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Women's Economic Empowerment in Kazakhstan: Institutional Trust, Economic Participation, and Sociocultural Barriers

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A B S T R A C T

The paper explores institutional trust, women's participation in the economy and politics in both urban and rural areas of Kazakhstan, considering regional differences between these areas. The research is quantitative in its approach that combines both Latent Class Analysis (LCA), which explains latent attitudinal categories, with Change-Point Analysis to determine key turning points in Gender Inequality Index (GII) over a 16-year time series from 2008 to 2023. The study finds a high level of gender perspective disparity between urban and rural areas in Kazakhstan, in addition to essential changes in gender inequality levels. The results show that institutional trust plays a vital role in shaping women's participation in the economic sphere, with a lower level of trust correlated with a decrease in labor force involvement and career growth. In addition, two key

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turning points in gender development have also been identified in 2019 and 2022, which are linked with government reform as well as socioeconomic alterations.

KEYWORDS: *gender, women's empowerment, social attitudes, labor market, economic participation*

Introduction

Women's economic empowerment is essential for sustainable economic growth and social justice. Although there is formal recognition of gender equality, women still face serious institutional and socio-cultural barriers that limit their access to entrepreneurship, leadership positions, and high-paying jobs. Feminist economic theory emphasizes that the economic marginalization of women is caused by market conditions and institutional and cultural factors (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Barker, 2005). In parallel, institutional trust theory posits that trust in public institutions significantly shapes individuals' economic engagement, including their likelihood to pursue entrepreneurial activities and career advancement (Weil & Putnam, 1994; Deininger & Goyal, 2024).

Empirical studies have shown that low trust in institutions significantly hinders women's access to financial resources and entrepreneurial networks, limiting their economic activity, particularly in developing economies. (Mengesha et al., 2017; Tangut, 2024). In Kazakhstan, like many other countries, this issue is exacerbated by a lack of transparency in government programs, limited access to career development opportunities for women, and a lack of sustainable mechanisms to promote women to managerial positions. (Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2019; Yousafzai et al., 2024). Additionally, traditional gender roles and patriarchal attitudes, particularly prevalent in rural areas of Kazakhstan, significantly restrict women's ability to develop entrepreneurship and increase their participation in the economy (Kireyeva et al., 2024).

The scientific novelty of this study lies in its integrated approach to analyzing gender inequality in Kazakhstan. Unlike most other studies, which focus on either the micro-level (sociocultural attitudes) or the macro-level (structural indicators), this paper combines both levels of analysis for the first time. In this paper, an assessment is carried out to identify hidden patterns concerning gender norms and women's involvement in economic activity using the latent class analysis (LCA) method. Based on the study of

the collected panel data for 2008-2023, the dynamics of gender equality are investigated, and the most significant periods of transformation are identified.

This work provides essential empirical data and a theoretical rationale for developing targeted measures to support women's entrepreneurship and increase women's economic participation in Kazakhstan. The study addresses two key issues: (1) how does the level of institutional trust affect women's economic and political participation in Kazakhstan? (2) What differences exist in the perception of women's gender roles and economic opportunities between urban and rural regions of the country? LCA and point-of-change analysis are used to answer these questions. The LCA method allows the grouping of respondents according to their views on gender roles, the level of institutional trust, and economic activity. Analyzing points of change helps identify structural shifts that affect women's entrepreneurial initiatives.

This paper is outlined as follows: the literature review synthesizes research on gender roles, institutional trust, and women's economic participation. The methodology outlines the use of Latent Class Analysis, change-point analysis, and data sources. The results section presents key findings on regional differences and temporal trends. Finally, the conclusion highlights the study's contributions and limitations, offering actionable policy recommendations to support women's economic empowerment.

Literature Review

Women's economic empowerment, including developing women's entrepreneurship, is vital in transforming traditional gender roles and increasing economic participation. However, the transformation of gender roles occurs unevenly in different countries, and the degree of women's involvement in the economy varies significantly depending on cultural traditions, legal norms, and public perception. For example, Nair (2023) found that women are more active in entrepreneurial activities in highly digitalized countries. Sugiyanto et al. (2024) emphasized that developing innovative behavior can expand women's access to economic opportunities.

In developed countries, women are increasingly taking leadership positions and starting businesses. In developing countries, patriarchal norms are more pronounced, making it more difficult for women to enter the formal labor market and engage in entrepreneurial activities (Iqbal et al.,

2023; Setyorini et al., 2024). Social attitudes significantly impact employment in countries with high levels of religiosity and tradition (Khoudja & Fleischman, 2015; Gjylbegaj & Radwan, 2025).

