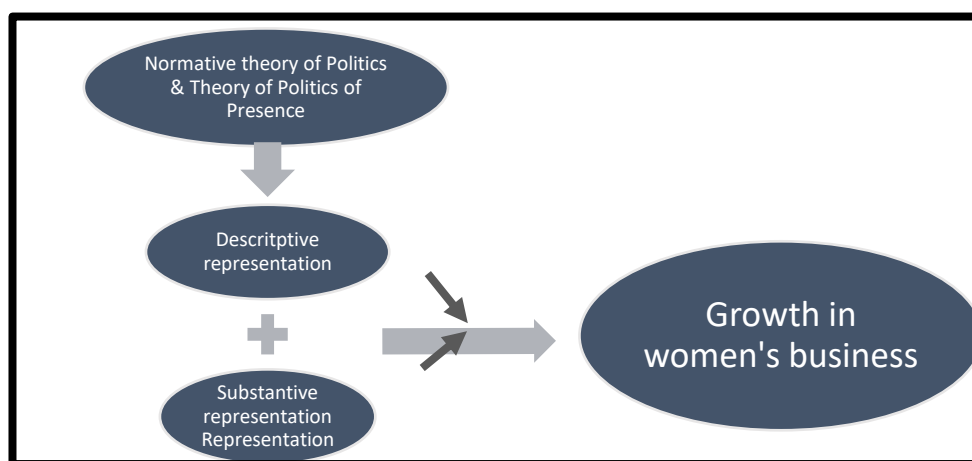


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Politics of Presence and Growth in Women's Business

Source: Authors' original Framework

6. Literature Review

Women empowerment and equalised participation of women in decision-making ranks, as well as political and power-sharing positions, are targets that have been agreed upon internationally in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) declared that the goal of attaining equal participation of women and men in decision-making is also due to the need to show a proper balance which is aligned with the normal gender composition in society. Equal participation is needed to uphold democracy and promote its appropriate performance (Stockemer, 2011). In this respect, the equal participation of women in decision-making is both a requirement for justice and democracy as well as a requisite mechanism through which the well-being of women

can be taken into consideration. It would be near impossible to reach the goals of equality without the active participation of women and the incorporation of their perspectives at all levels of decision-making. Additionally, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development seeks to actualise rights of all humans including gender empowerment and equality (United Nations Women Report, 2021)

Following the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as many other treaties that have been entered into, gender equity and women empowerment discussions have been on many political agendas of many countries for a while. However, although these various platforms acknowledge that the equal participation of women in decision-making positions is crucial, “gender parity remains far off” (United Nations Women, 2021, p. 11). Most countries in the world have not achieved gender balance, and a few have set or met ambitious targets for gender parity (50–50).

The importance of incorporating women in positions of power, including in parliaments, cannot be emphasised enough. According to Dahlum, Knutsen and Mechkova (2022) there is sufficient evidence that links the political empowerment of women with increased growth of women-owned businesses and subsequent economic growth. For example, according to the United Nations Women Report (UN Women Report, 2021) research in India discovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with women-led councils was 62% higher than in those with men-led councils; in Norway, a direct causal relationship between the presence of women in municipal councils and childcare coverage was found.

According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Report (UNESCAP, 2019) inclusion of women in parliaments and positions of leadership is effective in leading to increased participation of women in business because women demonstrate political leadership by working across party lines through parliamentary women’s caucuses. Additionally, women work as champions of issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws and electoral reform (UN Women Report, 2021). Gubula, Lukani, Maputi, Mboyisa, Moholola, Mokoena, Molafo Mputing (2015) further assert that when women sit at the decision-making forums, they advance the deployment of all resources for the promotion of women issues into future economic development.

It was recounted that as of 2015, “around the world men make up 78% of parliamentarians, 93% of elected heads of state, 82% of government and 95% of

corporate executives” (Gubula et al, 2015). These statistics show that not much has happened since because A UN Women Report (2021) relates that as of the 1st of September 2021 women represented only 25% of the total percentage of national parliamentarians, which was an improvement from 11% in 1995; a total of four countries had a 50% representation of women parliamentarians “in single or lower houses”, - where Rwanda was reportedly performing considerably well having achieved 61% women parliamentary representation. Furthermore, by 2021 about 19 countries had attained or exceeded the 40% point. However, only four of those 19 are in Africa. It is conceivably appalling that there are at least 27 states globally where women still constitute less than 10% of parliamentarians (UN Women Report, 2021). At the current rate of progress, gender parity in national legislative bodies will not be achieved before 2063 (UN Women Report, 2021). Table 1 presents a selected data from the IPU (2023) monthly percentage ranking of women in national parliaments. According to IPU (2023) (Table 1), many African countries have a very low percentage of women parliamentarians.

