Loom to Legislature: Modeling the Effect of Textile and Garment Industry Employment on Women's Political Power Through Comparative Analysis of Thailand and Viet Nam

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Abstract

Across the world, the textile and garment manufacturing industry provides first-employment opportunities to millions of women, particularly in developing countries. These jobs allow women to work outside of the home or family farm for the first time, exposing them to countless new opportunities that past generations lacked. Of these new opportunities, perhaps the most important are the political opportunities that arise from the greater economic and decision-making power afforded to women employed in the textile and garment industry. However, past literature is not conclusive as to the exact method by which employment leads to this increased political power for women in developing nations. Therefore, this paper presents 5 distinct hypotheses as to the conditions which allow for manufacturing employment, specifically in the textile and apparel sector, to increase the opportunity for women to become involved in politics and make independent political decisions. These hypotheses are then combined into a model to visualize the effects this employment has. This model is then tested through a comparative analysis of Thailand and Viet Nam, with each hypothesis being examined through the lens of the two Southeast Asian countries. This analysis serves as evidence for the model, with the differences between the two countries aligning with the theorized conditions necessary for apparel industry employment to have a positive effect on women's political power. As such, this model serves as a beginning point for further research into this relationship, having provided a plausible theoretical framework for how textile and garment manufacturing jobs can lead to greater political opportunities for women in developing nations.

1. Introduction

For countless women across the globe, employment is the first step in realizing autonomy and independence, especially in countries where gender inequality remains high. By making their own wage, women are often able to make economic decisions for themselves and gain power both inside and outside of the home. This greater power opens doors to new opportunities for women in developing nations, where many doors have historically been open only to men. One such opportunity is that of political power, which can be wielded by women to further improve the conditions and opportunities for other women in their country. However, research is somewhat divided over how and when employment opportunities can be translated into greater decision making and economic power, which in turn can be extended into political power for women in the country as a whole. Different research has suggested the need for different cultural, economic, and political conditions in order for this causal effect to take place. As such, a model is needed to map out these conditions and their effect on the relationship between textile and garment industry employment and women's political power.

This paper works to explore this relationship and the conditions necessary for its effectiveness. First, prior research is examined in order to provide a background understanding for the relationship between textile and garment industry employment and political power. This research is then used to generate hypotheses and a model which lay out five conditions that work to increase the effectiveness of said employment on political representation. In order to test this model, a comparative analysis of Thailand and Viet Nam, both developing nations in Southeast Asia, is conducted. Each hypothesis is carefully analyzed in respect to the two countries and the model is applied to test its validity. These findings are then used to suggest opportunities for further research and the potential implications of the model.

By creating such a model and setting the stage for further research, policy can be more effectively guided in order to provide women with the opportunities to seek political power. Therefore, a woman's first employment opportunity, which is often in the apparel industry, can be more easily translated into political power and even a potential seat in government. This increase in women's political representation is especially valuable, as women's issues are more likely to be brought to the forefront of political discussion when women are actually involved in the discussion.

2. Background

2.1 - Economic Development and Gender Equality

The association between economic development and gender equality has long been of interest to political scientists and economists alike. As such, a wide variety of literature exists, with different opinions existing on the causal relationship between the two variables. Research has been conducted into each direction of the relationship, both the impact of economic development on gender equality and vice versa. A greater consensus exists for the latter, with literature being much more divided on the impacts of economic development on women's political and economic power. Therefore, this paper will first explore the extent to which gender equality promotes economic development.

The academic community is in general agreement that gender equality, both economically and sociologically, is beneficial for long-run economic development, with multiple studies supporting this conclusion. As women gain autonomy in household and personal decision-making, they are more likely to join the workforce, increasing the supply of labor and potential for specialization in the economy (Coxhead, Jayasuriya, Kurosaki, 2023). These economic gains as a result of gender equality in education and employment are supported by additional studies as well, with gender equality consistently being found to promote economic growth (Kabeer & Natali, 2013) (Kabeer, 2016). This relationship makes sense, as greater societal acceptance of women in the workforce and higher education allows for massive expansion of the skilled labor force and thus increased human capital for the nation as a whole. Given the prominence of semi-skilled labor, especially in manufacturing, as a tool for economic development, a nation expanding its labor force to include women essentially guarantees positive economic gains. Women's political empowerment also promotes technological growth, further increasing GDP per capita in developing nations (Dahlum, Knutsen, & Mechkova, 2022). Increased autonomy for women may also extend the period for which women are in the workforce as well, as women with greater decision-making power have an increased likelihood of using contraceptives, which allows them to focus on career development instead of children (OlaOlorun & Hindin, 2014). Employment also delays childbirth and marriage by providing a transition period between adolescence and adulthood (Amin, et al., 1998). Furthermore, the

effect of gender equality promoting female labor participation may be compounding, as increased female labor participation is associated with lower gender gaps in educational attainment and parental investment, suggesting that women benefit sociologically from joining the workforce (Molina & Usui, 2022). This sociological benefit may work to further promote gender equality and thus increase economic growth by an additional factor.