In Kazakhstan, traditional social attitudes often emphasize male authority within the household and community decision-making, hindering women's progression into leadership and high-status positions (Kenzheali et al., 2024). A prevalent belief is that a woman's primary duty lies in the family sphere, particularly in caregiving and homemaking roles, which leads to skepticism regarding women's suitability for political or executive positions (Davletbayeva & Semidotskikh, 2024). Stereotypes such as "men are natural leaders" and "women are emotionally less stable for management roles" persist in workplace and educational environments, influencing hiring decisions and access to promotions (Lawson et al., 2022). Moreover, retraditionalization and patriarchal narratives, emphasizing the roles of "woman-mother" and "keeper of traditions", continue to hinder women's equal participation in economic and political life. Despite their high educational potential, traditional norms and institutions in rural areas prevent women's equal access to education, employment and entrepreneurship (Meenakshi, et al., 2024). These attitudes contribute to occupational segregation and reinforce the gender gap in income and career advancement.

Structural barriers further compound these limitations. In rural areas, women are more likely to be employed in the informal sector, which undermines financial independence and restricts access to social protection, credit systems, and long-term career advancement (Mensah & Derera, 2023; Yoganandham & Vishnuram, 2024; Koehler, 2025). In 2022, Kazakhstani women earned approximately 74.8% of what men earned, down from 78.3% in 2021, reflecting a backslide in gender pay equity (Bureau of National Statistics, 2023). Although women in urban areas have better access to education and high-income jobs, gender-based income disparities persist nationwide (Lekha & Kumar, 2024; Mohammed et al., 2025).

While female entrepreneurship has expanded in Kazakhstan, as women comprise 64.6% of individual entrepreneurs, barriers to accessing profitable and high-growth sectors remain (Bureau of National Statistics, 2023). These include discriminatory hiring practices, limited access to professional networks, and insufficient institutional support (Agrawal, 2018; Yousafzai et al., 2024). Gender norms continue to shape decisions about resource allocation and leadership, and without sufficient institutional trust, even

highly qualified women may remain excluded from the formal labor market (Weil & Putnam, 1994; Rowley et al., 2010; Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2019). Moreover, it can be concluded that without sufficient institutional trust, even qualified women may continue to be excluded from the formal labor market.

International research shows that low institutional trust limits women's economic participation, career growth, and entrepreneurial activity (Oboro-Offerie & Busia, 2022; Karhina et al., 2019; Bhandari et al., 2024). This is often reinforced by cultural traditions and weak institutional frameworks (Badamas & Idris-Iyekolo, 2025). For example, Mengesha et al. (2017) found that migrant women in Australia face reduced access to economic resources when trust in institutions is low. Similarly, Liani et al. (2021) observed that weak trust in institutions in African countries decreases women's access to finance and reduces their economic activity.

In contrast, high trust in government and labor institutions encourages greater female participation in public life (Deininger & Goyal, 2024). Di Ruggiero (2025) shows that policies promoting women's inclusion can help strengthen institutional trust. Likewise, Świecka et al. (2025) found that social trust and awareness positively influence women's engagement in economic initiatives.

In Kazakhstan, institutional trust among women remains low and uneven. Despite the formal promotion of gender equality, women's representation in leadership and political roles is limited. A lack of transparency in government programs and weak support for female entrepreneurship reinforce inequality. These trends echo Tangut's (2024) findings that low trust in institutions discourages women from engaging in entrepreneurial activities. As of May 2025, women held only 28 out of 148 seats (18.9%) in the lower house of Parliament, the Mäjilis (Central Communications Service under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025). This underrepresentation underscores the imperative of strengthening institutional processes to support women's leadership. However, recent data suggests a potential opportunity for institutional engagement. According to a 2024 survey conducted by the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies, women's trust in the President stood at 78.1%, compared to 74.5% among men (KazISS, 2025). This relatively high level of trust presents an opportunity to translate institutional confidence into enhanced economic participation.

In various countries, the increased women's participation in the economy has played a pivotal role in transforming traditional gender norms. In Turkey, the rise of female entrepreneurship has contributed to shifting perceptions about women's social functions (Kurtege Sefer, 2020). In India, policy initiatives that ensured women's access to financing and resources have helped alter gender expectations, particularly in rural regions (Chopra, 2024). These cases highlight how economic empowerment, when supported by institutional reforms, can drive deeper sociocultural change. Kazakhstan presents a similar yet distinct context, shaped by its own policy landscape and regional dynamics.

Women's economic participation empowers them and plays a critical role in challenging traditional gender roles. Research confirms that increasing the number of women in leadership positions reduces discrimination and fosters more inclusive institutions (Chinedu-Eze et al., 2024). The growth of women's entrepreneurship likewise challenges prevailing societal expectations and expands women's perceived economic roles (Đuričin & Beraha, 2024; Yousafzai et al., 2024).

