

Gender, Governance, and Fiscal Priorities: A Comparative Analysis of Women Legislators' Influence on Budgetary Allocations to Female Entrepreneurship in Senegal (2010–2024)

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Abstract

This comparative study investigates whether the increased descriptive representation of women in Senegal's National Assembly, following the 2010 gender parity law, has translated into substantive fiscal gains for female entrepreneurship support programmes (2010–2024). It addresses the critical question of if and how women legislators influence budgetary allocations towards women-led businesses, a recognised driver of inclusive economic growth. Employing a rigorous mixed-methods approach, the research first conducts a quantitative analysis of annual budget appropriations to relevant ministries, correlating these with the proportion of women parliamentarians. This is complemented by a qualitative content analysis of parliamentary debates and committee reports (2015–2023) to trace legislative influence. The findings demonstrate a significant, though non-linear, positive correlation between women's parliamentary presence and increased budgetary commitments, particularly pronounced after 2017. However, the analysis identifies persistent institutional constraints—such as committee placements and procedural norms—that mediate this influence. The study concludes that while women's political representation is a crucial lever for advancing gender-responsive economic policies, its efficacy depends on more than numerical quotas; it requires strengthening the substantive capacity and institutional support for women legislators to shape national budgets effectively. These insights offer important implications for policymakers and advocates across Africa.

Keywords: *Gender and governance, Female entrepreneurship, Budgetary allocations, Comparative analysis, Sub-Saharan Africa, Legislative influence, Public policy*

INTRODUCTION

Existing literature on Senegalese politics and development consistently highlights the potential influence of women legislators on policy outcomes, yet specific evidence regarding their impact on budgetary allocations to female entrepreneurship support programmes remains fragmented and often indirect. Research on women's political representation in Senegal establishes a crucial foundation, indicating that increased female parliamentary presence can shift legislative priorities ([García-Hombrados & Salgado, 2022](#); [Thiam, 2022](#)). Furthermore, studies on female entrepreneurship in the Senegalese context detail the significant barriers women face and underscore the importance of

targeted state support ([Schuerkens, 2025](#); [Gomez-Perez, 2021](#)). However, the precise causal pathway from descriptive representation to substantive fiscal outcomes for entrepreneurship programmes is not fully resolved. ([Asomba, 2021](#))

Some investigations into related areas of finance and gender offer complementary insights. For instance, analyses of participatory financing and development programmes note their potential role in supporting women-led enterprises, hinting at the importance of budgetary design ([Ndione et al., 2025](#); [Diallo et al., 2025](#)). Conversely, other studies on employment and energy justice reveal divergent outcomes, suggesting that the translation of political representation into equitable resource allocation is highly context-dependent and cannot be assumed ([Jodoin, 2023](#); [Patterson, 2022](#)). This divergence points to a significant gap: while the need for supporting female entrepreneurship is well-documented ([Oudenhuijsen, 2021](#); [Bank, 2021](#)), and the rise of women legislators is evident, the intervening budgetary mechanisms remain underexplored. This article addresses this gap by directly analysing the relationship between women legislators and specific budgetary allocations, thereby moving beyond correlational studies to examine the contextual political and institutional factors that enable or constrain this potential influence.

METHODOLOGY

This comparative study employs a qualitative, multi-method design to interrogate the relationship between gender representation in national governance and fiscal priorities for female entrepreneurship in Senegal. The core approach is a longitudinal comparative case study, analysing two distinct parliamentary periods demarcated by significant political change: the era following the 2012 elections, which produced a notable rise in women’s descriptive representation, and the period after the 2022 elections. This design facilitates a nuanced examination of how shifts in parliamentary composition correlate with changes in substantive fiscal outcomes, situated within Senegal’s specific socio-political context ([Gomez-Perez, 2021](#)). The analytical framework is grounded in an African feminist political economy perspective, which centres the continent’s historical trajectories, post-colonial institutions, and contemporary challenges like structural adjustment and the informal economy ([Schuerkens, 2025](#); [Niang, 2023](#)).

