

## Chapter Two

# Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in Politics: An Overview

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This study investigates issues surrounding women's empowerment in society and politics, focusing on the persistent gender disparities and the importance of striving for gender equity in politics. Various perspectives, including the gender power model, are used to explain the inherently gendered nature of power, with men generally having greater access to multiple types of resources, including favourable cultural norms. The research references various studies that highlight the positive correlation between women's education, economic opportunities, political representation, and empowerment. The document also examines women's political and civic participation, noting their lower interest in conventional politics but higher involvement in unconventional political activities. The findings emphasise the significance of enhancing women's capabilities and political representation to achieve gender equality and empowerment.

*Keywords:* gender/sex differences, society, empowerment, political participation, inequality, policy issues

### Introduction

Throughout history and across nations even today, there remains a notable discrepancy in power dynamics favouring men, as documented by various scholars (e.g., Brown, 1991; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016). According to the gender power model proposed by Pratto and Walker (2004) and further elaborated upon by Pratto et al. (2011), power is inherently gendered. Men, in comparison to women, typically possess greater access to the use of force, exert more control over resources, experience fewer social obligations, and benefit from more advantageous cultural norms and beliefs. This gendered disparity manifests in various facets of daily life, including but not limited to inequalities in educational opportunities, access to employment, and control over economic resources (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016).

There is widespread agreement on the significance of striving for gender equity, as evidenced by the stance of organizations like UN Women (2011). To strengthen the status of women worldwide, a range of interventions have been put into action, including initiatives focusing on health, education, and financial empowerment (for a comprehensive review, see UN Women, 2016). Central to these efforts is the concept of empowerment, which serves as both a framework and a process geared towards rectifying gender inequities.

Women's empowerment in society is a multifaceted topic often explored through various theoretical frameworks. For example, feminist theory examines power dynamics, gender inequality, and social structures contributing to women's subordination. It highlights the importance of challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for gender equality. The capability approach (Sen, 1979; Nussbaum, 2000), focusing on individuals' capabilities and freedoms to lead valuable lives, emphasizes enhancing women's capabilities through access to resources, education, and opportunities.

The issue of resources and related challenges is also highlighted by the intersectionality framework developed by Crenshaw (1991), who acknowledges the intersecting systems of oppression (such as race, class, gender, and sexuality) that shape women's experiences. This framework emphasizes the unique challenges faced by women with multiple marginalized identities.

Relatedly, the social capital theory explores how social networks, relationships, and community connections influence individuals' access to resources and opportunities. It underscores the role of social support and collective action in empowering women. Evidence from the existing literature reveals that different domains of social capital can potentially affect all constructs of women's empowerment (Ikhar et al., 2022). Lastly, empowerment theory stresses the importance of processes through which individuals gain control over their lives, resources, and decision-making. It examines psychological, social, and structural factors facilitating empowerment, such as self-efficacy, agency, and participation.

Guided by these analytical frameworks, numerous studies have tested what 'works' regarding women's empowerment. For example, research has consistently indicated that women's education is positively associated with their empowerment in society and politics. Increased educational attainment correlates with higher employment levels, po-

litical participation, and decision-making autonomy for women (e.g., Kabeer, 2005). Second, studies demonstrate that economic opportunities, such as access to microfinance, entrepreneurship training, and employment programs, can enhance women's financial independence and decision-making power within households and communities (e.g., Duflo & Udry, 2004). Third, research indicates that women's representation in political institutions, such as parliaments and local governments, is crucial for advancing gender equality and addressing women's issues. Countries with higher levels of women's political participation tend to have more inclusive policies and greater attention to women's rights (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995).

These are just a few examples, and there's a wealth of literature available on each of these topics, providing further empirical evidence and nuanced insights into factors of women's empowerment in society and politics.