Despite the academic consensus that gender equality, especially in the labor force, promotes economic growth and further gender equality, scholars are more divided as to whether economic growth promotes gender equality. Arguments in favor of a positive relationship are more numerous than those against and are generally supported by comparative studies of gender equality on the global scale. Specifically, analysis of 90 countries suggests that economic development is first associated with a decrease in female labor force participation, followed by an increase. Additionally, as countries develop, they see greater educational attainment by women and lower fertility rates (Mammen & Paxson, 2000). This relationship may be due to the one above between female labor force participation and women's well-being. However, not every study has found this positive relationship between economic growth and gender equality to be the case. This occurs for a number of reasons, most notably the varied role of government from country to country in promoting gender equality with the gains from economic development as well as the patriarchal structure of capitalism, which adds an additional layer of patriarchal obstacles for women in developing countries to overcome (Kabeer, 2016). However, when government does use the gains from economic growth to improve the material conditions of women, the sociological and economic impacts can be great. Notably, studies have shown that policies ranging from cash transfers (Bergstrom & Ozler, 2021) to free bicycles (Fiala, et al., 2022) to vocational training (Fletcher, Pande, & Moore, 2019) can promote educational and professional attainment by women, thus lowering gender gaps and furthering economic growth due to the relationship between gender equality and economic growth. As such, this paper focuses on the effect of economic development through the garment industry on women's political empowerment, or their ability to influence government to enact these policies.

2.2 - The Garment Industry's Impact

While ample prior research has been conducted into the effects of economic growth and gender equality on each other, much less has been done into the effect of the garment industry on

each of the two prior variables. That being said, work has been done exploring how the garment industry contributes to both economic growth and women's quality of life. Recent studies in particular have shown the effect of employment in the garment industry on the lives of women to be very similar to the observed effect of general employment. Women who work in the garment industry while young are more likely to be enrolled in school or employed in other occupations after their garment jobs (Heath & Mobarak, 2015). This suggests that the garment industry offers a stepping stone into broader professional and educational opportunities for young women in developing countries. Additionally, employment in the garment industry has benefits for women in the home as well. When living in neighborhoods in proximity to garment factories, women are less likely to be tolerant of domestic violence and less likely to be victims of domestic violence as well (Molina & Tanaka, 2023). Furthermore, women employed in the garment sector have greater agency over matters concerning both their household and their own body (Grogan, 2022). These findings suggest that the garment industry is a common way by which women obtain some sort of financial and social independence from men, which can be leveraged into increased agency in their day to day lives. These sociological and personal benefits are likely to be further increased when women are managers in the garment industry, a phenomenon which is somewhat rare. Specifically, when women are managers, men working at the factory come to have greater respect for women in the professional environment and the gender gap in expectation is reduced (Macchiavello, et al., 2015). As discussed above, this increased agency and respect for women has positive impacts on economic growth and female labor force participation, which can then compound and further gender equality.

The effect of the garment industry on developing economies as a whole is also a positive one. There is general consensus that garment manufacturing is associated with higher GDP growth rates - that is, as export focused garment manufacturing earns more, the GDP growth rate increases (Islam, 2021). Garment manufacturing also attracts foreign direct investment, which despite being associated with lower GDP growth rates in the short run, has no impact in the long run. Therefore, the overall impact of export focused textile manufacturing on GDP growth is a positive one (Islam, 2021). As such, textile and garment manufacturing exists as a lucrative industry for nations with low GDPs but high amounts of labor, such as a large number of Asian nations.

The garment industry also has negative effects on the economies and societies of developing nations. Despite increasing economic consumption on average by around 12%, the effect on consumption is radically different for those at the top and bottom of the economy. Top earners increase their consumption by 25% as a result of export focused garment manufacturing while the poorest only increase their consumption by less than 10% (Picarelli, 2016). These stark differences increase economic inequality despite quality of life increases for most of the society. Increased inequality can come to have its own problems, including fueling domestic strife and shifting political power. Inequality is not the only problem associated with the garment industry either, as educational attainment may also decrease with increased opportunities for low skill employment in the industry. Specifically, it has been found that for every 25 jobs created in the garment sector, one student drops out of school prior to completion, thus lowering the rate of school completion and reducing human capital (Atkin, 2016). Therefore, while the garment industry may promote education among young women, men may be inspired to stop their educational pursuits in order to pursue garment employment. However, given that most developing nations are very patriarchal, these reductions in gender gaps in educational attainment may prove beneficial for gender equality as female workers come to be more advantaged compared to their male counterparts.

2.3 - Barriers to Gender Equality

While most research does find garment industry development, economic growth, and gender equality to be correlated, others find there to be significant barriers to the advancement of gender equality in the developing world. Despite the emergence of export focused garment industries in developing economies, women may be left out due to cultural and societal norms steeped in patriarchy. Thus, unemployment among women remains much higher in the developing world despite access to lower skilled manufacturing jobs which could be worked by women with no prior work experience. These effects are even felt by educated upper class women as well (Malhotra & DeGraff, 1997). These gender attitudes persist despite economic progress and permeate every level of society, holding back gender equality and women's advancement (Bussolo, et al., 2023). These social and cultural values also impact the household decision making process and work against the positive impact of employment and education on women's agency (Malhotra & Mather, 1997).

Research also suggests that these social and political factors are the determinants of women's political power, instead of economic conditions determining said power. Therefore, while economic gains and increased female labor force participation may encourage gender equality, true advancements in women's rights require a society and government ready and willing to undergo such change (Htun & Weldon, 2010). Thus, the problem of gender equality cannot be solved simply through increasing economic and educational opportunities for women, with developing countries instead needing to possess the societal and cultural conditions prime for progress. Therefore, this paper examines these conditions in order to determine when the economic gains of the garment industry allow for women to advance their relative political and economic power in developing nations, specifically Thailand and Viet Nam.