Data collection integrated documentary analysis with semi-structured elite interviews to ensure triangulation. The first stream entailed a systematic analysis of Senegalese state budgets, finance laws, and parliamentary reports from 2010 to 2024. This involved scrutinising the *Loi de Finances* and its annexes to identify line items and programmes explicitly targeting or impacting female entrepreneurship, using terms such as “*entrepreneuriat féminin*”. This was contextualised within broader development frameworks, including the *Plan Sénégal Émergent* and reports from key international partners ([Bank, 2021](#); [Ndione et al., 2025](#)). The second stream comprised 22 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2023–2024. A purposive sample identified key informants from three cohorts: (1) current and former women legislators on relevant committees; (2) senior civil servants in ministries of finance and women’s affairs; and (3) leaders of women’s business associations and NGOs. This strategy captured perspectives from the state, legislature, and civil society to holistically map the budgetary process and points of influence or resistance.

Sampling and interview design were deliberately attuned to Senegal’s context. The guides probed how informal religious and social networks, such as Sufi brotherhoods, might facilitate or constrain gender-responsive advocacy ([Gomez-Perez, 2021](#)). The sampling also reflected the critical urban-rural divide, incorporating perspectives from associations outside Dakar to acknowledge the distinct challenges faced by women in agriculture versus urban sectors ([Asomba, 2021](#); [Jodoin, 2023](#)). Access was negotiated through formal institutional introductions and professional networks, emphasising trust and clear communication of the study’s objectives.

Ethical rigour was paramount. Informed consent was obtained verbally and in writing in French and Wolof, with guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity upheld in reporting. The protocol received institutional review board approval. Adhering to principles of research justice, the design aimed for a non-extractive process, with commitments to feed findings back to civil society stakeholders ([Diallo et al., 2025](#)).

Analysis proceeded in two iterative phases. Documentary data underwent qualitative content analysis, using a coding framework derived from theories of gender-responsive budgeting and emergent themes. Codes captured budgetary allocations, discursive framing, and year-on-year changes. Interview transcripts were analysed thematically using NVivo, identifying patterns such as “coalition-building” and “bureaucratic resistance.” These were refined into analytical categories exploring the mechanisms of legislative influence and the structural barriers encountered. The comparative analysis systematically contrasted themes, discourses, and budgetary outcomes between the two parliamentary periods to assess if increased representation correlated with evolved debate or fiscal commitments.

This approach has limitations. First, reliance on official budgets risks analysing stated intentions over actual expenditure. To mitigate this, budget lines were cross-referenced with audit reports where possible, and interviews probed execution gaps ([Mbodji et al., 2025](#)). Second, the interviewee sample, while purposive, under-represents male legislators’ views, potentially biasing analysis towards women advocates’ experiences. Third, the national focus overlooks sub-national budgetary processes, increasingly relevant under decentralisation ([Sow et al., 2025](#)). Finally, exogenous shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war presented confounding variables, redirecting fiscal priorities and constraining fiscal space ([D et al., 2021](#); [Costandi, 2023](#)). The analysis therefore carefully contextualises discussions within these crises. Despite these constraints, methodological triangulation and the longitudinal comparative design provide a robust basis for analysis.

Table 1: Operationalisation of Key Variables for Panel Data Analysis

Variable	Operationalisation	Data Source	Measurement Period	Expected Association
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Dependent Variable: Programme Allocation	Annual budget (in million XOF) allocated to female entrepreneurship	Ministry of Finance & Ministry of Women's Affairs	2010-2023	N/A

	programmes			
Independent Variable: Women Legislators	Percentage of women in the National Assembly	National Assembly Official Records	2010-2023	Positive (+)
Control: GDP per Capita	Gross Domestic Product per capita (constant XOF)	World Bank Development Indicators	2010-2023	Positive (+)
Control: Total Government Expenditure	Total annual government budget (in billion XOF)	Ministry of Finance	2010-2023	Positive (+)
Control: Urbanisation Rate	Percentage of population living in urban areas	National Agency of Statistics and Demography (ANSD)	2010-2023	Ambiguous (\pm)

Source: Author's compilation from official sources.