## **The Issue of Women in Politics**

### ***Political Participation and Gender***

The possibility of political participation is a reflection and a cornerstone of democracy, as it allows people to have a say in decision-making and, thus, in society's governance (Bessant & Grasso, 2019). There are many forms of participation, depending on whether the concept of political participation also includes holding political positions or exercising political functions (i.e., political representation as political participation, see Rai, 2017), as well as on how the concept of politics is understood. Suppose the latter is understood as something that includes all activities that influence the life of a community. In that case, political participation includes political representation (e.g., holding political office) and activities that go beyond 'classical political participation' (e.g., voting). In this case, political participation includes charity work, protesting, lobbying, signing petitions, being involved in trade unions, NGOs, voluntary associations, and civic initiatives. The distinction between conventional/formal (e.g., participation in elections, political rallies, contacting politicians, active participation in a political party) and unconventional/informal/civil-society political engagement (e.g., signing petitions, boycotting products, participating in protests) is often discussed (see van Deth, 2021).

The importance of the conceptualization and operationalization of political participation is clearly highlighted by one of the seminal

studies on gender and political participation (Schlozman et al., 1995). Namely, it is argued that gender differences depend on whether informal, unconventional, and more local forms of participation are also taken into account, as well as on whether the concept of politics includes 'all activities that affect the life of the community, including those related to charity and various organizational activities' (Schlozman et al., 1995). Understanding gender differences must, therefore, take into account different forms of political engagement, the attitudes and resources involved, as various types of actions require different types of resources, which people also understand differently (Coffé & Boldenzahl, 2010; Dalton, 2013; Pattie et al., 2003). Otherwise, gender differences may be underestimated or overestimated (Grasso & Smith, 2022).

Research has shown that women are relatively less politically active than men (e.g., less interested in politics than men, less likely to contact politicians, less likely to participate in parties, etc.) (Carreras, 2018), except when it comes to electoral participation (Carreras, 2018; Coffé, 2013). As Carreras (2018) explains, this is partly because women perceive voting as a duty towards others, which is more pronounced in women as a personality trait. Their otherwise low political engagement is a consequence of cultural forces that traditionally portray politics as a male domain.

Part of the explanation of said differences also stems from the fact that women subjectively rate their knowledge of and interest in politics lower (although there is an issue of subjective bias in this regard, i.e., it is questionable whether women objectively know less about politics; see Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019).

However, elections are not the only domain where the gender gap is small or non-existent. Studies show that the gap disappears when one moves beyond conventional political participation. Thus, women's political participation is much higher in unconventional or informal political participation (Sarvasy & Siim, 1994; Siim, 2000; Stover & Cable, 2017). Coffé's (2013) analysis of the 27 EU Member States thus found that in the 'old democracies' (Western Europe), there are no gender differences when it comes to political activism (as an aspect of protest-based, unconventional political participation; see also Grasso & Smith, 2022).

Similar differences are found in younger generations. Young men dominate when it comes to more institutional forms of political par-

TABLE 2.1 Political Engagement of Young People, 2010–2020, According to Gender

Item	2010		2020	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Interested in politics	33,0	37,0	22,0	27,0
Voting	52,2	56,0	63,0	69,5
Signing a petition	23,0	33,0	37,0	51,0
Participating in protests	15,0	16,4	11,3	15,2
Contacting politicians	3,2	2,5	5,7	3,3
Boycotting election	8,1	4,7	3,8	2,5
Boycotting products	5,3	7,2	9,1	13,4

NOTES Adapted from Lavrič et al. (2011) and Deželan & Lavrič (2021).

ticipation, linked to organisations and political parties, different types of online political participation, and following politics in the news. It is worth noting that young men are more sceptical about some aspects of democratic practices, confirming that women are, on average, more liberal and more sympathetic to democracy (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993).

A study in Italy (Polish Association of Social Psychology, 2021) has shown that young men are more likely to directly engage in politics, such as joining a political party, acting to influence government policy, or contacting a politician. On the other hand, young women would instead opt for civic activities, such as volunteering, charitable work, religious-based initiatives, or boycotts.