2.4 - Women's Political Power

Also of great interest to research are the origins and effects of women's political power in developing nations. Given the wide variation in female representation among countries, political scientists have had ample opportunity to analyze these differences. This research has led to multiple explanations of the origins of women's political power, ranging from increased education to institutional systems designed to increase representation. One such explanation relies on a combination of these two, arguing that the remodeling of inheritance systems leads to increased educational attainment by women, allowing them greater human capital and physical capital, both of which can be used to attain greater political power. By studying inheritance systems in India, women who received land-titles and inheritance were found to have achieved higher levels of education than those who didn't (Deininger, et al., 2013) (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). These higher levels of education, along with increased economic resources gained through either inheritance or employment, have some of the greatest effects on women's political power (Medoff, 1986). As such, one would expect countries to see consistent improvements in women's political power as they develop, though this is not always the case.

This suggests that a combination of political (i.e. inheritance systems) and economic (i.e. limited resources) barriers must be overcome for women to achieve political power, especially in developing nations where these barriers are strongest. One of the most effective ways to combat these barriers is to install gender quotas for parliament, requiring that a certain percentage of candidates in a parliamentary election be female. Empirical evidence suggests that these quotas

are effective in increasing female representation in the governments of developing countries (Norris & Dahlerup, 2015). This is due to the pure mechanical effect of requiring a greater number of female candidates, thereby almost ensuring that a greater number of women win seats in parliament. The success of such policies shows that, with the proper legislation and government support, the political barriers preventing women from gaining power can be broken.

Despite many scholars arguing that education leads to increased female representation in government, some argue the opposite: that there is no correlation between the educational attainment of women and women's political power. Using data from Africa, Sara Hlupekile Longwe found this lack of a correlation to be the case, instead arguing that a "hidden agenda" of gender discrimination, which is ingrained into both men and women as children, is responsible for the lack of equality in positions of power (Hlupekile Longwe, 2000). This is a much different approach than other scholars have taken, as the existence of gender bias in government and society is hard to quantify and thus hard to study. As an alternative to the educational attainment explanation, Hlupekile Longwe instead suggests that coalitions of women's organizations could be formed, creating broad political networks for women to work together to overcome discrimination in politics (Hlupekile Longwe, 2000). This is an example of the social origins of political power, with the connections and organizations formed between people being responsible for political power forming.

Gendered views of power may even prevent women from aspiring to hold political power, as women are less likely to pursue conflict and power-related actions (Schneider, et al., 2016). This barrier is overcome by reframing politics as a pathway to solve community problems, which women are more likely to pursue. This is part of the broad political culture of a country, which impacts women's political power quite heavily. This broader political culture is also shaped by the religious culture of the country, as more conservative religious countries tend to have less women in power. Research has shown that the religious beliefs of political groups have a negative effect on women's representation in government (Medoff, 1986). This is to be expected, as the countries which have the highest levels of women in government tend to also be among the least religious, take the Scandinavian countries as an example. These cultural, religious, and political barriers serve to impede the attainment of political power for women. Thus, in order to overcome these barriers, a number of conditions are likely necessary, such that the economic, cultural, and political climate is ripe for advancements in women's representation.

3. Model

3.1 - Rationale

Using past research, which suggested the necessity of various economic and political-cultural conditions for the translation of female employment into female political power, as a starting point, a model was theorized and created showing these conditions and relationships. The model begins at the top, with the hypothesized industrial and political conditions being the first necessary step for textile and garment industry employment to positively affect women's political power. The industrial conditions, which include the skill of textile and garment manufacturing labor, the relative economic importance of the textile industry in the country, and the share of working women employed by the industry, allow for women to gain human capital and greater economic power. These gains lead to increased domestic decision making power and greater independence from men for women. The political conditions, which include the secularity and stability of government, allow for women to encounter less barriers to political opportunity and power, as religious-conservative governments and consistent regime change limit chances for women to be elected

Each condition represents one of the key hypotheses of this paper, with every one predicted to increase either the economic power or political opportunity of women employed in the textile and garment industry. This increased human capital and economic power combine with the increased political opportunity to lead to greater political power for women, as they are able to translate their greater independence and economic standing into political power with less institutional barriers. This causal path is shown in Model 1.