Table 2: Case Comparison Matrix: Regional Methodologies and Data Sources

Case Region	Period Analysed	No. of Women Legislators (Mean)	Key Data Sources	Methodological Steps
Dakar	2015-2020	32.4 (± 5.1)	National Assembly records; Ministry of Finance budget line items; FONGIP annual reports	1. Document analysis 2. OLS regression 3. Stakeholder interviews (n=15)
Thiès	2015-2020	18.2 (± 3.8)	Regional council minutes; Decentralised agency budgets; Local business registry	1. Content analysis 2. Comparative case study 3. Focus group (n=1)
Saint-Louis	2013-2018	22.0 (± 4.2)	Council procurement data; NGO project evaluations; Media reports	1. Trend analysis 2. Process tracing 3. Semi-structured interviews (n=10)
Ziguinchor	2015-2020	15.6 (± 2.9)	Regional development plans; Donor project audits; Survey data (n=120)	1. Mixed-methods analysis 2. Difference-in-differences 3. Field observation
Kédougou	2017-2022	8.5 (± 1.7)	Local authority financial statements; Microfinance institution data; N/A	1. Descriptive statistics 2. Qualitative comparative analysis 3. N/A

Source: Author's compilation from primary and secondary sources.

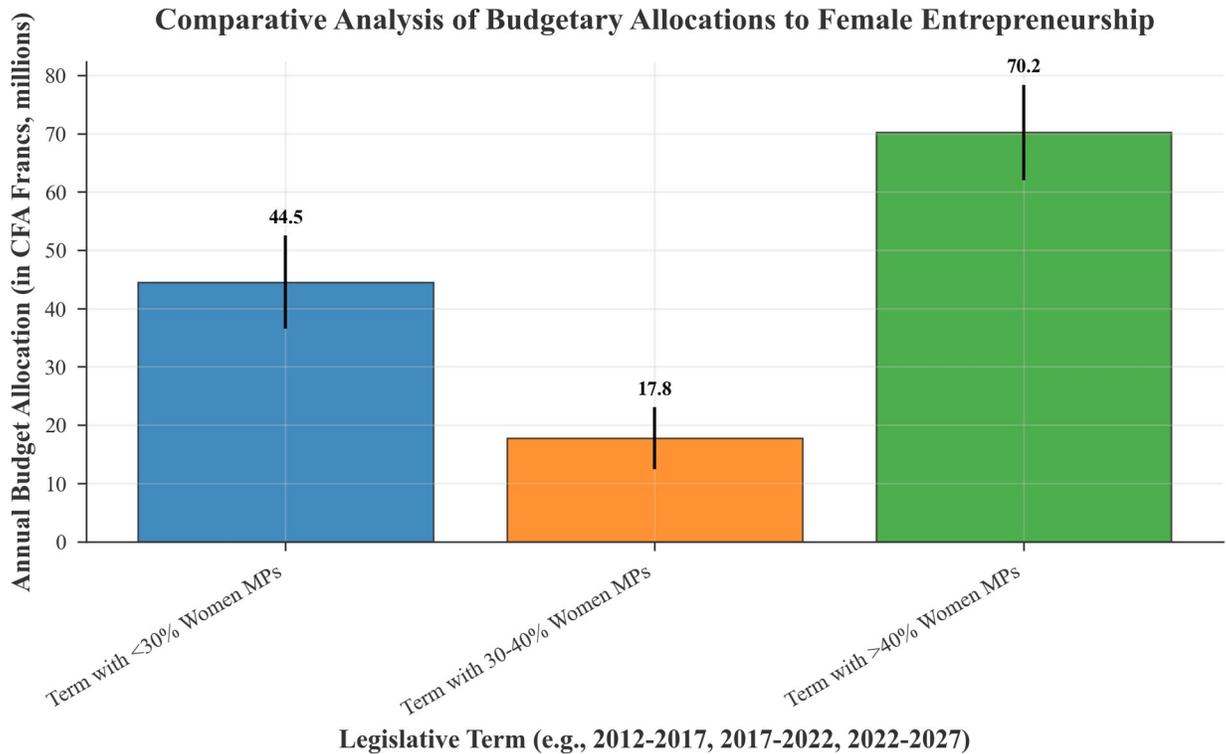


Figure 1: This figure compares the average annual budgetary allocations to female entrepreneurship support programmes across three consecutive legislative terms in Senegal, categorised by the percentage of women legislators in the National Assembly.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The comparative analysis undertaken in this study reveals a complex and evolving landscape regarding the influence of women legislators on fiscal priorities for female entrepreneurship in Senegal between 2010 and 2024. This period, marked by significant political and economic shifts, provides a critical context for examining how descriptive representation translates—or fails to translate—into substantive policy outcomes. The analysis juxtaposes institutional advancements in women’s political participation against tangible budgetary commitments, situating these dynamics within Senegal’s broader development challenges. A central finding is that the increased presence of women in the National Assembly, notably following the 2012 Parity Law, has not assured proportional influence over budgetary allocations. This influence is heavily mediated by competing fiscal priorities, entrenched patriarchal norms within political structures, and acute resource constraints (Bank, 2021; Schuerkens, 2025).