The results of the Slovenian Youth 2020 study also align with those of the Italian study. Young men are much more inclined to participate in political party activities (30% of men vs. 24% of women) or contact a politician (36% of men vs. 27% of women). Young women, on the other hand, would rather opt for civic activities, such as peaceful protests (55% of women vs. 46% of men), volunteering (76% of women vs. 66% of men) or boycotting (48% of women vs. 45% of men). Generally, the data suggest that young Slovenian women demonstrate less interest in politics than men, but they are more likely to vote and are more active in unconventional political participation (Table 2.1).

As can be seen from the data and in line with past studies elsewhere, young Slovenian women are less interested in politics than men. Still, they are more likely to vote and participate in unconventional political participation.

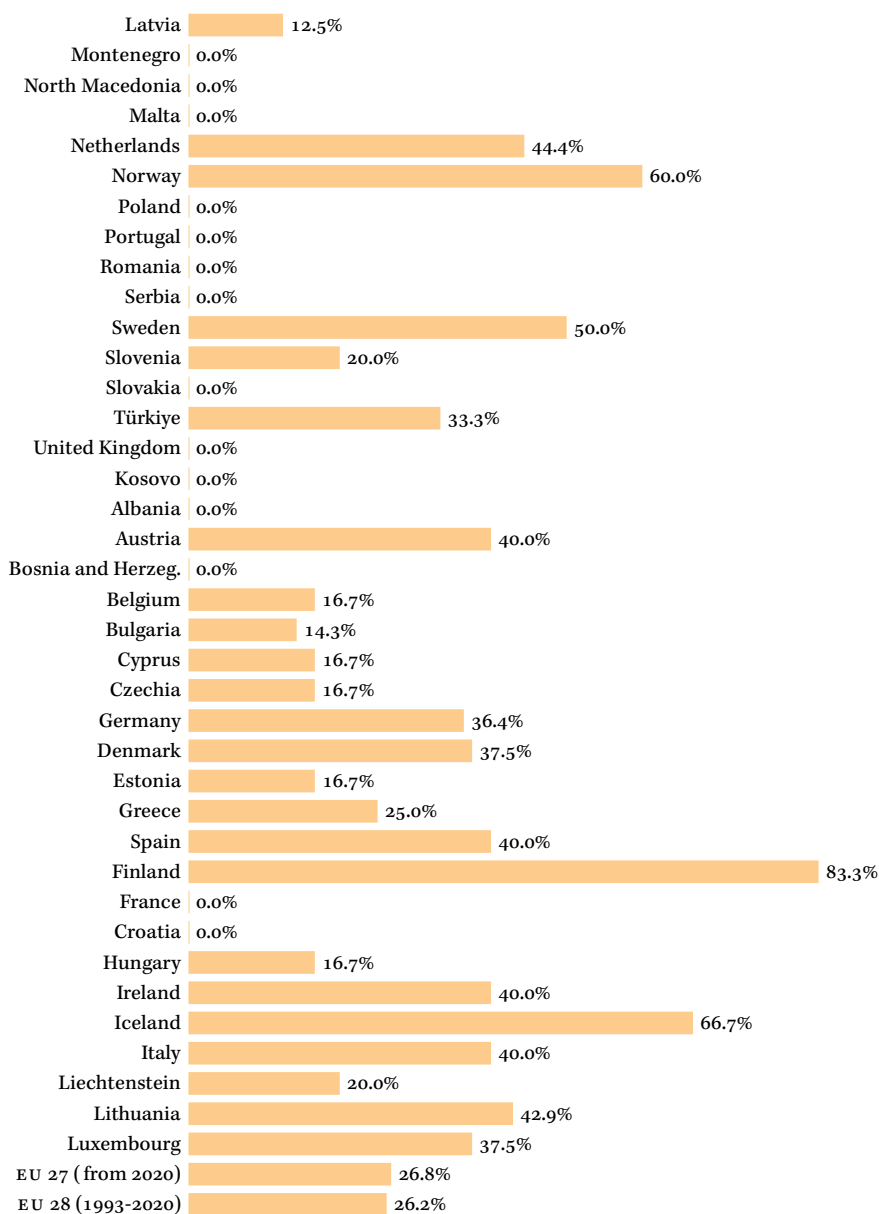


FIGURE 2.1 Share of Women among Party Leaders (based on data from EIGE, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs>)

Still, it is essential to emphasize that the differences are much more pronounced regarding women's representation in politics, i.e., holding

political office. When it comes to party leadership within the EU, for example, the average is around 25% (Figure 2.1).