These initiatives have yielded mixed outcomes. Women now comprise nearly 65% of sole proprietors and 46.9% of SME employees, indicating significant progress in entrepreneurship and formal employment (Bureau of National Statistics, 2023b). However, women remain underrepresented in high-income, male-dominated sectors, and the gender wage gap persists (Bureau of National Statistics, 2023a). Sociocultural norms, particularly in rural areas, continue to reinforce traditional roles. According to a 2023 UNDP survey, 67.9% of men and 53.6% of women still believe that a woman's primary role is to care for the family, while only around one-third of respondents are familiar with terms such as "gender equality" or "feminism" (UNDP, 2023).

Urban–rural disparities further shape this dynamic. In cities like Astana and Almaty, women's labor force participation exceeds 68%, supported by better access to education and professional networks. In contrast, rural regions such as Turkistan and Kyzylorda show rates closer to 58%, with many women engaged in informal or unpaid labor (Bureau of National Statistics, 2023c). Women in urban areas are more likely to assume leadership roles, while rural women remain largely excluded from business and political networks (Kireyeva et al., 2024).

A review of scientific papers reveals a strong link between gender norms, institutional trust, and women's economic activity. In countries with

high levels of institutional trust, women participate more actively in economic activities, while there are more significant barriers in traditional societies. In the case of Kazakhstan, however, many studies overlook regional differences and the role of institutional trust in shaping women's economic behavior. This creates a gap in understanding how gender norms evolve across urban and rural contexts, and how institutional settings may accelerate or hinder women's empowerment.

Research Methods

This study uses a quantitative method, emphasising LCA to identify hidden groups of respondents with common gender attitudes. The study covers residents of Kazakhstan's urban and rural areas and aims to identify barriers to women's access to quality employment. The prime rationale for conducting a complete examination is to produce thoughtful observations that can be efficiently utilised to formulate key strategies that will effectively broaden opportunities and improve accessibility towards quality employment for women in Kazakhstan.

The research is based on official statistical data from the Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2008-2023, reflecting objective gender equality indicators. Using these data makes it possible to track the dynamics of structural changes in gender equality over the past 15 years. Data from the World Values Survey (WVS), which evaluates public attitudes on gender norms, social engagement, and trust in institutions, are analyzed. This dataset provides essential information about the perception of gender roles and the participation of women in various spheres of life at the time of the survey. This dual-source approach enables a comprehensive examination of gender inequality at structural (economic and political indicators) and attitudinal (individual beliefs) levels. However, due to the WVS's data collection timeline, some recent changes such as policy reforms and growing female leadership are not fully captured, limiting the data's applicability for current trend analysis.

The dataset comprises responses from 1,276 individuals, with 755 from urban and 521 from rural areas, collected during a survey from the WVS. The primary focus is identifying latent classes based on agreement levels with various statements about gender norms, access to education, employment equity, and organisational participation. Attitudes on gender roles (Q29, Q30, Q31, Q35), trust in women's organisations (Q80),

participation in women's groups (Q104), and perceptions of gender equality in politics (Q233) are analysed. These indicators help reveal latent attitudinal patterns influencing women's employment opportunities. Responses are measured using ordinal scales, such as Likert scales (ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree') or categorical scales (e.g., 'Not at all often' to 'Very often'), serving as key indicators in assessing attitudinal structures that shape access to quality employment for women.

The LCA framework assumes that a finite number of unobserved latent classes, k, generate the observed response patterns. The probability of observing a response pattern Yi for individual i, given latent class k, can be expressed as shown in formula (1):

$$P(Y_i) = \sum_{k=1}^{K} P(C_i = k) \prod_{j=1}^{J} P(Y_{ij} \mid C_i = k) \qquad (1)$$

where:

K – the total number of latent classes

J – the number of observed variables

C_i – the latent class membership for individual *i*

$P(Y_{ij} \mid C_i = k)$ – the conditional response probabilities given class membership.

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by region.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by region

Region	Number of cases	Total %	Cumulative %
KZ-ALA Almaty city	135	10.6	10.6
KZ-AST Astana city	70	5.5	16.1
KZ-ALM Almaty	137	10.7	26.8
KZ-AKM Akmola	57	4.5	31.3
KZ-AKT Aktobe	59	4.6	35.9
KZ-ZAP West Kazakhstan	43	3.4	42.9
KZ-MAN Mangystau	44	3.4	46.3
KZ-YUZ Turkestan	114	8.9	54.9
KZ-PAV Pavlodar	62	4.9	59.8
KZ-KAR Karagandy	102	8.0	67.8
KZ-KUS Kostanay	68	5.3	73.1
KZ-KZY Kyzylorda	58	4.5	77.6

Region	Number of cases	Total %	Cumulative %
KZ-VOS East Kazakhstan	65	5.1	82.7
KZ-SHV Shymkent city	62	4.9	87.6
KZ-SEV North Kazakhstan	55	4.3	91.9
KZ-ZHA Zhambyl	74	5.8	100.0

Source: Authors' elaboration.