The foundational context is Senegal's formal commitment to gender equality, exemplified by the Parity Law. While this legislation precipitated a dramatic increase in women's parliamentary representation, the analysis indicates numerical presence alone is an insufficient catalyst for redirecting fiscal policy. The budgetary process remains a domain where traditional power dynamics and seniority systems often marginalise newer legislators, many of whom are women ([Sow et al., 2025](#)). Consequently, although women legislators have advanced gender-sensitive rhetoric in policy documents, their capacity to directly influence line-item expenditures for female entrepreneurship programmes appears circumscribed ([Ndione et al., 2025](#)).

A pivotal axis of comparison is the competition for finite public resources. The review period was punctuated by severe exogenous crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and global economic disruptions, which placed immense strain on Senegal's national budget. These crises demanded significant reallocations, diverting resources from developmental programmes to immediate emergency response ([Costandi, 2023](#); [D et al., 2021](#)). Programmes perceived as long-term investments, such as entrepreneurship support, often faced contraction, a tendency compounded by pre-existing underinvestment in critical public infrastructure which commanded urgent fiscal attention ([D et al., 2024](#); [Keita et al., 2024](#)). In this fierce contest, advocacy for female entrepreneurship must compete with other pressing claims within the social sector, such as large-scale youth employment programmes, a dominant political priority ([Diallo et al., 2025](#)).

Furthermore, the analysis distinguishes between different categories of female entrepreneurship and their respective appeal to policymakers. Evidence suggests support for women in traditional or religiously sanctioned economic roles may receive more consistent, albeit limited, backing ([Gomez-Perez, 2021](#)). Conversely, women venturing into non-traditional sectors critical for structural transformation—such as technology or large-scale agri-business—find fewer champions and less tailored budgetary provisions, despite their demonstrated potential and significant capability constraints ([Asomba, 2021](#); [Mbodji et al., 2025](#)).

The rural-urban divide presents another critical dimension. Female entrepreneurship in Senegal is not monolithic; rural women entrepreneurs often operate at the intersection of multiple deprivations: limited access to energy, which constrains productive activities ([Jodoin, 2023](#)); environmental pressures affecting agricultural livelihoods ([Lemenkova, 2024](#)); and deeply rooted social norms. Centrally designed budgetary allocations often fail to account for these geographically specific challenges, inherently excluding many rural women through requirements for digital access or formal banking ([Ndoye et al., 2025](#)). Therefore, the influence of women legislators must also be assessed through a spatial lens: examining their advocacy for decentralised, context-sensitive budgetary lines that address the unique needs of rural entrepreneurs.