The same applies to membership of national parliaments (about a third of women) and membership of the European Parliament (about 40% of women), while among the 28 EU Member States, there are only six governments led by women.<sup>1</sup>

This unequal participation of women and men in political decision-making thus remains one of the main challenges of today's democratic societies. It is not only a clear indicator of the so-called democratic deficit and a sign of the lack of credibility of institutions but also an indicator of how societies lose valuable human capital and, thus, the potential to solve critical social issues and improve societal well-being. Namely, women's limited experience and participation in decision-making have far-reaching consequences across various dimensions of society.

Some of these critical consequences include:

- *Economic Inefficiency and Growth Impediments.* Women's limited participation in decision-making can result in suboptimal use of the labour force, ultimately hampering economic growth. A study by McKinsey & Company found that closing gender gaps in labour markets could add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015).
- *Inequitable Resource Allocation.* When women are excluded from decision-making processes, resource allocation may not reflect the needs and priorities of the entire population, leading to inefficient use of resources and reduced economic efficiency (Duflo, 2012).
- *Poor Governance and Policy Outcomes.* The absence of women's perspectives in leadership roles can lead to policies and decisions that do not adequately address the needs of women and children, contributing to less effective governance (World Bank, 2012). Policies developed without women's input are often less effective in addressing issues like maternal health, education for girls, and gender-based violence (Kabeer, 2005).
- *Social and Health Consequences.* Limited decision-making power among women is associated with poorer health outcomes for

<sup>1</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs>

women and children. For instance, women's limited control over household resources can negatively impact child nutrition and health (Smith et al., 2003).

- *Increased Gender Inequality.* When women are excluded from decision-making, it reinforces existing gender inequalities and perpetuates a cycle of disadvantage and marginalisation (UN Women, 2015).
- *Impact on Education and Skill Development.* Societies that restrict women's roles in decision-making are less likely to prioritise education for girls, leading to lower educational attainment and skill development among women (King & Hill, 1993).
- *Limited Career Advancement.* Women's restricted participation in decision-making can hinder their professional development and career advancement opportunities, perpetuating gender gaps in leadership positions (*Women in management (quick take)*, 2020).
- *Violence and Security Issues.* Women's limited involvement in decision-making processes, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings, can increase their vulnerability to violence and reduce their protection under the law (True, 2012). When women are not part of the decision-making, responses to gender-based violence can be insufficient, and policies may fail to address the root causes and prevention of such violence (Htun & Weldon, 2012).
- *Environmental and Sustainability Challenges.* Women often play a crucial role in managing natural resources. Their exclusion from decision-making can lead to environmental policies that do not fully consider sustainability and the effective management of resources (Agarwal, 2000). Gender-inclusive decision-making is also vital for effective climate change adaptation strategies. Excluding women can result in less comprehensive approaches to addressing environmental challenges (UNDP, 2016).

These consequences highlight the importance of inclusive decision-making processes that leverage the full potential of both women and men to foster sustainable development and equitable societies. In other words, women's limited experience and participation in decision-making impoverish societies in various domains. Therefore, understanding the obstacles to women's participation in decision-making and politics in general is essential for finding solutions.



## Causes, Limitations, and Structural Barriers for Women in Politics

### *Cultural and Societal Norms*

Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often limit women's participation in politics. These roles view women primarily as caretakers and homemakers, not as leaders or decision-makers (Paxton & Hughes, 2014). Relatedly, patriarchal structures and beliefs perpetuate male dominance in political spheres, discouraging women's involvement (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

Traditional gender roles and patriarchy are often associated with gender stereotypes, which together form a nexus of interrelated conceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that rationalise and legitimise discrimination. This discrimination is another factor that limits women's participation in politics. Women thus often face sexist attitudes and stereotypes that question their capabilities as leaders, which can deter women from pursuing political careers (Alexander & Jalalzai, 2020).

