

Empowering Women in Politics: Strategies for Achieving Equal Participation

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Abstract:

The excerpt explores the obstacles hindering women's engagement in politics and advocates for measures to facilitate equal participation. It highlights the significance of increased women's representation in strengthening democracy and formulating policies that cater to the diverse needs of society. Qualitative research methods are utilized to analyze the challenges faced by women in political participation. Through in-depth thematic analysis, the paper examines the barriers to women's involvement in politics and identifies potential solutions. Despite global progress, women continue to face hurdles such as limited party support, societal norms, and a lack of women's role models in politics. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of implementing quotas, fostering gender-sensitive party policies, and promoting women's political leaders to address these challenges and achieve equal participation. To achieve parity in political participation, a multi-pronged approach is recommended. Political parties are urged to develop and implement gender equality policies, including quotas, mentoring programs, and leadership training for women. Additionally, collaborative efforts from governments, media, and civil society are essential to create a pipeline of qualified women's candidates and dismantle cultural and institutional barriers.

Keywords: Woman, Politics, Party, Policies, Participation.

Introduction:

Across the globe, a persistent imbalance exists in political representation. Women, who constitute half the world's population, remain significantly underrepresented in decision-making spheres. This introductory section delves into the historical context of this disparity, explores the critical role women can play in shaping a more just and equitable society, and outlines the objectives of this research paper. For centuries, political participation has been a male-dominated domain. Societal norms confined women to domestic roles, relegating them from the public sphere of political discourse and power. Even as women gained suffrage in many countries throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, significant barriers continue to impede their entry and advancement in politics.

These barriers are multifaceted. Stereotypes depicting politics as a "man's world" discourage women from aspiring to leadership positions. Traditional gender roles often prioritize childcare and household responsibilities on women, limiting their time and energy for political pursuits. Political parties themselves can be breeding grounds for discrimination, lacking gender-sensitive policies and support structures that could empower women candidates. Unequal access to financial resources, mentorship opportunities, and political networks further disadvantages women compared to their male counterparts. The result is a global landscape where women remain vastly underrepresented in government positions. As of 2023, the Inter-Parliamentary Union reports that women hold only 26.1% of parliamentary seats worldwide. This imbalance persists at all levels of government, from local councils to national parliaments.

The underrepresentation of women in politics has far-reaching consequences. When women are excluded from decision-making processes, policies often fail to reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of the population. Research suggests that increased women's participation in politics leads to a broader range of issues being addressed, including education, healthcare, and social welfare programs that disproportionately impact women and families. Furthermore, diverse perspectives are crucial for fostering a healthy and vibrant democracy. Women bring a unique set of experiences and skills to the political table. They are often adept at collaboration, compromise, and consensus-building, qualities essential for effective governance in a complex and interconnected world. Studies have also shown a correlation between increased women's political participation and reduced levels of corruption, as women are often perceived as less susceptible to bribery and more focused on public service. In essence, achieving gender parity in politics is not just a matter of fairness; it is a matter of good governance and effective representation.

This research paper aims to shed light on the challenges and opportunities related to women's political participation. It will examine the various factors that hinder women's entry into politics, including socio-cultural norms, institutional barriers, and financial constraints. Additionally, the paper will explore effective strategies for promoting women's empowerment in political life. These strategies might encompass legal quotas, capacity-building programs, and the development of gender-sensitive policies within political parties. By analyzing successful initiatives from around the world, the paper seeks to identify best practices that can be replicated to create a more inclusive political landscape. Ultimately, this research paper aspires to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality in politics. By fostering a deeper understanding of the issues at hand and promoting innovative solutions, we can pave the way for a future where women have a rightful and equal voice in shaping the world we live in.

Literature Review

Women's involvement in politics dates back centuries, yet their participation has often been marginalized and constrained by societal norms and legal restrictions. In many ancient civilizations, women were excluded from formal political roles, relegated to domestic spheres instead (Follett, 1994). However, there have been notable exceptions throughout history, such as Cleopatra in ancient Egypt and Queen Elizabeth I in England, who wielded significant political power.