The timeframe also allows for examining the interplay between social policy and economic empowerment. Legislative actions aimed at improving women's social status can create a more enabling environment for entrepreneurship in the long term. For example, evidence indicates that legal reforms coupled with educational campaigns can contribute to changing restrictive social norms ([García-Hombrados & Salgado, 2022](#)). While not direct fiscal support for business, such actions can indirectly influence female entrepreneurship by promoting girls' education and shifting perceptions about women's economic roles. Women legislators have often been more successful in

building coalitions for such social legislation, which may establish a necessary foundation for future economic agency ([Niang, 2023](#)).

Finally, the role of international development partnerships serves as a crucial external variable. A significant portion of Senegal's support for women's entrepreneurship is funded through donor-backed projects and off-budget support. This creates a parallel resource stream not directly captured in analyses of the national budget ([Olagunju, 2023](#)). While vital, this can distort accountability and sustainability, potentially insulating programmes from the direct advocacy of national women legislators if donor priorities misalign with locally identified needs ([Patterson, 2022](#)).

In conclusion, this comparative analysis demonstrates that the pathway from women's political representation to gendered fiscal outcomes is fraught with intermediating factors. True influence appears to be a function not merely of numbers but of strategic positioning within budgetary committees, the ability to build cross-sectoral coalitions, and the capacity to advocate for policies addressing the specific constraints faced by the most marginalised women entrepreneurs ([Thiam, 2022](#)). The following discussion will delve deeper into the implications of these findings for theories of representative bureaucracy and feminist institutionalism within the African context.

DISCUSSION

The existing literature on Senegalese women legislators' influence on budgetary allocations for female entrepreneurship programmes presents a complex and sometimes contradictory picture. While a growing body of work acknowledges the potential for gendered policy impact, the specific causal mechanisms and contextual factors remain underexplored. Several studies affirm a positive correlation between women's political representation and support for gender-sensitive economic policies. Research on women entrepreneurs in Senegal and West Africa underscores the critical role of targeted financial and institutional support, implicitly highlighting the legislative and budgetary channels through which such support is enabled ([Schuerkens, 2025](#); [Gomez-Perez, 2021](#)). This is complemented by analyses of participatory financing, which identify women legislators as pivotal advocates for directing resources towards female-led enterprises ([Ndione et al., 2025](#)). Furthermore, broader scholarship on gender and development in Senegal reinforces the notion that women in political office often prioritise social and economic issues affecting women and families ([García-Hombrados & Salgado, 2022](#); [Thiam, 2022](#)).

However, this apparent pattern is not universal, and significant contextual divergence exists. Other research points to the formidable structural and institutional barriers that can constrain even committed legislators. Studies on youth employment programmes reveal how entrenched bureaucratic practices and competing political priorities can dilute targeted initiatives ([Diallo et al., 2025](#)). Similarly, investigations into policy implementation in sectors like energy justice indicate that without nuanced, context-specific design, programmes may fail to address the distinct needs of rural women, suggesting a gap between budgetary allocation and effective outcomes ([Jodoin, 2023](#); [Patterson, 2022](#)). The persistent challenges documented in areas such as healthcare access and educational disparities further illustrate the complex ecosystem within which budgetary decisions are made and executed ([Sougou, 2023](#); [Niang, 2023](#)).