When it comes to gender stereotypes and prejudices, the most frequently problematised attitude is that politics is considered a male domain. Such a stance is regarded as a relic of a pre-modern, conservative/traditional cultural matrix marked by patriarchy, directly resulting in a lower representation of women in political positions. Women candidates are not perceived as equal *ceteris paribus*, especially regarding positions associated with defence or the economy (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993).

According to Bauer (2019), there are three primary ways that feminine and masculine stereotypes can affect political decision-making. The first is represented in candidate strategies within political parties, whereby masculine qualities (and, therefore, men) still tend to be preferred. At the second level, campaign news coverage favours candidates with more masculine traits. More specifically, studies have shown that the media use masculine stereotypes more frequently to describe both women and men candidates (e.g., Hayes & Lawless, 2015). Finally, voters themselves are strongly influenced by gender stereotypes when making their decisions. Furthermore, the alignment between masculine stereotypes and political leadership frequently pressures women candidates to emphasize masculine qualities over feminine qualities in campaign messages. This, in turn, further strengthens the association between political leadership and masculine traits.

Cultural stereotypes that portray women as less competent or less suited for leadership roles can discourage women from entering politics and undermine their credibility if they do (Alexander & Jalalzai, 2020). Societal beliefs that men are inherently better leaders perpetuate gender biases and discrimination against women in politics. These perceptions can lead to voter bias and a lack of support for women candidates.

As indicated, these perceptions are linked to gender stereotypes at the level of personality traits – women are thought to be warm, expressive, and empathetic, while men are considered to be assertive, determined, and rational (Broverman et al., 1972) – and with gender stereotypes at the level of beliefs, where women are perceived as more liberal and democratic and therefore more suited to specific areas within politics such as social issues and education (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). However, stereotypes related to personality traits presumably play a more critical role (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993).

### *Media Representation*

Media complex is closely tied to culture, representing an essential part of the cultural milieu in contemporary society. It significantly shapes an individual's worldview and how social reality is represented and reproduced. It represents the most invasive and, simultaneously, the most influential force in forming (and reproducing) public opinion, social norms, and values.

Being simultaneously an object and subject of culture, it reflects a dominant worldview and is thus often a biased information transmitter. The media often portrays women politicians in a biased manner, focusing on their appearance or personal lives rather than their policies and competencies. Women politicians also receive less media coverage than their male counterparts, leading to lower public recognition and support (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996).

Media thus contributes to what might be identified as gendered socialisation, which can influence how women are perceived by themselves and by society. Namely, as research indicates, from a young age, boys and girls often socialise into different roles and expectations. Boys are encouraged to be assertive and ambitious, while girls are taught to be nurturing and compliant, affecting their confidence and interest in political careers. Later, this is reinforced in schools and education in general, as in many countries and regions, girls have less access to edu-

cation than boys, limiting their opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for political engagement (Ballington & Karam, 2005).

### *Lack of Support Networks*

Gender stereotypes, patriarchal thinking, male allies within politics, an unfriendly electoral system (stereotypes in leadership positions and lack of gender equality values in programs), and lack of regulatory mechanisms present another set of factors that significantly impact women's decisions to engage in politics. However, Jalušič and Antić Gaber (2020) pointed out some less visible obstacles women face. Among them is a greater need for women to receive external encouragement and support, especially from the local community and party leaders. According to their research, politically active women missed (more) party support during the candidacy process, which supports studies highlighting that women often have less access to mentors and political networks that can provide career guidance and support (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

As the key to increasing the number of elected women, women politicians identified placing women in positions where they can be elected. Political parties play a decisive role here, as their leadership acts as a gatekeeper, determining whether women will be placed in a specific position. Past research on parliamentary elections, for example, shows that women candidates were often placed in less desirable constituencies or less electable places (Pleš Murko et al., 2015). Likewise, with their programs, activities, and ideological orientations, political parties provide space for political activity and contribute to the perception of politics and party activity. Put differently, women's opportunities to connect and advance are shaped by the fact that political and professional (support) networks are frequently male-dominated (McBride & Mazur, 2010).

