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Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society
Organizations for Elections

Netherlands Institute for
Multiparty Democracy



Funded by the
European Union

Report on barriers to women's political participation in Ethiopia

January 2024





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Acronym

CEDAW *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*

FDRE *Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*

HDI *Human Development Index*

HoF *House of Federation*

HoPR *House of People's Representatives*

IDEA *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*

IPU *Inter-parliamentary Union*

MoWSA *Ministry of Women and Social Affairs*

NDI *National Democratic Institute*

NEBE *National Electoral Board of Ethiopia*

SDG *Sustainable Development Goals*

TSMs *Temporary Special Measures*

UNDP *United Nations Development Program*

VAWP *Violence against Women in Politics*

Executive Summary

Women's political participation (WPP) refers to "women's ability to participate equally with men, at all levels, and in all aspects of political life and decision-making." It has emerged as a critical issue in the 21st century. While women's involvement in formal political structures has advanced, it still varies by country, and they remain underrepresented globally.

Likewise, in the Ethiopian context, although WPP has significantly progressed, women remain underrepresented in political institutions and the electoral process. Ethiopia ranks 7th among African nations and 31st globally, with 41% representation of women in the lower house (HoPR) and 30% in the upper house (HoF). Moreover, Ethiopia has yet to have a female prime minister, the highest executive power. At the state minister level, representation is also lacking; as of October 20, 2021, only 15 of 52 positions (29%) were held by women in 2020. Further, Gender disparity persists in elections, particularly regarding voters and candidacy.

Despite these challenges, WPP is recognized as a fundamental right and a critical norm in international and regional frameworks. Thus, countries must respect, promote, and enforce WPP merely because it is a human right. In the Ethiopian context, in addition to the international commitments made, the government must respect, promote, facilitate, and enforce WPPs as per national legislation (specifically, the FDRE Constitution). WPP is further a crucial element for achieving gender equality, sustainable development, and democratic governance.

This report synthesizes the key barriers to women's political engagement, examines their socio-cultural and structural contexts, and proposes strategies for overcoming these challenges. Commissioned by the Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CECOE), the report underscores the importance of empowering women politically as both a fundamental right and a pathway to inclusive progress.

The synthesis report assesses both the formal and informal barriers. Informal, in this sense, refers to "unwritten rules such as custom, culture, tradition, socialization, and gender stereotypes". On the other hand, the "formal category" includes institutions, political parties, the media, election management, finance, and resources.

Barriers to Political Participation

The barriers identified are multi-faceted:

1. **Policy, Legal, and Institutional Barriers:** Weak enforcement of gender equality laws, absence of measurable temporary special measures (TSMs), and male-dominated political party dynamics restrict women's access to political platforms.
2. **Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Gender stereotypes, traditional norms, and family responsibilities limit women's public engagement and reinforce male dominance in leadership. In this regard, the Gender Social Norms Index (2022) revealed that 98.77% of the Ethiopian population has at least 1 bias against women's participation in education, economy, politics and physical integrity. In respect of WPP, the study revealed that nearly half of the population (45%) has at least 1 bias against women's participation in politics.
3. **Structural and Economic Barriers:** Limited access to financial resources, education, and professional networks hinder women's capacity to compete in elections and assume leadership roles.
4. **Psychological:** Women continue to struggle with low self-esteem and self-confidence to engage in politics, resulting from gender stereotypes and social norms.
5. **Violence Against Women in Politics:** Psychological, physical, and economic violence during elections discourages women's political involvement.

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

- To address these challenges, the report recommends:
- Implementing comprehensive affirmative actions such as quotas.
- Enhancing the enforcement of existing legal frameworks and policies.

- Supporting socio-cultural change through education, media campaigns, and community engagement.
- Providing financial and mentorship opportunities to women candidates.
- Establishing safe and inclusive environments that protect women from violence in politics.

This synthesis report emphasizes that achieving gender equality in politics is essential for Ethiopia's democratic progress and socio-economic growth. By dismantling systemic barriers and empowering women, Ethiopia can foster a political environment that reflects the voices and aspirations of its diverse population. Collaborative efforts by the government, civil society, and international partners are critical to achieving this vision.