Table 1. IPU Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments (of 1st June 2023)

| African Country | Region | % of Women in Parliament as of 1 st June 2023 (IPU, 2023) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Algeria | North Africa | 4.1% |
| Egypt | North Africa | 13.7% |
| Morocco | North Africa | 11.7% |
| Nigeria | West Africa | 2.8% |
| Liberia | West Africa | 6.7% |
| Côte d'Ivoire | West Africa | 21.4% |
| Rwanda | East Africa | 34.6% |
| Kenya | East Africa | 31.3% |
| Ethiopia | East Africa | 30.6% |
| South Africa | Southern Africa | 44.4% |
| Lesotho | Southern Africa | 24.2% |
| Eswatini | Southern Africa | 40.0% |
| Gabon | Central Africa | 23.9% |
| Republic of the Congo | Central Africa | 18.8% |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo | Central Africa | 23.9% |

Source: data from: IPU [Inter-Parliamentary Union] (2023, p. 1)
<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=6&year=2023>

Dahlum, Knutsen and Mechkova (2022: 1) state that the relationship between increasing parliamentary decision-making powers of women and development as well as economic growth is more pronounced in “Non-Western” countries. Stockemer (2011) further points to the fact that the issues of women's parliamentary representation need further research in Africa. These sentiments by Stockemer (2011) as well as Dahlum et al. (2022) highlight the importance of a study that looks at the impact that improved participation of women in African parliaments makes on the growth of women-owned businesses. Memusi (2021) also reported the effect of women leaders on the growth of the economy thus emphasising the importance of affirming women.

Strides have been made, but they are not enough. Women’s rights, as well as their social and political standing, have improved somewhat in some African countries. Those improvements have resulted in more women entering positions of political power. The rising number of women in elected office has raised expectations about their role as political leaders. The entry of women into public life offers a test case of whether women politicians, in particular, those in parliament, can ‘make a substantive difference (Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2007). Therefore, this current paper wanted to see if the rising numbers of women had an effect on women's business ownership. is some hope that this development could alter the predominant policy agenda and advocacy for women’s interests in general.

6. Method

The study adopted the positivist research as it conjectured a numerical relationship between women in parliament and growth of women-owned business in Africa. A correlational research design with an attendant quantitative approach was applied. The method thus chosen to align with the substantive genre of the theory of politics of presence, which anticipates that women representation in parliament should be substantive in the sense of representing the interest and needs of other women (Wängnerud, 2009).

Secondary data were collected from the World Bank archives of World Development Indicators (Women in Business & Women Business and the Law Index) (World Bank, 2022). The study randomly collected a cross-sectional secondary data for two variables namely women in parliament and women's ownership of a business for a sample of 26 African countries. The sample covered the North, South, East, West

and Central African countries. The data were analysed through the usage of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. Where the simple regression model is:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = percentage of women business ownership (WBO%)

X = women in parliament (WInParl)

α = constant; $\beta_1 - \beta_2$ = regression coefficients; ε = error term

7. Results

The ordinary least squares (OLS) analysis with the summary results appears in Table 2. The result summary shows a P-value = 0.7149, which is higher than 5% significance level, which thus show that women in African parliament has no significant effect on growth of women's own business in Africa. Furthermore, both the r (correlation coefficient) = 0.075 and r^2 Square (coefficient of determination) = 0.0056 are low, which further show lack of correlation between women in parliament and women own business. Furthermore, the scatter graph in Figure 2 shows that the relationship between women's parliamentary representation in Africa and women's business ownership is in disarray, i.e. there is no coordination. This is because the Cartesian coordinates in the scatter plot show no straight-line relationship. The result of this paper runs contrary to a related paper conducted by Ghani et al. (2014), which found a significant positive relationship between political reservation for women and growth women entrepreneurship in India.

Table 2. Summary Regression Result: Dependent Variable: Women Business

| SUMMARY OUTPUT | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--|
| Regression Statistics | | | | | | | | | |
| Multiple R | 0.07522 | | | | | | | | |
| R Square | 0.005658 | | | | | | | | |
| Adjusted R | -0.03577 | | | | | | | | |
| Standard E | 12.37175 | | | | | | | | |
| Observatic | 26 | | | | | | | | |
| ANOVA | | | | | | | | | |
| | <i>df</i> | <i>SS</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>ignificance F</i> | | | | |
| Regressor | 1 | 20.9027 | 20.9027 | 0.136565 | 0.71496 | | | | |
| Residual | 24 | 3673.442 | 153.0601 | | | | | | |
| Total | 25 | 3694.345 | | | | | | | |
| | <i>Coefficients</i> | <i>andard Err</i> | <i>t Stat</i> | <i>P-value</i> | <i>Lower 95%</i> | <i>Upper 95%</i> | <i>ower 95.0%</i> | <i>pper 95.0%</i> | |
| Intercept | 27.38995 | 5.587606 | 4.901911 | 5.33E-05 | 15.85769 | 38.9222 | 15.85769 | 38.9222 | |
| WinParl | 0.078893 | 0.213485 | 0.369547 | 0.71496 | -0.36172 | 0.519505 | -0.36172 | 0.519505 | |