### *Financial, Educational, and Institutional Barriers*

Studies identify various barriers that limit women's ability and access to politics. For example, Thames and Williams (2013) state that women typically have less access to the financial resources necessary to run effective political campaigns. Relatedly, broader economic disparities mean women often have fewer personal resources to invest in political careers (World Bank, 2012).

There are also educational barriers. In many regions, women still have less access to education, limiting their qualifications and confidence to enter politics. Lack of targeted political education and training programs for women also reduces their readiness for political engagement (Ballington & Karam, 2005).

Next, the challenge of balancing political careers with family responsibilities disproportionately affects women, discouraging many from participating in politics. Insufficient parental leave and childcare support further exacerbate the difficulty for women in sustaining political careers (O'Brien, 2013). The established methods and organization of work in politics are not inclined to the coordination of political and private life. When deciding to participate in politics, opportunities for balancing professional and private life are especially important to women; family plays a crucial role in the decision to run for office. The asymmetric division of household and caring work poses a problem; studies (e.g. Silbermann, 2015) show that despite being employed, women still take on a greater role than men in caring for the family and household chores. Consequently, these inequalities take their toll on professional careers. On the other hand, women who put more effort into shaping their careers have a more challenging time deciding to interrupt it and switch to risky politics.

Other structural barriers include institutional barriers tied to political party structures, electoral systems, and other legislative obstacles. For example, Krook (2010) found that many political parties have internal structures and processes that favour male candidates, including informal practices and patronage networks. Second, certain electoral systems, like majoritarian systems, can disadvantage women more than proportional representation systems, which tend to be more inclusive (Norris, 2004). Third, quota systems implemented to tackle unequal participation of women in politics vary significantly in terms of their design and enforcement, often limiting their effectiveness (Dahlerup, 2006). Lastly, the lack of comprehensive policies to promote gender equality in political participation further entrenches women's underrepresentation (Waylen, 2007).

### *Violence, Harassment, and Safety Concerns*

Security concerns are another critical issue that can deter women's participation and impact their performance. Namely, women in politics often face gender-based violence and harassment, both online and offline, that deters women from political participation (Bardall, 2011,

2013). The threat of violence against women politicians and their families is a significant barrier to their political engagement (Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2016). As noted by Piscopo (2016), empirical evidence and anecdotal reports indicate the seriousness of the phenomenon, making violence against women in politics an urgent topic of reform.

### *Discussing Different/Unequal Realities for Women (and Men)*

As indicated, various social/cultural causes, spanning from family, education, media, and institutions, jointly create differential realities for men and women, including those related to politics. Discussing these different realities leads to at least three important questions: (1) is the attribution of specific traits to gender factually based (i.e., whether women and men exhibit the attributed traits); (2) do these traits impact the performance of specific tasks; (3) are these gender-specific traits valued differentially when it comes to politics.

There are various studies showing gender differences, including some that confirm gender stereotypes. For example, a meta-analysis by Hyde (2014) indicated that when it comes to cognitive abilities, there are gender (albeit minimal) differences in mathematics and science performance. Studies also show differences in verbal and spatial abilities – girls generally outperform boys in verbal skills, whereas boys tend to have an advantage in some spatial tasks. More importantly, there are also differences in social and personality traits. Specifically, boys and men exhibit higher physical aggression (verbal aggression shows smaller gender differences), and women tend to be more expressive and better at reading nonverbal cues. There are also minor gender differences in leadership styles – women often adopt more democratic and participative styles, while men may be more autocratic. Lastly, differences in personality traits, like agreeableness and neuroticism, are also consistent (but again, not large). Women score higher on agreeableness and neuroticism, while men score higher on assertiveness.