For this analysis, two latent classes were specified to capture divergent attitudinal groups:

1. Class 1 ("Moderates"): respondents exhibiting neutral or moderate agreement patterns, reflecting evolving or mixed views on traditional gender roles.
2. Class 2 ("Traditionalists"): respondents with conservative views who support traditional gender norms.

To assess the role of urban or rural residence, the grouping variable *URBRURAL* was incorporated to examine its influence on latent class membership. This relationship was modelled using a multinomial logit model, as shown in formula (2):

$$\log\left(\frac{P(C_i=2)}{P(C_i=1)}\right) = \alpha + \gamma \cdot URBRURAL \qquad (2)$$

where α is the intercept and γ quantifies the effect of urban or rural residence on the likelihood of latent class membership. The models were estimated separately for urban and rural respondents using the generalized structural equation modelling (GSEM) framework in STATA. GSEM was selected over alternatives such as multinomial logit regression or hierarchical linear models because it can address latent classes of different types of responses (i.e., ordinal, categorical) and estimate associations between observed covariates and latent classes with consideration for measurement error. The choice ensures efficient capturing of interactions among gender norms, institutional trust, and regional differences, which is the research's main analysis point.

Residual variances ($\text{var}(\epsilon_{Qj})$) were evaluated to identify differences in attitudes between latent classes. Urban respondents from Class 1 showed less variability in Q30 (views on educational equality) than rural respondents, indicating more sustainable urban change. This methodology allows us to identify strategic directions for women's empowerment.

Moderators (Class 1) have progressive views, especially in cities where equality trends in education and leadership are increasing. Politicians should use this to increase women's participation in quality employment. "Traditionalists" (Class 2) adhere to traditional gender roles, especially in rural areas. Measures to reduce prejudice and support women's organizations are vital for them.

Table 2: Indicators for women's participation in various sectors

Indicator	Period
The gender inequality index	2008-2023
Seats in the mazhilis of the parliament, the ratio of women	2008-2023
The proportion of the economically active female population of working age	2008-2023
Share of women-police, in percentage	2008-2023
Share of women judges, in percentage	2008-2023
Share of women occupying leading positions in percent	2008-2023
The proportion of women in political posts, in percent	2008-2023
Number of women holding leadership positions in the government	2008-2023

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The methodology is in a sequence that is as follows:

(1) *Collection of data*. The study makes use of a longitudinal database that comprises the Gender Inequality Index (GII) as well as corresponding indicators that are relevant in terms of women in different sectors, as seen in Table 2.

The dataset ranges from 2008 through 2023, giving a complete picture of gender inequality over a 16-year timeframe.

2) *Change-Point Detection*. A change point is identified whenever a shift in signs in the slope is observed, hence a shift from decline towards stagnation or advancement. The approach focuses on magnitude changes to measure improvement and stagnation and on shift timings to associate these with corresponding socio-political and economic developments.

3) *Visualisation and Interpretation.* To explore potential correlations, these points are cross-referenced with macro-level trends in women's participation across political, economic, and security sectors. Specifically,

we examine the relationship between increased female representation in leadership (e.g., parliament, police, judiciary) and observed changes in the role of socio-political reforms and policy interventions in influencing these trends.

4) *Contextual Analysis*. The identified change points are analysed within Kazakhstan's broader policy and socio-economic context. This involves correlating the years of significant shifts (e.g., 2019 and 2022) with the introduction of gender-sensitive policies and reforms, Changes in leadership initiatives promoting women's participation, and Regional or sectoral advancements in female representation.

This methodology presents a balanced strategy for analysing drivers and obstacles that affect gender inequality trends in Kazakhstan by blending quantitative examination with context interpretation. The outcomes form a platform for developing evidence-based solutions to consolidate progress and address structural issues linked with gender inequality.

Results

The results obtained from LCA give a more refined interpretation of gender roles, women's faith in women's organisations, and gender activity participation in urban and rural areas, specifically about socio-cultural beliefs and perceptions about institutions. The obtained findings have essential relevance in guiding strategies towards enhancing women's accessibility to quality job opportunities across the entire nation, alongside the overall objectives of gender equality as well as socio-economic development.