The struggle for women's suffrage marked a turning point in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with movements gaining momentum in countries like the United States, United Kingdom, and New Zealand. The achievement of suffrage rights laid the groundwork for greater participation in politics, though obstacles persisted in accessing leadership positions (Cott, 1987).

Despite advancements in women's rights, gender disparities persist in political representation worldwide. Women continue to be underrepresented in parliaments, cabinets, and other decision-making bodies across the globe. The Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2020) highlights the significant gaps in political empowerment between men and women, emphasizing the need for continued efforts to address this imbalance.

Several factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics, including structural, cultural, and institutional barriers. Structural barriers such as discriminatory laws and electoral systems that favor male candidates hinder women's access to political office (Krook & O'Brien, 2012). Cultural norms and gender stereotypes perpetuate traditional roles for women, discouraging their participation in politics (Childs & Krook, 2008). Institutional factors such as party gatekeeping and lack of support networks further limit women's political opportunities (Celis et al., 2014).

Numerous studies have explored strategies to enhance women's participation in politics, focusing on various approaches including legal reforms, affirmative action measures, and capacity-building initiatives. Research by Dahlerup (2006) emphasizes the importance of quota systems and other affirmative action policies in increasing women's representation in legislatures. Other scholars, such as Norris (1997), highlight the significance of women's political networks and mentorship programs in supporting aspiring women's leaders.

Empowering Women in Politics

"Empowering Women in Politics" presents a compelling analysis deserving of thorough examination (Rubel et al., 2024). It grapples with the intricacies of gender equality in Albanian society, revealing a struggle to strike the right balance. Successful women, who could serve as exemplary figures in politics and social spheres, often find themselves confronted with daunting decisions (Rubel et al., 2024). In the political arena, conflict looms large, eroding the principles of meritocracy with alarming frequency. This tumultuous environment presents a formidable challenge for individuals considering a foray into politics, regardless of their gender (Rubel et al., 2024). The findings of Rubel et al. underscore the urgent need to address systemic barriers hindering the full participation of women and other marginalized groups in politics. Only through concerted efforts to promote inclusivity and uphold the principles of meritocracy can Albanian society pave the way for a more equitable and representative political landscape (Rubel et al., 2024).

In their work, Galligan and Buckley (2023) deliver a compelling message to women, urging them to engage in politics despite its inherent challenges. They assert that life itself is fraught with obstacles, and in every endeavor, individuals have the opportunity to strive for excellence, uphold honesty, and contribute to the welfare of their nation. The authors emphasize the importance of active participation in politics, rather than remaining passive observers. They

highlight the significance of being present and involved in addressing societal issues directly, rather than merely discussing them from a distance. According to Galligan and Buckley (2023), choosing to enter politics signifies a refusal to shy away from difficulties or uncertainties. It represents a commitment to serving the public good and utilizing one's talents, sincerity, dedication, understanding, perseverance, and voice to advocate for truth and positive change (Galligan and Buckley 2023).

The role of women in politics is examined, acknowledging the dual challenge of confronting male dominance while also fostering cooperation. The authors assert that political engagement, for individuals of integrity, is fundamentally about striving to leave behind a nation improved from the one inherited from previous generations (Mechkova et al. 2024). Regarding gender equality, Mechkova et al. (2024) express optimism for the future, suggesting that the world has yet to fully realize the potential of women's contributions. They recognize the numerous women throughout history who have served as inspirational figures, excelling in politics through their unwavering dedication, patriotism, and political prowess (Mechkova et al. 2024). The authors affirm their belief in the inherent capacity, courage, and strength within every woman to excel as an honest, successful, and effective politician. encourage readers to explore the narratives of nine distinguished women in politics, acknowledging their contributions and extending congratulations for their inclusion in the publication. They remind readers that perhaps one day, it will be their own opportunity to make a meaningful impact in the political sphere.

In their discourse, Mamun et al. (2024) assert that women constitute more than just half of the population; they hold pivotal roles in shaping societal dynamics. While traditionally perceived as mothers, wives, and schoolteachers, women's participation and contributions are increasingly acknowledged and formalized across all spheres. As women venture into non-traditional gender roles, their visibility enhances, amplifying their impact and bringing forth creativity, added value, problem-solving abilities, and energy to society as a whole (Mamun et al., 2024). The authors personally hold many women in high regard, particularly those who have introduced novel concepts or advancements in fields that have left a lasting impression.