Model 1.
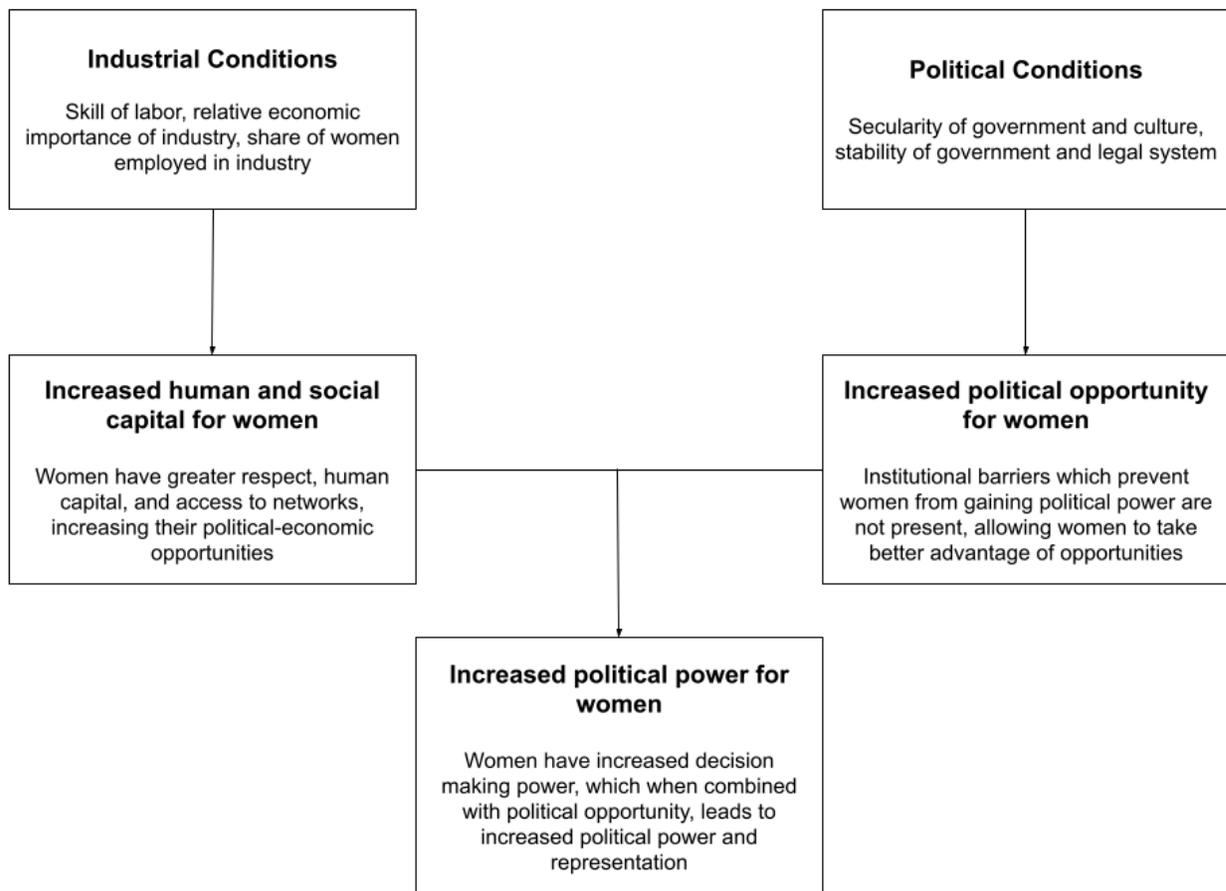
4. Theoretical Perspectives

Given that research suggests the necessity of certain conditions in order for garment industry employment to have positive effects on women's political and economic power, such conditions are the focus of my research and analysis. Based upon prior research, hypotheses were generated to explain the conditions of interest. This research operates upon five distinct hypotheses, grouped into two categories: textile and garment industry conditions and governmental or political-cultural conditions. Each category features three hypotheses, each of which works to explain a condition responsible for the conversion of first employment to political representation.

4.1 - Textile and Garment Industry Hypotheses

High Skilled Labor Hypothesis: If a country's textile industry is more dependent on higher skilled labor, women employed in the industry will possess greater relative economic power and thus greater political power.

Economic Importance Hypothesis: If a country's textile/apparel manufacturing industry is of greater relative economic importance to the country, then employment in said industry will have a greater positive effect on women's political power.

Female-Dominated Industry Hypothesis: If a country's textile industry employs and is made up of a greater share of women, women employed in the industry will form stronger social and political networks, increasing their political power.

4.2 - Governmental Hypotheses

Secularity Hypothesis: If a country has a more secular government and culture, then textile and garment industry employment will have a stronger positive effect on women's political power.

Political Stability Hypothesis: If a country has greater political and constitutional stability, then textile and garment industry employment will have a stronger positive effect on women's political power.

These hypotheses are based upon prior literature on women's political power and form the basis for this research, guiding data and variable selection. Each hypothesis represents a condition which ought to aid the positive effect of textile and garment industry employment on women's political power. As such, no one hypothesis is able to completely predict the effect of such employment on women's representation, but rather all of the hypotheses work in tandem to outline the conditions necessary for this effect to be maximized. Due to the complex nature of political power and its origins, other conditions may be hypothesized to allow for apparel industry employment to increase women's political power, but are not the focus of this paper. These hypotheses also form the basis of Model 1, and will be tested through the application of the model to the two countries chosen for comparative analysis. Both countries were selected due to their key similarities and differences, with one country lacking the hypothesized necessary conditions and the other possessing them.

5. Case Selection and Summaries

5.1 - Case Selection

This research is solely focused on Thailand and Viet Nam, specifically the differences in textile industries, government, and women's political power in the two Southeast Asian countries. Only two countries were chosen in order to conduct direct comparative analysis to test Model 1. These two countries were selected due to their similarity in population size, economic development, and inequality. However, the countries differ greatly in governmental characteristics, textile industry size, and women's political power, making them ideal candidates for analyzing the earlier hypotheses. Both countries are subject to analysis under each hypothesis, with these analyses then being combined to gauge the accuracy of Model 1.