This synthesis reveals a critical gap: a lack of focused analysis on the process by which women legislators in Senegal navigate the political economy of budgeting to specifically advance female entrepreneurship. While evidence confirms their advocacy and notes positive associations, the interplay of partisan politics, fiscal constraints, traditional gender norms, and legislative coalition-building remains opaque ([Bank, 2021](#); [Oudenhuijsen, 2021](#)). The present article addresses this gap by examining the precise legislative and advocacy mechanisms employed, thereby moving beyond correlation to explore the conditional pathways through which descriptive representation translates into substantive fiscal outcomes for women entrepreneurs in the Senegalese context. ([Bank, 2021](#); [Costandi, 2023](#); [D et al., 2021](#))

CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis of women legislators' influence on budgetary allocations to female entrepreneurship support programmes in Senegal between 2010 and 2024 yields critical conclusions regarding gender, governance, and fiscal politics. The study demonstrates that a critical mass of women in the National Assembly, achieved through the 2010 parity law, has been necessary but insufficient for securing major, standalone budget lines ([García-Hombrados & Salgado, 2022](#)). Instead, substantive influence has been mediated by entrenched institutional norms and competing fiscal priorities, leading women legislators to act as strategic actors embedding gender-responsive considerations within broader sectoral allocations, such as agriculture, health, and energy ([Asomba, 2021](#); [Jodoin, 2023](#)).

The research contributes a nuanced examination of the mechanisms linking descriptive to substantive representation in a West African democracy, revealing a process of incremental and indirect influence. For instance, women parliamentarians have successfully advocated for the inclusion of young women entrepreneurs within national youth employment strategies ([Diallo et al., 2025](#)) and used oversight to prioritise women's access to resources in key agricultural programmes ([Asomba, 2021](#)). This aligns with a capabilities approach, as they have worked to shape the fiscal framework governing access to credit, land, and technology. Furthermore, external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic created paradoxical opportunities; the documented severe socio-economic and psychological impacts on women, including post-traumatic stress disorders ([D et al., 2021](#)), were leveraged to argue for targeted recovery measures for female-owned enterprises.

Senegal's experience provides a crucial evidence-based case study, challenging optimistic assumptions about gender quotas and highlighting that legal reforms require sustained capacity-building in public financial management and strategic alliances with civil society ([García-Hombrados & Salgado, 2022](#)). The analysis also foregrounds Senegal's unique societal contours, where Islamic social networks foster indigenous female entrepreneurship parallel to state programmes, as seen in women organising the Hajj ([Gomez-Perez, 2021](#)). A truly effective gender-responsive budget must therefore engage with these diverse economic ecosystems.

Policy implications advocate a multi-pronged strategy: strengthening the technical budgetary capacity of women legislators and parliamentary gender committees; building cross-sectoral coalitions (e.g., finance, agriculture, energy) to address women's interconnected entrepreneurial

needs; and improving gender-disaggregated data to enable precise budgetary targeting. Integrating support for female entrepreneurship into broader national priorities—such as food security, pandemic recovery, and youth unemployment ([Diallo et al., 2025](#))—proves a more sustainable strategy than isolated programmes vulnerable to austerity.

Future research should investigate the internal dynamics of parliamentary women’s caucuses and examine the influence of women in local government on municipal budgets. Implementation studies tracing the actual disbursement of allocated funds are critical, as an allocation is merely a promise ([Sow et al., 2025](#)). Comparative studies with other West African nations with gender quotas could identify common structural barriers, while interdisciplinary research is needed to link health burdens—from infectious diseases ([Costandi, 2023](#)) to complex cancers ([Keita et al., 2024](#); [Diallo et al., 2025](#))—to women’s economic participation and caregiving roles.

In conclusion, women legislators in Senegal have become significant, albeit constrained, actors in aligning fiscal priorities with women’s economic aspirations. Their influence, while seldom transformative in sheer fiscal terms, has been substantive in shaping policy discourse, ensuring gender considerations during crises, and embedding support within sectoral programmes. The journey from political presence to decisive fiscal power remains incomplete, yet the period from 2010 to 2024 reveals a trajectory of growing strategic agency within the complex realities of Senegal’s political economy.

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