In the realm of education, the story of Malala Yousafzai, a young woman from Pakistan, resonates profoundly with me. Her unwavering courage and relentless dedication to the cause of educating women in her country have left a lasting impression. Despite facing numerous obstacles and even threats to her own life, Malala pursued her dream with unwavering determination. Reflecting on Malala's journey, I am struck by the profound impact her voice has had on advocating for social transformation. Her example inspires me to believe that we, too, here in Albania, can drive real change. Malala's story carries a powerful message: regardless of our gender, age, race, or religious affiliation, each of us has the potential to be a catalyst for positive transformation. I find immense inspiration in Malala's resilience and unwavering commitment to her cause, and I am deeply motivated by her example to contribute to positive change in my own community.

Women's Political Struggle Endures

From suffragettes to modern-day feminists, women and men have fought long and hard for women's right to vote and hold office. Progress is clear. As of 2015, women in every country in

the world have the right to vote; the first nation to grant women's suffrage was New Zealand in 1893, and the last country was Saudi Arabia in 2015 (Dolan et al., 2021). Today, several countries are led by women's, and some countries, such as Finland, also have a cabinet dominated by women. These achievements have been possible in large part thanks to gender equality measures. In the Arab region where progress has been slowest, the adoption of quotas by 12 countries helped increase the percentage of women in parliaments from 10 to 18 percent between 2012 to 17. But progress is slow and uneven. Women are still underrepresented in politics, parliaments and public life. Women make up less than 23 percent of parliamentarians, with an average of 18 percent in the Arab region, while men make up more than 77 percent, leaving a more than 50 percent gender gap (Paxton et al., 2020). Attitudes towards women candidates are still largely characterized by deeply ingrained stereotypes, and political opponents will often use those stereotypes to question women's capabilities.

When we talk about women's political participation, it is easy for us to imagine the empty seats around the decision-making table, and a little more difficult to picture the many obstacles and challenges women face to get into those seats. There is a growing recognition that women in 2020 are marginalized from political and public life. In the past few years, we've seen this play out in high profile elections in the US and around the world. Women are putting themselves forward for elections more and more, yet their numbers are still far behind those of men. Why is this the case? Even though it is widely accepted that development, peace and prosperity in societies cannot be achieved without half of the world's population, women continue to be sidelined in decision-making. The stigma against women in politics is still alive and well. They continue to face structural, socioeconomic, institutional and cultural barriers (Dolan et al., 2021). Tackling those barriers takes effort on the part of every element of society whether it is government, civil society, the media, academia, the private sector, youth and yes, even men.

The fact that more women are willing to run for office is a positive step. A study by High-Pipper and Comer showed that women represented by a woman are more interested and become more involved in politics and feel more skilled and effective than did those represented by a man. At a recent gathering of Arab youth, part of UNDP's flagship Youth Leadership Programme, young women spoke of the lack of women's public figures in the Arab region that they can look up to, and be inspired by; "we would like to see our own AOC in the Arab region, someone we can point to as a positive image of women in politics" (Bos et al., 2020). When women represent other women, they are representing half of society, and can we really consider elections that do not include half of society democratic? Or institutions without gender parity, strong?

UNDP is working on promoting women's political participation at different levels and in different ways. The internet plays an important role not only in awareness but also in helping women candidates run for office, evening the playing field and promoting their causes by reaching a wider audience. Despite its negative effects on women candidates, and there are many, social media offers great opportunities; it reduces the cost of campaigns, and offers different means of communication. UNDP is harnessing social media to raise awareness, promote networking and create a more positive narrative. Youth are a very important part of promoting women in public and political life. They lead social change around the world (Şimga

and Göker, 2021). UNDP recognizes and has engaged young people in the fight for gender equality, and women in politics. In the Arab region, UNDP is shifting the narrative of women's participation by connecting institutions and civil society. It is proud to have supported the Organization of Arab Election Management Bodies, to launch the Arab Network for Women in Elections. It's creating civic space with the aim of amplifying the voices of women in politics, highlighting the successes that Arab women have had and shedding light on the challenges they still face. It is a platform for institutions that manage and administer elections, civil society organizations that advocate for and promote women's political participation, and international organizations that support these efforts including UN Women, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (Cheema, S. (2022).