The analysis identified two distinct latent classes across urban and rural respondents, representing divergent attitudinal profiles. Class 1 ("Moderates") includes individuals with more neutral or evolving views on traditional gender roles and moderate levels of institutional trust. In contrast, Class 2 ("Traditionalists") comprises respondents who strongly endorse conventional gender norms and highly trust women-specific institutions.

The complete list of survey questions and response options is available in Appendix Table 3.

Results indicate clear attitudinal divides between urban and rural respondents (Table 4). "Moderates" (Class 1) show weaker adherence to traditional gender roles, with lower β-values for statements on male political leadership (Q29: β = 1.019, p<0.001) and male priority in education (Q30: β

= 0.274, p = 0.005). Conversely, "Traditionalists" (Class 2) strongly support conventional norms, with β-values exceeding 2.4 (p<0.001) across key indicators (Q29, Q30, Q35). This polarization suggests the need for differentiated policy interventions targeting urban progressives and rural conservatives (see Table 4 for full results).

Table 4: Results of LCA

Variable	Urban Class 1 (β)	Urban Class 2 (β)	Rural Class 1 (β)	Rural Class 2 (β)
Q29	1.019 (p<0.001)	2.417 (p<0.001)	1.020 (p<0.001)	2.417 (p<0.001)
Q30	0.274 (p=0.005)	2.900 (p<0.001)	0.274 (p=0.005)	2.900 (p<0.001)
Q35	2.366 (p<0.001)	2.982 (p<0.001)	2.366 (p<0.001)	2.982 (p<0.001)
Q80	1.795 (p<0.001)	1.894 (p<0.001)	1.335 (p<0.001)	1.894 (p<0.001)
Q104	0.033 (p=0.387)	-0.022 (p=0.053)	0.033 (p=0.387)	-0.022 (p=0.053)
Q233	1.461 (p<0.001)	2.158 (p<0.001)	1.461 (p<0.001)	2.158 (p<0.001)

Source: Authors' elaboration.

In contrast, urban respondents in Class 2 have a high level of consensus regarding all variables with mean scores above β = 2.4 (p<0.001) on Q29, Q30, and Q35. The implication is that urban respondents in Class 2 reflect a high level of conformity with traditional views, which can hinder gender progress in urban areas. In addition, urban respondents in Class 2 have high confidence in women's organisations (Q80), with a score of β = 1.894 (p<0.001), which reflects that these women's organisations are seen in a good light by those with traditional gender roles.

In rural areas, Class 1 shows similar attitudinal patterns to their urban counterparts, with moderate agreement on Q29 (β = 1.020) and minimal agreement on Q30 (β = 0.274), indicating a gradual shift toward gender parity in leadership and education. Meanwhile, rural "Traditionalists" maintain strong support for conventional norms (β > 2.9 on Q30 and Q35), reinforcing the persistence of patriarchal attitudes across regions.

"Traditionalists" display consistently high β-values across all indicators, particularly in leadership and education contexts (e.g., Q30: β > 2.9, p < 0.001), reflecting strong adherence to traditional gender roles. In contrast, "Moderates" show minimal agreement with such norms, primarily on educational equity (Q30: β = 0.274, p = 0.005), which indicates growing support for gender parity, particularly in urban areas.

These divergent views underscore the need for targeted educational initiatives and awareness campaigns in rural regions, where patriarchal beliefs remain deeply embedded. Traditional views on family income roles also remain strong (Q35: β = 2.366, p < 0.001), suggesting that even where progressive attitudes toward leadership and education are emerging, household economic norms tend to remain conservative. Furthermore, trust in women's organizations (Q80) is noticeably lower among rural Moderates (β = 1.335) than their urban counterparts. This finding reflects a limited level of institutional confidence, which may hinder broader participation in gender-based initiatives.

Rural respondents in Class 2 exhibit patterns consistent with their urban counterparts, demonstrating strong agreement with traditional gender norms across all key indicators (e.g., Q29–Q35, β > 2.4, p < 0.001). Confidence in women's organizations (Q80: β = 1.894) remains moderately high even among Traditionalists, although participation in such groups **(Q104)** is consistently low across all groups (β ≈ 0.033), limiting their potential impact.

Perceptions of gender equality in political opportunities (Q233) reveal further disparities. Urban respondents in Class 1 perceive moderate levels of equality (β=1.461, p<0.001), whereas those in Class 2 demonstrate significantly stronger alignment (β=2.158, p<0.001). Rural respondents exhibit similar trends, although with slightly lower responses in Class 1, suggesting entrenched biases in rural areas. These disparities underline the importance of targeted policy measures to address regional and class-specific barriers to women's political participation and representation.