5.2 - Country Summaries

Thailand

Thailand, officially the Kingdom of Thailand, is a constitutional monarchy located centrally in mainland Southeast Asia. It is notable as the only country in the region to have escaped colonial rule, having remained independent despite European colonization of all of its neighbors. The country is majority Buddhist, with a deep religious and cultural history shaping the modern nation. Economically, Thailand is one of the most developed countries in the region, boasting the 4th highest GDP per capita in Southeast Asia and standing as an upper-middle income country globally. This development would suggest greater political power for women relative to other countries in the region, though this isn't necessarily the case.

Thailand's textile and garment industry is far from the largest in Southeast Asia and far from the largest industry in Thailand (Asia Garment Hub, 2023). Instead the largest exports are more complex items such as integrated circuits and machine parts (OEC, 2021). However, these industries are far from as female-dominated as the textile and garment industry is, meaning that women may have less opportunities to rise to positions of power in the workplace, as well as network with other women.

Viet Nam

      Viet Nam, officially the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, is a one-party socialist state on the east coast of Southeast Asia. Having been colonized by France until 1954, Viet Nam is perhaps most widely known in America for its massive civil war in the 1960s and 70s. The result of this conflict was a decisive victory for the Communist Party of Viet Nam, who have ruled the country since the war's end in 1975. Under the party's leadership, the nation has experienced rapid economic growth, now possessing the 6th highest GDP per capita in the region and the largest amount of textile and apparel exports in the region as well.

      Viet Nam's textile and garment industry is the second largest industry by export value in the country (Statista, 2023). This difference in industry importance is part of the reason for the two countries' selection, as this will allow analysis of the Industrial Importance Hypothesis. Further differences between the countries are analyzed below.

5.3 - Country Statistics

      In order to, at a glance, understand the macro-level differences between Thailand and Viet Nam, it is best to simply analyze summary statistics of the two countries' macroeconomic indicators, gender equality, and female political power. These statistics are represented in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Country	Thailand	Viet Nam
Population	70,000,000	97,000,000
GDP per capita (USD)	6,910	4,164
GINI Coefficient	35	36.8
HDI Ranking	66	107
Female Labor Force Participation Rate	60%	69%
Gender Inequality Index	0.380	0.312
Female Share of Legislators	15.75%	30.26%

(Statista Research Department, 2024), (United Nations Development Programme, 2024) (World Bank, 2023)

These statistics suggest the necessity of further analysis of the two countries, as women in Thailand have less relative political power than women in Viet Nam, despite the fact that Thailand is more economically developed and has a higher HDI. According to some prior research, Thailand's position as an upper middle income country, among the most developed in Southeast Asia, ought to cause it to experience greater political power and equality for women (Mammen & Paxson, 2000). Additionally, Thailand's higher Human Development Index score suggests that women would have better access to healthcare and education in Thailand than Viet Nam, resources which may allow women to more easily achieve political power (Cite). However, as evidenced by the lower statistics, this is not the case, with Viet Nam having nearly twice the share of female legislators, a lower GII, and a higher female labor force participation rate. Therefore, there must be conditions other than macroeconomic development which lead to the differences in women's political power between the two nations, especially the massive difference in the share of female legislators in each country's respective government. This key difference will serve as the main indicator for the stark differences in women's political power between Thailand and Viet Nam. As female voter turnout data is unreliable in the two countries, with voter turnouts being overrepresented by official sources, female share of legislative power is the most obvious sign of female political power. There is no greater political power anyone can have than the ability to draft laws, making this indicator especially representative of this research's desired outcome variable. However, in order to gauge the effectiveness of Model 1, additional indicators must be used, as each hypothesized condition must be tested through comparison of the two countries.

5.4 - Key Indicators

For each hypothesis, a few indicators were used to compare Thailand and Viet Nam. These statistics allow for the testing of the hypotheses through comparing the two countries' textile and garment industry conditions as well as political conditions.

High Skilled Labor Hypothesis: Skill of Labor in Textile and Garment Industry

The key indicator used to measure the skill of the labor used in the garment industry in the two countries of focus is the percent value added in garment manufacturing. This number represents the increase in value of finished goods attributable to the labor of manufacturing

workers in each country. As such, the higher the value added is, the more skilled workers in a country are, as they are able to generate more value with their labor. While specific garment industry data is not available, this paper assumes that the garment industry value added percentage is similar to the manufacturing sector wide percentage in each country.

Table 2.

Key Indicator	Thailand	Viet Nam
Percent Value Added in Textile and Garment Manufacturing	6%	15%

(World Bank, 2023)

Economic Importance Hypothesis: Relative Economic Importance of Textile and Garment Industry

The key indicators used to measure the relative economic importance of the garment industry in Thailand and Viet Nam are the total amount of textile and garment exports as well as percentage of total exports attributable to the industry. These indicators will give an understanding of the sheer size of the industry as well as the relative size of the industry compared to others in the country, as the textile and garment industries in both countries are primarily export focused. The statistics representing these indicators are found in Table 3.

Table 3.

Key Indicator	Thailand	Viet Nam
Total Textile/Garment Exports (USD)	5.55 billion	40.3 billion
Total Exports (USD)	325.89 billion	384.22 billion
Share of Total Exports	1.7%	10.49%

(Asia Garment Hub, 2023) (World Bank, 2023)

Female-Dominated Industry Hypothesis: Total Number of Women Employed, Share of Women in the Industry

The key indicators used to test the third hypothesis are the total number of women employed in the industry, the percent of employees in the industry that are female, and the total share of working women employed in the garment industry. The combination of these variables show the effect to which the textile and garment industry is female-dominated, as well as the effect to which the industry is important to women's employment nationwide.