Expectedly, women are indeed less likely to support conservative, illiberal policies (see, e.g., McCue & Gopoian, 2000) and are indeed more empathic (Rueckert & Naybar, 2008; Rochat, 2022; Christov-Moore et al., 2014). Studies further suggest that empathy can be an essential element of successful politics (i.e., it can be an asset; see, for example, Moses, 1985). Yet, empathy (when it comes to its perceived functionality in the domain of politics) is not perceived by the public as such (i.e., as being politically functional) – i.e., masculine traits are more often rated as more positive (Broverman et al., 1972), which consequently implies

that women, despite displaying policy-relevant traits (which are factually gendered), are 'at a loss.'

Of course, the most challenging question is to what extent these detected differences can be tied to 'nature' (biology), i.e., to what extent they are universal and thus culturally invariant. For this purpose, Schmitt et al. (2008) conducted a comprehensive study examining sex differences in Big Five personality traits across 55 cultures. The study found consistent sex differences in personality traits across cultures, where women scored higher than men on neuroticism, agreeableness, extraversion (women scored higher in facets like warmth and sociability), and conscientiousness. Sex differences in openness were the smallest and varied across different cultures. Interestingly, more egalitarian and economically developed societies showed more considerable sex differences in personality traits.

Another study (Weis et al., 2021) found significant interactions between sex and menstrual cycle phase, highlighting how hormonal fluctuations across the menstrual cycle impact resting state networks (RSNS) in the brain, particularly those related to cognitive and sensory functions (RSNS were more stable in men). The authors note that this has implications for interpreting sex differences in cognitive and sensory processing. Relatedly, Sanchis-Segura & Becker (2016) also emphasise how, in women, hormonal fluctuations during the menstrual cycle can affect brain function and behaviour and how biological differences, including sex chromosomes (XX vs. XY) and sex hormones (e.g., oestrogen and testosterone), influence brain structure and function, emphasising that these factors should be considered in research design and analysis.

In sum, studies indicate universal patterns of sex differences, including those in personality traits. Still, on the other hand, it would be wrong to ignore that cultural factors significantly influence the magnitude and expression of these differences. The interaction between biological, evolutionary, and cultural factors contributes to the observed sex differences in personality traits across different cultures. While studies (e.g., Buss, 2019; Schmitt et al., 2008) discuss possible evolutionary explanations for these sex differences, such as differing adaptive pressures on men and women throughout human history, most explore social role theory, which posits that sex differences in personality arise from the different social roles and expectations assigned to men and women in various cultures.

These insights, taken together, can inform policies and interventions aimed at promoting gender equality by acknowledging both universal and culture-specific aspects of sex differences in personality.

### **Policies and Measures Aimed at Gender Equality**

In the context of what has been stated, it seems necessary to try and raise awareness of gender equality through various measures, which include a different valuation of the 'feminine traits,' as well as the removal of barriers that prevent women from being activated in the context of conventional political participation and representation in terms of women's occupation of political positions. In this context, many initiatives have been launched, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly.

As indicated by Tripp and Kang (2008), the introduction of quotas offers the most explanatory power for women's representation today, and 'together with proportional representation systems, these institutional factors are of paramount importance' (p. 339). In addition, and as indicated by various studies, parties function as gatekeepers for candidate selection. Thus, the emphasis on the selection process of candidates within parties has become a new area of focus (Caul, 2001; Matland, 1993). Moreover, gender mainstreaming (i.e., integrating a gender equality perspective at all stages and levels of policies, programs, and projects) in EU-funded projects should also be ensured (O'Connell, 2013).

Next, capacity building and training programs should be supported to equip women with the skills and knowledge needed to run for office and succeed in political roles. Namely several studies have shown that programs that equip women with the skills and knowledge required to run for office and succeed in political roles increase women's political participation (Tadros, 2014). As Ballington (2008) indicated, a lack of experience with representative functions was one of the critical deterrents to entering politics for women.