The findings emphasise the need for nuanced policy measures to address regional and class-specific barriers to women's access to quality employment. Urban Class 1 respondents represent a demographic ripe for progressive interventions, such as gender-equal education campaigns and leadership development programs. In contrast, rural Class 2 respondents require targeted strategies to challenge deeply entrenched traditional norms and improve institutional trust. Efforts to enhance participation in women's

groups and confidence in women's organisations are crucial to fostering a supportive environment for women's empowerment across all classes and regions. By addressing these disparities, Kazakhstan can make significant strides toward achieving its strategic goal of expanding opportunities and access for women in the labour market.

Gender inequality trends in Kazakhstan show two key turning points: a temporary setback in 2019 and a significant improvement in 2022 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Change-point analysis of the GII in Kazakhstan for 2008–2023
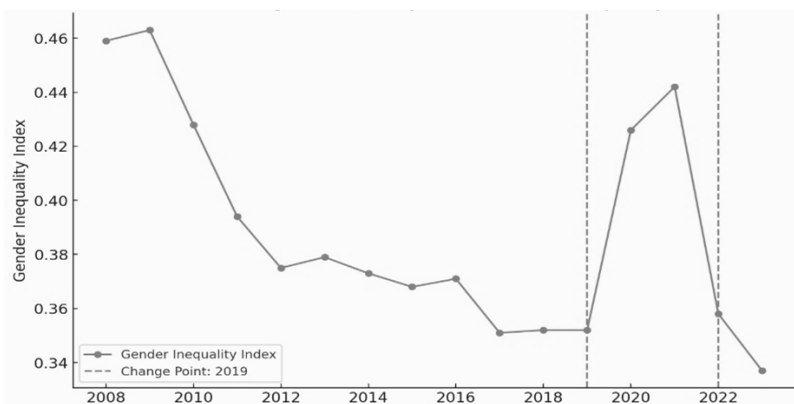
Source: Authors' elaboration.

The change-point estimation in Kazakhstan from 2008 until 2023 reflects two points at which a break in trend is discernible: 2019 and 2022. 2019 and 2022 are turning points in gender inequality trajectories that align with women participating in sectors. In 2019, the GII saw a reversal 2019, rising from 0.352 in 2018 to 0.426 in 2019. The stagnation can be seen as proof of setbacks in gender policy implementation or a slower rate of closing structural gaps. During these two years, women in the police increased incrementally from 12.5% in 2018 to 14.6% in 2019, whereas women in leadership roles and political positions saw little shift. The stagnation is proof that social as well as structural obstacles still hold sway despite incremental advancement in women in professions across fields, especially in rural as well as traditionally conservative areas. The shift that followed in 2022 proves that gender inequality has reduced considerably, as seen in a drastic fall in the GII from 0.442 in 2021 to 0.358 in 2022. The fall

is in line with enhanced trends in women's participation, as women in the police increased to 15.6%, and women in leadership positions increased to 40.8%. The increment in institutional reform and women rising into leadership roles in political and economic spaces can be seen as a cause.

The findings are that structural developments in women's participation concerning security (police), leadership, and political involvement are key drivers in reducing gender inequality. The 2019 regression, as much as its transitory state, highlights that ongoing policy application and assessment are crucial, especially in tackling root gender roles in rural contexts. The correlation with social participation data, that is, latent class trends, clearly reflects those targeted strategies, development in terms of institutional confidence, and women attaining leadership positions, which are critical drivers in gender inequality advancements. The research recommends longitudinal tracking of gender inequality trends and considering the correlation between macro-level developments in policy and attitudinal developments at a more local level. Policymakers are critical in operationalising these insights into devising evidence-based strategies that promote equal participation of women in all sectors of society, that is, in the economy.

Discussions

The quantitative approach utilized, which is grounded in LCA, recognizes latent heterogeneity concerning gender roles, leadership, educational opportunities, and employment equity regarding gender inequality trends. The study also develops a correlation between attitudinal trends in 2018 and subsequent changes in the GII, providing insights into factors influencing women's employment opportunities in Kazakhstan.

The divide between "Moderates" (Class 1) and "Traditionalists" (Class 2) is consistent across urban and rural populations. Urban Moderates generally express more egalitarian views, as reflected in lower β-values related to male leadership and educational preference. In contrast, Traditionalists, particularly in rural areas, strongly adhere to conservative gender norms that limit women's economic roles.

High β-values on Q35 among "Traditionalists" reflect persistent stereotypes that hinder women's participation in high-income sectors and limit both formal and domestic economic contributions. These cultural attitudes pose challenges for implementing national gender equality

strategies. Overcoming them requires coordinated efforts, including awareness campaigns and private-sector incentives to promote women's advancement, ultimately contributing to broader socio-economic development.