Table 4.

Key Indicator	Thailand	Viet Nam
Women Employed in Garment Industry	551,750	1,875,000
Percent Female in Garment Industry	67%	75%
Share of Working Women Employed in Industry	2.16%	5.65%

(Asia Garment Hub, 2023) (International Labor Organization, 2023)

Secularity Hypothesis: Government Secularity and Religious Influence

In order to gauge religiosity, simple data on religious identification was used to generate a percent religious number for each country as a key indicator. This data is represented in Table 5. Additionally, United States State Department reports on religious freedom were used to generate a holistic understanding of the level to which religious views permeate the governments of Thailand and Viet Nam.

Table 5.

Key Indicator	Thailand	Viet Nam
Percent Identifying as Religious	99%	14%

(United States Department of State, 2023)

Political Stability Hypothesis: Political Stability

The key indicators used to measure the political stability of both Thailand and Viet Nam are the number of government overthrows, meaning successful coups or rebellions, since 1945

and the number of constitutions since 1945. Given that both countries were occupied or colonized until that year, Thailand by Japan and Viet Nam by France, it's logical to use 1945 as a starting point to measure the recent political volatility of each nation. The indicator statistics for each country are represented in Table 6.

Table 6.

Key Indicator	Thailand	Viet Nam
Government Overthrows since 1945	10	2
Constitutions since 1945	18	5

(Wongcha-Um & Johnson, 2020) (Pongsudhirak, 2014) (Nation Thailand, 2017) (University of Melbourne Law)

6. Comparative Analysis of Thailand and Viet Nam

6.1 - High Skilled Labor Hypothesis

As seen in Table 2, Thailand's textile industry is significantly less developed and skilled than that of Viet Nam, with a % value-added in apparel manufacturing less than half that of Viet Nam. This suggests that textile and garment industry workers in Viet Nam possess higher levels of human capital, which likely contribute to greater female representation in Viet Nam's government than Thailand for a multitude of reasons.

Firstly, additional human capital ought to lead to higher wages for employees. This is due to the increased bargaining power of employees when they possess greater skill levels. Human capital requires investment, either from the worker or the employer — an investment which has to be paid off. In the case of worker investments in human capital, the greater number of jobs available with higher skills allows the worker the ability to leverage other employment opportunities in wage negotiations. This leads to higher wages for the employee and additional job options should their current one not work out. In the case of employer investment in human capital, employers who make these sorts of investments want to see returns on them. This leads them to incentivize their employees to stay at that job, often using higher wages. In both cases, employees become more valuable to their employers and are rewarded with higher wages. These higher wages lead to greater economic resources and greater potential for education, both of

which increase decision-making power. In female-dominated industries such as the textile and garment industry, this increased decision-making power is vital to increasing political power (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019).

The increased human capital associated with higher skilled labor also has a more direct effect on political power. Fredderke and Luiz find that, in South Africa, greater levels of human capital were associated with greater levels of political aspiration (Fredderke & Luiz, 2008). For women in developing countries where gendered views of leadership and politics hamper the representation of women in government, these increased aspirations can work to undo these patriarchal views ingrained in women. Therefore, by having greater levels of human capital, women are more likely to run for office and thus more likely to be elected.

These two methods by which human capital increases economic power and political aspirations show evidence for human capital increasing political power. Thus, a higher skilled apparel industry likely has a greater positive effect on women's political power than a lower skilled apparel industry. This is the case with Viet Nam and Thailand, as Viet Nam's textile and garment industry workers have much greater levels of human capital and thus have higher political aspirations and decision-making power. Such is a partial explanation for the stark differences in female representation in the governments of the two countries and the impact the apparel industry can have on this representation.

6.2 - Economic Importance Hypothesis

Table 3 shows the respective sizes of the textile and garment industries in Thailand and Viet Nam, as well the relative economic importance of the industries in the two countries. The statistics indicate that the textile and garment industry in Viet Nam is significantly (roughly 8 times) larger than that of Thailand. Additionally, the Vietnamese textile and garment industry is of much greater relative importance to the Vietnamese economy, being responsible for 10.49% of the country's exports. In comparison, Thailand's textile and garment industry is only responsible for 1.7% of the total Thai exports. This massive difference in industrial importance to the nationwide economy also contributes to the difference in female representation in the two governments.

Most obviously, more important, larger industries are able to pay higher wages to their employees. These higher wages contribute to greater economic resources and higher levels of

education for employees, which in the case of the apparel industry, are mostly women. As mentioned in sections 2.4 and 6.1, increased economic resources and education are incredibly important to increasing women's political power. This is due to women with higher wages and higher education levels being more able to successfully run in political campaigns, especially on the local scale (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). Therefore, the vastly more important Vietnamese textile industry would be expected to have a greater positive impact on female parliament representation than the small Thai textile industry.

Secondly, women who work in an economically important industry may be able to garner more respect from their male counterparts. Using similar logic to that found in Macchiavello, et al. (2015), which found that men are more respecting of women when they work with female managers, women working in a larger, more economically important industry may be able to leverage this greater respective economic power into greater respect from men. As such, having a large, important, female-dominated garment industry may lead men to be more likely to vote for women, as they possess greater respect for women. This would lead to a greater share of women in government as they're able to receive more votes.