Next, implementing family-friendly policies such as parental leave and childcare support to help women balance political careers and family responsibilities is also necessary. For example, Sweden's generous parental leave policy has been linked to higher levels of women's political participation (Nyberg, 2012).

Another set of political reforms that could empower women and in-

crease their political participation is related to finance reforms, including financial support or incentives for parties that nominate more female candidates. For example, in France, political parties that do not meet gender parity in candidate lists face financial penalties (Krook, 2010).

### Summary

The current paper aims to comprehensively analyse the persistent gender disparities in society and politics, focusing on the importance of achieving gender equity for societal progress. By employing a variety of theoretical frameworks, including feminist theory, the capability approach, and intersectionality, the study seeks to understand the gendered nature of power and its impact on women's empowerment.

The paper argues that men generally enjoy greater access to resources, control, and favourable cultural norms in politics, contributing to inherent gender disparities in power dynamics. These advantages underpin the systemic barriers that women face in their pursuit of equality and empowerment.

The empirical evidence presented in the document underscores the critical role of women's education in their empowerment. Education enhances employment levels, political participation, and decision-making autonomy. Educated women are more likely to be employed, participate in political processes, and make independent household decisions. Additionally, access to economic opportunities, such as microfinance, entrepreneurship training, and employment programs, can significantly boost women's financial independence and power within the household and society.

The document highlights the critical importance of women's political representation for advancing gender equality. Higher levels of women's political participation are associated with more inclusive and equitable policies. However, women often exhibit lower interest in conventional politics compared to men. Despite this, they are more likely to be involved in unconventional political activities, such as activism and advocacy.

Next, several barriers regarding gender equality in politics and challenges concerning women's empowerment are identified. These could be summarized as follows:

- *Stereotypes and Biases.* Women in politics are often subjected to



gender stereotypes that question their capabilities and leadership qualities. They face harsher scrutiny and are frequently judged based on their appearance and personal life rather than their policies and competencies.

- *Exclusion from Networks.* Women frequently encounter exclusion from informal networks and mentorship opportunities crucial for political advancement. This lack of access limits their political engagement and support opportunities.
- *Media Representation.* The media often perpetuates gender biases, portraying female politicians in a negative light or focusing on their attributes rather than their professional achievements. This skewed representation can undermine public perceptions of their effectiveness as leaders.
- *Structural Barriers.* Institutional structures and political systems are often designed to disadvantage women. These include electoral systems that favour incumbents (often men), lack of gender quotas, and policies that do not support work-life balance, making it difficult for women to participate fully in politics.
- *Economic Disparities.* Economic barriers, such as lower funding levels and financial support for women candidates, hinder women's ability to run effective campaigns. Women often have less access to resources and funding networks than their male counterparts.

These challenges highlight women's multifaceted barriers to achieving gender equality in politics. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive policy changes, cultural shifts, and targeted interventions to create a more inclusive and equitable political landscape.

The current study tries to provide several recommendations to overcome these barriers and challenges. First, capacity-building programs are essential for equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge to run for office and succeed in political roles. These programs should focus on leadership training, public speaking, and campaign management. Second, family-friendly policies, such as parental leave and childcare support, are also crucial. These policies help women balance the demands of a political career with family responsibilities, making it easier for them to participate in politics. Financial reforms are another essential recommendation. Incentivising political parties

to nominate more female candidates can enhance women's political representation. For example, public funding or financial bonuses can be awarded to parties that achieve gender parity in their candidate lists. This approach has been successful in several countries and has increased women's representation in political offices.

The study underscores the need for a multifaceted approach to enhance women's capabilities. This includes improving access to education, creating economic opportunities, and establishing supportive political institutions. By addressing these areas, societies can move closer to achieving gender equality and empowering women to participate fully in all aspects of political life. The document concludes that women's empowerment is not only a matter of justice and equity but also a crucial factor for society's overall development and progress.

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