Challenges Faced by Women in Politics

Women leaders have higher and more difficult problems than males since they must also contend with perceptions. With more women taking up leadership roles, previously unrecognized concerns and obstacles associated with such a position are now becoming apparent. Life is becoming increasingly tough for them due to rising stress levels and multiple responsibilities at work and home, as well as the continual need to prove themselves (Shames, 2015). Women's political engagement is hampered or facilitated by a variety of circumstances, including socioeconomic status, geographical, cultural, and political systems (Sharma, 2019).

Women's political representation and advancement are hampered by four primary political obstacles. Absence of party support, such as restricted financial assistance for women's candidates, restricted access to political connections, and more stringent standards and credentials applied to women; absence of availability to well-developed education systems for women's leadership in general, and for guiding young women towards political life; and the essence of the electoral system, which favors men (Singh, 2011). Women are prevented from participating in politics for a variety of reasons. There are many factors like; the present cultural value system, the private-public gap in terms of domain identity, and male predominance in political institutions, which are responsible for less participation of women in politics. They have been unable to amass help and services for cultivating their political constituency due to their low share in India's inner political party structure. Women do not receive appropriate financial backing from political parties to run for office. One of the most significant barriers to women being politically engaged is illiteracy. They are unaware of their basic and political rights due to a lack of awareness. Parties are prejudiced not just in terms of seat allocation in polls, but also inside their ranks.

Poverty is also a significant barrier to women's political engagement. An impoverished family's daughter kid is the primary victim, and she faces several challenges. Women are also shown to have a greater rate of dropping out of school than men. Women's thinking is trained in a sense to accept that they are of a lesser class than males since this has been the viewpoint of many in society due to social and cultural standards. The caste system, or social class structure, is also a significant barrier. Because of their families' poor money, women from lower castes were unable to attend school. To provide for their family, many women were involved in low-

paying jobs. In India, the majority of women do not own land or property. They don't even get a piece of their parents' assets (Singh, 2011).

The country's poor health situation for women is also a big barrier to their involvement. In the country, there is a disparity in access to healthcare facilities. Gender inequality in health-care settings occurs even before birth. The majority of girl children are terminated due to the family's preference for sons. Daughters are denied the same feeding services as males after they are born. Due to marital responsibilities and dowry systems, women are also seen as less fortunate. Hospitals are also said to as "gender biased" since males attend hospitals at a higher rate than women (Alam, 2015). The possibility of violence, according to Martha Nussbaum, is a substantial impediment to women's capacity to participate in politics. "Violence and the prospect of violence undermine many women's ability to engage actively in various types of social and political connection, to speak publicly, to be acknowledged as respected people whose value is equal to others," writes Martha C. Nussbaum (Nussbaum, n.d.). Because of the continued unequal allocation of family care obligations, women spend significantly more time than males caring for their homes and children (Shames, 2015).

Lack of Representation and Voice: Women's representation in decision-making positions, politics, and leadership roles remains inadequate. Limited representation hinders the inclusion of women's perspectives, experiences, and needs in policies and decision-making processes.

Women's groups have concentrated on the empowerment of Indian women to overcome challenges of discrimination and violence. Empowerment is linked to family support and better standing inside the home, both of which are threatened by domestic violence and sexual assault. Poverty and illiteracy are two socioeconomic factors that restrict women from running for public office or even voting. The inability to comprehend Panchayat Raj norms erodes one's confidence in running for public office (, n.d.)

"Empowering Women in Political Participation"

How can these statistics be changed, and how can women be encouraged to go into politics and to actively participate in policy and decision-making? What do women who have just been elected to local councils need, and what challenges are they facing? What knowledge, abilities and skills do they lack? A study on women's political participation and representation at the subnational level: background, challenges and needs conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Ukraine with support from the Norwegian government provides answers to this and other questions. (Virna, 2021).