Introduction

Women's political participation (WPP) refers to "women's ability to participate equally with men, at all levels, and in all aspects of political life and decision-making."¹ There is no universal agreement on the definition of "politics," as Vicky (1982) notes, "definitions of politics are themselves inevitably political," reflecting the values of those who define them.² Be it as it may, from a rights-based perspective,³ WPP encompasses several areas, including:

1. participation as voters and candidates that is influenced by factors such as gender stereotypes, access to information, the burden of housework, and financial barriers;
2. holding public bodies and exercising public functions, including participation in formulating policies; and
3. participation in non-governmental organizations and associations, including political parties, civil society organizations, trade unions, media, and others.

WPP has emerged as a critical issue in the 21st century. While women's involvement in formal political structures has advanced, it still varies by country, and they remain underrepresented globally. With respect to Heads of State and/or government, as of October 1, 2024, there are 29 countries with 30 women serving, with only 17 acting as Heads of Government.⁴

With regards to cabinet members, according to data from UN Women, women held 23.3% of cabinet positions leading ministries as of January 1, 2024, and only 15 countries have women occupying 50% or more of Cabinet Minister roles.⁵ Also, only 15 countries have achieved 50% or more representation of women in Cabinet Minister positions leading policy areas.⁶ Hence, at the current pace, gender equality in top political roles is projected to take another 130 years.⁷

¹ UN Women Training Center eLearning Campus, *Gender Equality Glossary, Definition for the term Women Political Participation*. <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36&mode=letter&hook=W&sortkey=&sortorder=>

² Vicky Tandall, *Women and Politics*, St. Martin's Press, 1982.

³ UN Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1953) Article 1-3, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979) Article 7, and CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 23 (16th session, 1997).

⁴ UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Women's Leadership and Political Participation*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#83879>

⁵ IPU and UN Women, *Women Political Leaders*, 2024.

⁶ IPU and UN Women, *Women Political Leaders*, 2024.

⁷ UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Women's Leadership and Political Participation*.

In national parliaments, women comprise just 26.9% of members in single or lower houses, a rise from 11% in 1995.⁸ Only six countries Rwanda (61%), Cuba (56%), Nicaragua (54%), Andorra (50%), Mexico (50%), New Zealand (50%), and the United Arab Emirates (50%)—have achieved 50% or more female representation in these legislative bodies.⁹ If progress continues at this rate, gender parity in national legislatures won't be reached until 2063.¹⁰

With regards to local government participation, data from 145 countries reveal that women represent over 3 million elected members, accounting for 35.5% of local deliberative bodies.¹¹ As of January 2024, only two countries have reached 50% female representation, while an additional 26 countries have more than 40%.¹²

Likewise, in the Ethiopian context, although WPP has significantly progressed, women remain underrepresented in political institutions and the electoral process. Ethiopia ranks 7th among African nations and 31st globally, with 41% representation of women in the lower house (HoPR) and 30% in the upper house (HoF). Further, gender disparity was evident in the recent 6th General Election; especially, in voter and candidacy (see, the section below).

To this effect, the Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CECOE), a non-profit and non-governmental civil society organization with more than 175 member organizations, commissioned a consultant to conduct a synthesis report to assess the barriers of women's political participation. CECOE is undertaking this endeavor as a part of one of its key initiatives under the project "Enhancing the Participation of Ethiopian Women in Politics: Balancing the Scale," funded by the European Union and implemented in partnership with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD).

Status of Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia: Defining the Issue and Rationale

In Ethiopia, women's political participation (WPP) has gradually improved, with increasing representation in parliament, executive bodies, and local government.

⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in National Parliaments*, as of 1 January 2024.

⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Women in National Parliaments*, as of 1 January 2024.

¹⁰ UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Women's Leadership and Political Participation*.

¹¹ UN Women, *Women in Local Government*. Data as of 1 January 2024.

¹² UN Women, *Women in Local Government*. Data as of 1 January 2024.