Source: Authors' Results

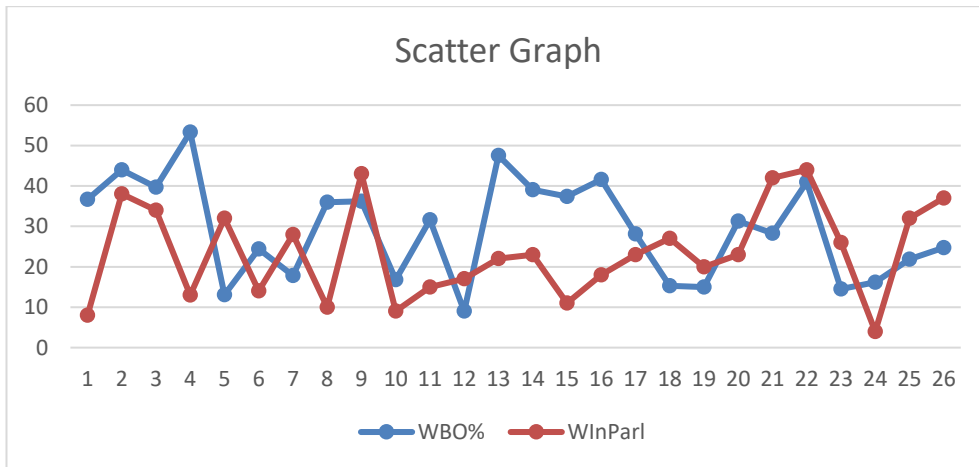


Figure 2. Relationship between Women in Parliament and Women Business Ownership

Source: Authors' graph based on Table 2

8. Implication

This paper’s implication is very crucial for informing a further discussion and policy formulation regarding women representation in parliament and by implication in other sectors of public administration and the concomitant effect in women’s

engagement in business and contribution to economic development. Given that this result demonstrates that African women representation in the parliament has no significant effect on the growth of women's own business, this implies that advocacy for gender equity in public administration may require additional strand of campaign, namely a slant of women-in-women campaign with emphasis on achieved women to hold the hand of others toward capacitating other women in wider society beyond immediate family and friends' circle. This newer approach will draw closer to the theory of substantive representation of women, where women in positions of authority and business would substantively use their elevated position to pilot the capacitation of other women as a collective effort. This view of women-in-women development campaign can formulate future women-in-politics political manifestos as a focal point of their development target whereupon women in political position may be held accountable by other women in lower echelon of society. This finding provides an agenda for future research which may target the application of women-in-women campaign. The paper is also useful as discussion paper in higher education business and development lectures and studies.

8.1. Value (Contribution)

This paper provides one of the first results in African literature on women in parliament and women's business development with a novel framework and with a concomitant new research concept termed women-in-women development campaign.

9. Conclusions

This paper explored the effect of women representation in African parliament on the growth of women owned businesses in Africa. It aimed to establish the extent to which women parliamentarians in Africa may provide a substantive representation of women's interest particularly the ownership and growth of women businesses. However, unlike previous research which opine that women representation in political positions may improve the rate of women entrepreneurship (Ghani et al. 2014); within the limit of twenty-six African country sample used, this paper found no significant evidence that African women representation in parliament supports the growth of women owned businesses in Africa. Hence the results from this paper fails to corroborate the theory of substantive representation. The paper thus proceeds

to recommend that African women in parliaments owe a duty of ensuring that their position in politics catalyses the development of women at the lower pyramid of the society. This portends that the accountability of African women in parliaments should not be limited within the confines of their political party administration, or within the circle of friends and relatives. Rather, the litmus test of the accountability of women parliamentarians should be the extent to which their presence in the parliament have provided dividend to other women through amongst others – growing and supporting young women towards substantive ownership and growth of women businesses. This will assist in economic independence of African women at the lower level of the pyramid and will contribute to poverty alleviation. Further research is recommended on this topic – to expand the sample with additional numbers of African countries, and such future research may engage in a regional comparison to evaluate how the phenomenon may differ amongst African regions.

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