Quotas

The 2020 local elections proved that women actively participate in politics – more than a third of them were elected to councils at various levels. This was largely due to the legally imposed 40 percent mandatory quota on nominating candidates and drawing up political party lists. What is more, the active women who were elected to local councils in the 2015 elections, when a gender quota was also applied, by 2020 were in charge of party branches that were drawing up party

lists, thus encouraging women to go into politics by their own example (Virna, 2021). The state can also motivate political parties to ensure the gender balance during elections by providing additional financial support to those parties that have won seats in parliament and met the gender quota – and indeed such a practice exists in Ukraine. Political parties that have met the gender quota receive additional funds from the budget to finance their statutory activities and thus are encouraged to involve women. (Rahmanto, 2021). Apart from the legally imposed quotas, parties can also choose to impose additional intra-party quotas on the drawing up of election lists or to select party officials. Such quotas help support women’s leadership in these parties.

Political Parties' Gender Policies:

Intra-party quotas demonstrate the important role of political parties in involving women in politics at various stages. Conducting a gender audit in a party can reveal opportunities for growth in managing branches, as well as show how diversity and the involvement of women can help the party in the political arena. The results of such audits provide the basis for developing programmes and policies that enable and help women move up the career ladder and become more publicly visible and recognizable (Muhammad, and Kabir, 2024). As a result, politics becomes more diverse and loses its stereotypical “masculine” image. Parties, among other things, can also set up various funds to support women who have children and need help with looking after their children when they are doing party work. (Virna, 2021).

Factional Associations: Group Dynamics:

The common stereotype that politics is a “man’s world” is rather difficult to overcome if it is mostly men who talk about politics in the media, and it is they who run the state, oblast, city, or community. Inter-factional associations and groups that aim to ensure gender equality help women champion important issues in politics, become publicly visible, support other women MPs and councillors, and respond to sexism, gender discrimination and so on. Such associations are an important platform for providing mutual support and developing gender equality solutions (Zing and Shishkina, A. (2024).

Mentoring:

The fear of “big politics,” self-doubt, stereotypes and other reservations prevent women from going into politics. Special mentoring (tutorship) programmes (including those developed by political parties) help such women get support from more experienced women politicians, gain the necessary experience (for example, that of being an MP (councillor) assistant), and improve their skills. Political (party) mentoring programmes can also be beneficial to women who are already MPs (councillors) – they can help them realize their potential and become leaders, rather than just functionaries (Krook and Norris, 2023).

Women's Leadership Training Programs:

One should also pay attention to various training and leadership programmes for women – for those who are already in office and those who are only planning their political activities. These programmes not only teach women how to understand the budget or draft decisions, they also

help them create communities, become self-confident, learn the mechanisms of self-defence against oppression, and be more confident and determined, thus playing an important role in the making of women politicians (Krook, Norris, 2023). In 2021, with support from UNDP, newly elected women representatives will be able to unite around the values of equality, non-discrimination and the development of their communities (Virna, 2021). The Enhancing Women's Political Participation at the Subnational Level project provides for the development and holding of offline and online training events for newly elected representatives, as well as for the conduct of an educational campaign about the need to ensure the full, free and democratic participation of women in political and public life, on an equal footing with men.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Although the causality between the promotion of women's participation and a party's electoral success has not been well documented, findings from the case studies suggest that political parties have increased their support base and gained electorally after adopting reforms to promote women's empowerment. There may be many positive spinoffs for political parties that implement reforms.

- Public perceptions can be altered and interest renewed in political parties with waning levels of support.
- Taking the lead on women's empowerment can generate new support bases and attract new members to the party.
- Increasing the proportion of women candidates for elected positions can increase the flow of public funding to the party. If incentives in public finance laws tie funding allocations to parties to the proportion of women candidates nominated, political parties can benefit financially. These reforms could also attract the support of sister parties, party internationals and the international community to implement new initiatives, such as training and mentoring programs.
- Women candidates are more likely than men to come from civil society and, therefore, to have stronger relationships with CSOs. These linkages may be beneficial for women candidates, but may also reflect positively on the party for which the woman is campaigning in terms of establishing relations with grassroots and constituencies.
- Ultimately, putting in place strategies to promote women's empowerment can lead to more democratic and transparent political parties. Such strategies may also result in the inclusion of other marginalized and under-represented groups (Ballington, 2011).