These attitudinal divisions correspond with national-level trends. The GII improved from 0.459 in 2008 to 0.351 in 2017, but a reversal occurred in 2019 (0.426), indicating structural stagnation. Although trust in women's organizations increased in 2018 (Q80: $\beta = 1.894$, $p < .01$), this did not lead to greater participation or institutional reform. By 2022, the GII declined again to 0.358, reflecting the positive impact of gender-responsive policymaking and increased female representation in politics (40.8%) and law enforcement (15.6%).

Figure 2 illustrates the attitudinal divide, showing significant β-value differences across urban and rural respondents in Q29, Q30, Q35, Q80, Q104, and Q233.

The integration with the WVS data makes critical intersections between attested outcomes and underlying social attitudes evident. For example, areas with high proportions of "Traditionalists" (Class 2) have consistently low female labour participation rates and little gender reform progress. In rural areas with high proportions of traditional beliefs, the ratio of economically active women is stagnant compared to urban areas, but a consistent trend has been seen. The difference highlights mediation by sociocultural norms in determining the impact of measures. The pattern is also seen in educational attainment, reflecting the underlying attitudinal divide; poor female enrollments at universities are seen in rural areas despite national progress. The overlap between latent classes and regional trends in GII highlights that geographically targeted strategies are a necessary countermeasure to counteract prevailing traditional beliefs and promote development towards more supportive institutions.

Figure 2: Change-point analysis of the GII in Kazakhstan for 2008-2023
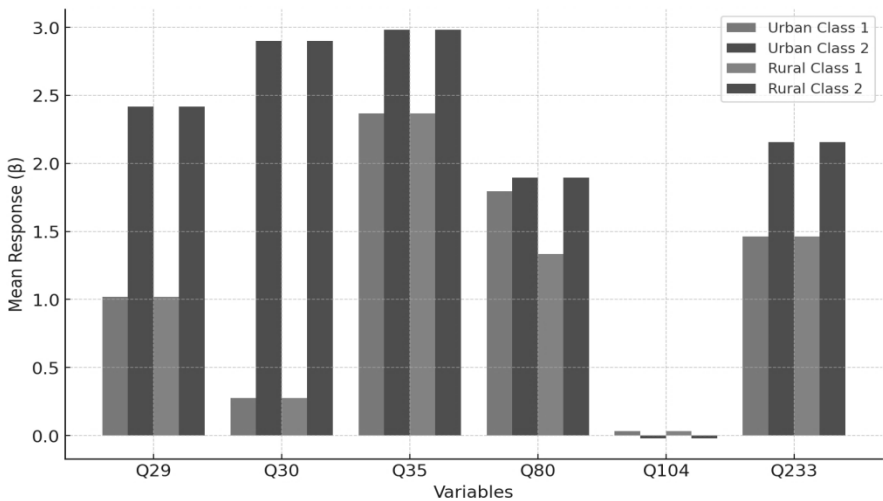
Source: Authors' elaboration.

These results concur with previous contributions by Kuzhabekova and Almukhambetova (2019), who state that structural institutional obstacles—particularly at the levels of public administration and academia—hindered women's advancement despite official promises of gender equality. One of the confirmations of the results is that rural interviewees are less receptive to efforts at change from the top-down level, and community-centered, non-state decentralization programs, like those implemented by the Zhas Project in collaboration with UNDP's local mainstreaming efforts, have a more significant, sustainable impact in such environments.

"Traditionalists" (Class 2) exhibit strong confidence in women's organizations ($\beta = 1.894$, p<0.001), yet participation remains low ($\beta \approx 0.033$, not significant), highlighting a gap between perceived importance and actual engagement. The difference reflects that though confidence in these kinds of organizations is high, participation is not evident. Therefore, developing women's organization capacities and coverage, especially in rural areas, is necessary to translate confidence into effective participation and empower women. Kazakhstan has implemented several measures to encourage women's engagement in civic activity, such as the National Commission on Women's Affairs and Family-Demographic Policy and the targeted funding offered through the Damu Entrepreneurship Fund. While such measures have succeeded at the urban level, our survey indicates partial success at the

rural level, where underlying traditional attitudes prevail. This mismatch suggests the need for policy adaptation at the regional level and greater monitoring mechanisms for converting country-level initiatives to local-level outcomes.

The change-point analysis on GII also provides additional context in interpreting these trends. The stagnation in 2019 is in tandem with a slowdown in policymaking and resistance towards change, as seen from a high incidence rate in Traditionalist views. The dramatic shift in 2022 is linked with broad-based reform at a macro level, encompassing women's advancement into leadership roles and increased participation in political and economic spaces. These structural level reforms are consistent with the Kazakhstan 2030 Strategy and Concept of Family and Gender Policy to 2030, both of which have in their program the reduction of gender inequality and the expansion of women's participation at the economic and leadership level. To some extent, the 2022 positive change can be attributed to institutional reform along these strategy documents. However, the analysis finds that while there has been a change in country-level policy, rural areas remain behind in changing attitudes, demonstrating the necessity for directed policy implementation.