1. Federal Legislative Bodies: Women's representation has significantly advanced in both the House of People's Representatives (HoPR) and the House of Federation (HoF). In the HoPR, female representation has risen to 41.3% in the 2021 National Elections, up from just 2% in 1995, while the HoF has seen an increase from 6.5% in 1995 to 29.7% in 2021.¹³ The figures in both houses is significantly higher than the regional average which stood at 26% for the Lower Houses of Parliament (counterpart of the HoPR) and 21% for the Upper Houses of the Parliament.¹⁴
2. Executive Branch: as of December 2024, women hold 10 of the 22 Cabinet minister positions, making up 45.5% of the Cabinet.¹⁵
3. Regional Councils: In the 6th National Election (2021), women's representation in regional councils reached an average of 41.97%, a significant rise from 24% in 2015 and 12.9% in 2000.¹⁶

Table 1: Representation of Women in Regional Council (2021)

Region	Number of seats won	Proportion of women
Addis Ababa	138	46.38%
Afar (election not held in 6 constituencies)	69	42.03%
Amhara (election not held in 5 constituencies)	254	37.80%
Benishangul Gumuz (election not held in 6 constituencies)	28	28.57%
Dire Dewa (N/A)	189	44.44%
Gambela	149	38.93%
Oromia	513	44.44%
Sidama	190	48.95%
287	287	43.55%
Somali	263	33.08%
Harari	36	44.44%
Total	2116	41.97%

Source: NEBE, June and September Election (2021) Reports per Region/City Administration

Despite these advancements, women remain underrepresented in political institutions and the electoral process. Ethiopia ranks 7th among African nations and 31st globally, with 41.3% representation of women in the lower house (HoPR) and 29.7% in the upper house (HoF). The Gender Development Index from NEWA (2021) indicates that gender parity in decision-making and leadership stands at 86%.

Moreover, Ethiopia has yet to have a female prime minister, the highest executive power.¹⁷ At the state minister level, representation is also lacking; as of October 20, 2021, only 15 of 52 positions (29%) were held by women in 2020.¹⁸ Following the recent President Sahle-Work Zewdie's term expiration, Ethiopia has lost its status as one of 17 countries worldwide with a female head of state.

Further, Gender disparity persists in elections, particularly regarding candidacy. In the 6th National Elections, of the 9,505 candidates from 46 political parties (including 148 private candidates), only 1,987 were women.¹⁹ Despite these challenges, WPP is recognized as a fundamental right and a critical norm in international and regional frameworks. Thus, countries must respect, promote, and enforce WPP merely because it is a human right.

¹³ Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) Data Base for Ethiopia.

¹⁴ IDEA (2024), Women's Political Participation: African Barometer. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2024-07/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2024.pdf>

¹⁵ Primeminister Office, Members of the Council of Ministers, <https://pmo.gov.et/council/>

¹⁶ Agenagn Kebede (2020), Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia from Ancient Times to the Present, *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences* Vol.10, Issue 02.

¹⁷ IPU and UN Women, *Women Political Leaders*, 2024.

¹⁸ Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, *Country Gender Profile*, 2022.

¹⁹ NEBE, *Election Report of the 6th National Election, June and September Reports*.

In the Ethiopian context, in addition to the international commitments made, the government must respect, promote, facilitate, and enforce WPPs as per national legislation (specifically, the FDRE Constitution).

Beyond international commitment and national laws, WPP is critical to ensure sustainable development. In this regard, one of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), under Goal 5.5, states “Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”.

This is also evident as the top 10 ranking countries in the Human Development Index (HDI) have more than relatively higher representation seats in parliament as well as are amongst the countries with the lowest Gender Inequality Index.²⁰

Table 2: Top HDI Ranking Countries by Gender Development Index Group, Gender Inequality Index and the Proportion of Women in Parliament (2022)