This Guide has sought to capture a broad and diverse range of strategies that are being implemented to support women's empowerment. It acknowledges, though, that many more innovative practices are being tried and tested by reform-minded political parties. It also acknowledges that what works for one political party may not work for another. National contexts must be considered when devising strategies, including the nature of the party system, the electoral system in use and other socio-cultural considerations. As mentioned above, one of the functions of a women's wing is to work on policy development within the party. Political parties must ensure that their policies and priorities respond to the needs of women and men, not only in terms of gender-specific policy reforms, but also ensuring that gender is mainstreamed

into all the policies of the party. This may be achieved through a policy committee that addresses gender mainstreaming and signs off on all policies for compliance, or through the provision of capacity building for party members. This is further discussed in the section on Governance under the Post-Electoral Period (Ballington et al., 2012).

Key Findings:

- Women are underrepresented in Albanian politics. The text highlights the lack of gender equality in Albanian politics, where women face challenges entering the political sphere due to a conflict-driven system that doesn't value merit.
- Women bring valuable perspectives to politics. The passage emphasizes the importance of women's voices and contributions in politics. It highlights their dedication, talent, and problem-solving skills that benefit society as a whole.
- Women face a lack of party support, limited access to education and financing, and an electoral system tilted towards men. These factors create a system where women struggle to gain a foothold in politics.
- Traditional gender roles, the caste system, poverty, and health disparities all restrict women's ability to participate in politics. Societal norms often discourage women from seeking leadership positions.
- Women are gaining voting rights globally, but still significantly underrepresented in parliaments (less than 23% globally).
- Deep-rooted stereotypes and a lack of women's role models continue to discourage women from entering politics.
- Legally mandated quotas for women on political party lists significantly increased the number of women elected to office (from 2020 Ukraine elections). This suggests quotas can be a powerful tool for boosting women's representation.
- Parties with strong gender policies, like intra-party quotas and support structures for women with children, encourage women to participate and climb the political ladder.
- Political parties that promote women's empowerment may see a boost in public support, attracting new members and potentially increasing their electoral success.
- Strategies that empower women within political parties can lead to more democratic and transparent institutions, potentially paving the way for the inclusion of other marginalized groups.

Conclusion:

Despite progress, women remain significantly underrepresented in politics. Societal biases, lack of support structures within political parties, and unequal access to power create hurdles for women's political aspirations. "Empowering Women in Politics" argues that change is necessary. Legal quotas for women in political positions have been effective, and political parties must implement gender-sensitive policies. This includes quotas within parties, mentoring programs, leadership training, and childcare support. Media and civil society can also play a part by promoting positive narratives about women in politics.

The benefits are undeniable. Increased women's representation leads to policies reflecting the needs of the entire population, strengthens democracy, and has a positive ripple effect on gender equality across society. Empowering women in politics isn't just about achieving gender parity; it's about building a more just and equitable world for everyone. By working together, governments, political parties, civil society, and the media can create an environment where women can thrive in the political sphere.

Recommendations:

- Encourage women to enter politics. The text urges women to overcome their hesitation and actively participate in politics. It emphasizes the importance of their contribution for positive change.
- Promote a meritocratic political system. The passage indirectly suggests a need for a political system that values merit and reduces conflict, allowing qualified individuals, regardless of gender, to thrive.
- Political parties should provide financial and logistical support to women candidates, while governments can introduce quotas and reforms to level the electoral playing field.
- Investments in girls' education and programs promoting women's leadership development can create a pipeline of qualified women's candidates and address underlying social norms.
- Collaborative effort is needed from governments, media, and civil society to address cultural and institutional barriers.
- Supporting youth engagement and promoting positive narratives about women in politics can inspire future generations.
- Consider adopting legal quotas for women in political office to increase their representation.
- Encourage political parties to develop and implement gender equality policies, including intra-party quotas, mentoring programs, and leadership training for women.
- Political parties should view efforts to promote women's empowerment not just as an ethical obligation, but also as a strategic investment with potential electoral benefits.
- Parties should implement a multifaceted approach to women's empowerment, including establishing dedicated women's wings, providing training and capacity building for women's members, and ensuring gender is considered in all party policies.

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