Tailored interventions should address the specific needs and characteristics of each group. Urban respondents identified as "Moderates" (Class 1) demonstrate a shift toward gender equality. Effective policies for this group may include professional training programs that empower women in high-income sectors, enhance leadership and negotiation skills, and strengthen female networking and mentoring systems. Emphasis should be placed on promoting women's participation in information technology and STEM fields and addressing residual gender biases (Agrawal, 2018; Bhandari et al., 2024).

In contrast, "Traditionalists" (Class 2), especially in rural areas, are more strongly influenced by cultural norms discouraging women's economic engagement. Successful strategies for these communities may include awareness campaigns that frame women's economic participation as a driver of community development. Involving local leaders and promoting household-based economic activities can further support women's roles and improve overall well-being.

Integrating attitudinal data with longitudinal gender inequality indicators offers a strong basis for understanding and addressing gender disparities in Kazakhstan. This study underscores the need for evidence-

based, geographically sensitive policymaking that links individual beliefs with broader structural outcomes. Policymakers should prioritize ongoing monitoring of attitudinal trends and statistical indicators to inform adaptive strategies that promote inclusive participation across all sectors. Such approaches align with Kazakhstan's national development goals and contribute to global gender equality and women's empowerment agendas.

Conclusion

This study comprehensively analyses gender inequity in Kazakhstan, combining micro-level attitudinal models with macro-structural trends over sixteen years. Using LCA and Change-Point Analysis, the research identifies key inflexion points and the sociocultural attitudes shaping them. The findings highlight several key insights.

First, the analysis of political representation shows that women occupy only 18–27% of parliamentary seats, falling short of the government's 30% target outlined in the Concept of Family and Gender Policy to 2030. Despite advances in female education and literacy, structural barriers limit women's full participation in decision-making processes.

Second, the results of the LCA indicate the existence of two attitudinal cohorts within the sample. The "Moderates" group is defined by a significant, gradual decline of traditional gender beliefs among urban residents. In contrast, the "Traditionalists" are highly represented within the sample's rural components with a strong allegiance to entrenched patriarchal beliefs, supported by the strong β-values of key attitudinal measures. The existence of the attitudinal patterns is also endorsed by change-point analysis of the GII, with the latter showing significant patterns of change across time with a notable decline between 2008 and 2017 (0.459 to 0.351), followed by a trend inversion to 0.426 by 2019 (indicating a deceleration of the downward trend), followed by a continuation of the decline to 0.358 by 2022.

The empirical evidence of this research underscores the strong linkage between institutionally oriented trust, gender-oriented economic engagement, and culture. Notwithstanding Kazakhstan's considerable gains toward the development of human capital, reflected by a high literacy rate and a significant female presence at institutions of higher learning, the persistent existence of significant challenges within the economic and political domains necessitates a rethink of policy strategies. In urban areas

where gender norm change is widely accepted at a macro scale, increased support to develop a strong leadership base, complemented by specific interventions to root out remaining biases, can have positive results. In rural areas where traditional gender roles remain deeply entrenched, culturally sensitive advocacy, community-level engagement, and long-term behavioral change strategies are urgently needed to challenge persistent beliefs.

Limitations of the current study lie in the temporal lag of specific attitudinal data (i.e., WVS) and the absence of qualitative understanding that could enable better appreciation of regional dynamics and sociocultural complexity. Future research could address these limitations using ethnographic approaches or case study methodologies. Policy recommendations derived from this study are: (1) launching community-level awareness raising campaigns to counter entrenched gender norms; (2) increasing women's organizations' reach and budget levels for marginalized communities; (3) synchronizing education reform with women's labor market integration into STEM fields; and (4) implementing trust-building mechanisms via transparent monitoring of gender-oriented government programs.

Future research efforts should include qualitative approaches that complement the strong quantitative techniques applied to this research to provide a thorough understanding of the intricacies of gender role change and the regulative principles of institutions. In conclusion, the current study is a significant scholarly work on the gender inequality debate in Kazakhstan that provides a comprehensive analysis that combines micro-perceptual knowledge with macro-dynamism structures. The implications drawn out of this research call for a rethinking of existing gender policies that stress the need for a two-pronged approach that simultaneously reinforces legal frameworks while promoting sociocultural change. The conclusions made of this research call for the need to have persistent, location-sensitive interventions that are the best way to overcome entrenched gender parity disparities.

Acknowledgments

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