Viet Nam has made progress towards having more women in leadership positions in the textile and garment industry, likely due to the size of the industry. The International Finance Corporation and the International Labor Organization of the UN began the Gender Equality and Returns program through their Better Work Initiative in 2016 in Bangladesh. The program, which aims to give women the skills needed to transition into management roles in the textile and garment industry, was adapted to Viet Nam in 2019 (World Bank, 2021). Viet Nam was likely chosen for the program due the massive size and economic importance of its textile industry. Therefore, women in Viet Nam are more likely to fill managerial roles, which garners more respect for women among men, which makes men more likely to consider female political candidates. This entire causal relationship begins with the sheer size and importance of the garment industry in Viet Nam, as its place as the 4th largest textile and garment exporter is likely responsible for it receiving the program.

6.3 - Female-Dominated Industry Hypothesis

Table 4 displays the gender statistics of Thailand and Viet Nam's respective textile and garment industries. In every indicator variable featured in this table shows that Viet Nam's textile

and garment industry is decisively more female than Thailand's. In terms of the total number of women employed in the industry, Viet Nam boasts over a million more. Additionally, Viet Nam's industry is 8% more female than Thailand's and employs over double the relative share of working women. It's likely that this high female labor force participation rate is due to the loss in working age men that occurred in Viet Nam during the civil war, setting the tone for a much more female economy in Viet Nam. All in all, the Vietnamese garment industry is much more female-dominated than Thailand's, which Model 1 suggests ought to contribute to greater women's political power.

Firstly, women in Viet Nam are more likely to be given opportunities for workplace leadership due to the greater female share of the garment industry. While women in Viet Nam already have access to the Gender Equality and Returns program, which increases their likelihood of becoming managers, the sheer amount of women in the industry mathematically ensures that women are given opportunities to advance in their careers. As mentioned above, these leadership roles in the workplace serve both as launching pads for eventual political careers as well as tools to undo culturally held biases towards women. While specific numbers on the amount of women in managerial positions in each country is hard to come by, one can use the raw number and share of women in each industry to estimate these amounts. As such, by being made up of so many women, the Vietnamese garment industry is working to advance the political power of women in the country more so than its Thai counterpart.

Additionally, due to the greater level of female-domination in the Vietnamese garment industry than the Thai garment industry, women in the industry ought to have an easier time forming female political networks in Viet Nam than in Thailand. This is somewhat obvious, as being surrounded by more of their fellow women ought to provide female employees with the ability to converse with one another. Since some conversations are bound to be about politics, female networks at work allow women to gain access to political information and discuss political solutions and aspirations with each other (Sokhey & Djupe, 2011). These networks are also important in the political decision making process, as our political choices are often influenced by those around us. By allowing women access to all female networks outside of the home, women are able to consider more options for political choices and thus develop their own political opinions and make better informed decisions. Such networks may also provide women with the support and confidence they need to attempt a political campaign. Research has found

that representation of marginalized groups is often heavily influenced by political networks and groups in said community, meaning that if women were to form such networks at work, they may be more likely to see female elected officials (Ocampo, 2018). Therefore, women in Viet Nam, who have greater access to these networks than women in Thailand, ought to have an easier time gaining political influence and power, as such networks are easier to create within a more female-dominated textile and garment industry.

6.4 - Secularity Hypothesis

Thailand and Viet Nam also differ quite greatly in the secularity of their government and culture, with Thailand being a significantly more religious nation. This is shown in Table 5, as Thailand is around 99% religious, while Viet Nam is only 14% religious. This is likely due to Viet Nam officially being an atheist state, as declared by the socialist government, whereas Thailand's constitution specifically calls for the promotion of Theravada Buddhism through education and protection (United States State Department, 2023). Taken in combination with the statistics on religious belief, this promotion of religion is enough to constitute Thailand as a religious state, while Viet Nam is not. This works to hamper women's political power, as research has shown religiosity to have a negative effect on female political representation (Yanus, 2021). Due to Thailand's citizens being more likely to be devout religious adherents than Viet Nam's, they are thus less likely to support female political candidates, and the culture of Thailand is less encouraging towards women running for political office.

Additionally, Thailand allows for the practice of Sharia law in its southern, majority Muslim regions (United States State Department, 2023). This allowance of strict religious law works to severely hamper women's political power, as strict gender roles are enforced. Under Sharia law, women are viewed as belonging in the domestic sphere, rather than the public one. Thus, women are often barred from holding positions of power, which obviously inhibits the ability of women to gain political power. This works to undermine the ability of women to seek representation in the southernmost regions of Thailand, a country where religious attitudes already harm women's political power. The same cannot be said of Viet Nam, an overtly atheist and secular state. Therefore, the model's hypothesized relationship between secularity and the effect employment can have on women's political power is supported by this comparative analysis.

6.5 - Political Stability Hypothesis

        As indicated by Table 6, Viet Nam has been significantly more politically stable than Thailand since 1945, despite Viet Nam having a long civil war in the middle of the 20th century. Including that war, Viet Nam has only seen two government overthrows and 5 different constitutions, compared to Thailand's 10 government overthrows and 18 constitutions in the same time span. As shown in Model 1, this large difference in political stability is partially responsible for the differences in female representation between the two countries.

        Thailand's history has been plagued by coups, with over 13 in its entire history as a constitutional monarchy. This has resulted in a Thai political culture where overthrow is the norm and constitutions aren't expected to last (Pongsudhirak, 2014). This leaves Thai citizens limited in their ability to democratically influence government and build the foundations for political movements. If a women's group in Thailand was to begin practicing political activism, they would, on average, have five years until a new constitution was enacted, fundamentally changing the political landscape they are operating in. If women were to get to government, they could expect their stay to be quite short, as a male-dominated military coup would likely remove them from power within a few years. This lack of stability has left Thailand struggling to democratize and allow for representation for its women.

        While Viet Nam is also not a democratic nation, its long history of political stability has allowed for it to implement more gradual, reform focused policies rather than the sharp political shock experienced under a coup. Such incremental changes are more effective at shaping public opinion than sharp shocks, as they give more time for citizens to adapt and change their mind (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). These reforms have included various programs designed to advance the political power of women, such as a legislative candidate gender quota, which is perhaps the most effective way to see greater female representation in government (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2023) (Norris & Dahlerup, 2015). These programs owe their existence to Viet Nam's political stability, as the advancement of marginalized groups would likely take the backseat to revolutionary and constitutional politics in a politically unstable country, such as Thailand. Therefore, Model 1's suggestion that political stability is a necessary condition for textile and garment industry employment to be effective in lifting women into positions of political power is supported by a direct comparison of the two countries' level of political stability.

<u>6.6 - Summary</u>

This comparative analysis was conducted in order to test the hypothesized conditions necessary for apparel industry employment to have a positive effect on women's political power. Given Thailand and Viet Nam's relative similarities in development, size, and culture, but stark differences in textile and garment industry size and female political representation, they made ideal candidates for this analysis. This revealed them to also differ greatly in the hypothesized conditions necessary for this employment to increase female representation in government. Viet Nam possessed every single one of these conditions at a greater level than Thailand — with a higher skilled, more important, more female textile and garment industry, as well as a more secular and stable political climate. These conditions allow Vietnamese women to possess greater levels of human capital, greater levels of respect, and greater access to socio-political networks, which when combined with Viet Nam's lack of religiosity and political turmoil and fluidity, cause Vietnamese women to enjoy greater political power relative to their Thai peers. This is evidenced by Viet Nam having nearly twice the rate of female legislators when compared to Thailand, a rate which is higher than the global average as well. Therefore, the model survives testing by comparative analysis of Viet Nam and Thailand, allowing it to serve as an effective explanation of when textile and garment industry employment grants greater political power to women.

7. Implications

The success of Model 1 in predicting the differences in female political representation between Viet Nam and Thailand has many implications, both for future research as well as governmental policy. Firstly, the model sets the stage for future comparative analysis in addition to more in depth statistical analysis of the effect of textile and garment industry employment on women's political power. Comparative analysis between different apparel producing countries would serve as further tests of the model, showing whether Thailand and Viet Nam are simply anomalies whose differences and similarities just happen to support the model. Additionally, local level comparisons within countries would serve to show whether the model applies on a smaller, regional scale as well as a large, national scale. Further analysis of the model can also be

done with regression and other more complex statistical methods. This would serve as greater evidence for or against the model than comparative analysis, as the actual effect of each hypothesized condition could be estimated using a large number of cases. This would show which of these conditions are the most important for textile and garment industry employment to have a positive effect on women's political power. From here, the model could be revised and edited in order to account for this new evidence and better understand when this employment can increase female representation in government.

While its existence as a foundation for future research is beneficial and interesting, the model is more productively used as a guideline for effective industrial and governmental policy for increasing female representation in government, especially after it has been improved upon by said future research. For instance, if future research shows the additional human capital gained from higher skilled labor to be the greatest determinant of employment's effect on political power, a firm, organization, or government could implement training programs for female workers in order to achieve this increased human capital. If industry size were found to be the largest determinant, then governments could invest more in the broader textile and garment industry. Addressing the secularity and stability conditions is much more difficult, as it requires shifts of the entire political and cultural climate rather than simple policy. These policies can prove to be incredibly important though, as increased female representation in government is found to have large benefits for women, such as increased access to education and healthcare (Reeves, et al., 2022) (Pillania & Sushil, 2020). Therefore, textile and garment industry employment can have significant consequences on nationwide well-being, should the hypothesized conditions in the model be met.

8. Conclusion

The effect of textile and garment industry employment on women's political power is a complex one. While employment ought to lead to greater decision-making and economic power for women, which translate into greater political power, certain barriers often exist which hamper this effect. As such, there are conditions that must be met in order for employment to have this have this effect. Model 1 shows these hypothesized conditions and how they lead to greater

political power for women. When tested using comparative analysis of Thailand and Viet Nam, Viet Nam was shown to possess the hypothesized necessary conditions at a much greater extent than Thailand. Therefore, the model serves as an effective explanation for Viet Nam's greater female representation in government. With this in mind, the model exists as a solid foundation for future research into the effects of employment on women's political power. Statistical analysis using a wider array of countries would prove beneficial in ascertaining which of the hypothesized conditions in the model are most necessary for employment to have this positive effect. Additionally, the model can serve as a framework for industrial and governmental policies aimed at aiding women in developing nations to achieve greater agency and equality.

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