Country Name	HDI Rank	Gender Development Index Group ²¹	Gender Inequality index ²²	The proportion of Women Parliaments ²³	Remark
Switzerland	1	2	3	39%	The World Average for Representation of women in both houses = 26.5%
Norway	2	1	2	45%	
Iceland	3	1	9	47.6%	
Hong Kong, Chine	4	2	-	-	
Denmark	5	1	1	43.6%	
Sweden	6	1	4	46.4%	
Germany	7	2	19	34.8%	
Ireland	8	1	20	27.4%	
Singapore	9	1	8	29.1%	
Australia	10	1	17	44.5%	
Netherlands	10	2	5	37.8%	

Source: UNDP, HDI (2024)

Furthermore, increased female representation is crucial for governments’ democratization, credibility, and legitimacy. In other countries, it has shown practical improvement in government performance. For instance, research in India found that areas with women-led panchayats (local councils) had 62% more drinking water projects than those led by men. Similarly, in Norway, a direct link was identified between the presence of women in municipal councils and improved childcare coverage.²⁴

Objectives

The primary objective of this synthesis report is to analyze and evaluate the factors contributing to the low level of women’s political participation (WPP) in Ethiopia. The specific objectives are as follows:

²⁰ HDI is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. UNDP (2024), Human Development Index.

²¹ The index measures the ratio of female to male HDI values. Based on the index, “countries are divided into five groups by absolute deviation from gender parity in HDI values. Group 1 comprises countries with high equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of less than 2.5 percent), group 2 comprises countries with medium to high equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of 2.5–5 percent), group 3 comprises countries with medium equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of 5–7.5 percent), group 4 comprises countries with medium to low equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of 7.5–10 percent) and group 5 comprises countries with low equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation from gender parity of more than 10 percent).”

²² This index is a “composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market.”

²³ This refers to the “proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament expressed as a percentage of total seats. For countries with a bicameral legislative system, the share of seats is calculated based on both houses.”

²⁴ R. Chattopadhyay and E. Duflo (2004). “Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India,” *Econometrica* 72(5), pp. 1409–1443; K. A. Bratton and L. P. Ray. 2002. “Descriptive representation: Policy outcomes and municipal day-care coverage in Norway,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(2), pp. 428–437.

1. To assess the legal and policy framework, identifying key barriers to WPP and potential strategies for improvement;
2. To examine the socio-cultural context in Ethiopia, identifying obstacles to WPP and corresponding strategies to address them; and
3. To evaluate structural and psychological barriers to WPP, proposing effective strategies to overcome these challenges.

Methodology

This synthesis report employs qualitative methodology, mainly a desk review of literature, reports, articles, and other relevant material. The desk review also includes an analysis of the legal and policy framework dealing with WPP.

Scope

1. **Technical Scope:** This synthesis analysis is limited to the following barriers: legal and policy, socio-cultural, structural, economic, and psychological barriers.
2. **Methodological Scope:** desk-review

Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia

The participation of women in politics is a fundamental human right and is essential for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Equal involvement of women and men at all levels of decision-making is critical to achieving equality, sustainable development, and democracy by incorporating women's perspectives and experiences into political processes. However, women around Africa still face significant obstacles to their political participation, and they are underrepresented in parliaments and decision-making roles.

Literature indicates that there is wide range of barriers to WPP. According to the IDEA's Africa Barometer (2024), these barriers can be categorized into formal and informal factors. Informal, in this sense, refers to "unwritten rules such as custom, culture, tradition, socialization, and gender stereotypes". On the other hand, the "formal category" includes institutions, political parties, the media, election management, finance, and resources.

Table 3: Informal and Formal Factors that factor WPP

Informal Factors	Formal Factors
Customs, culture, tradition	Political Parties and Institutions
Domestic roles and responsibilities	The media
Socialization, attitudes, stereotypes	Finances and resources
Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP)	Electoral systems and TSMs
	Electoral System management
	Conflict and war

Source: Africa Barometer (2024)

This synthesis report deals with both factors. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 deal with the formal factors including legal, policy, and institutional factors, as well as structural barriers; whereas sections 2.3 and 2.4 dictate socio-culture context, psychological barriers, and VAWP.

N.B: The Electoral Systems and Management will be dealt with in a subsequent gender analysis that will focus on the 6th General Election.

Policy, Legal and Institutional Barriers

The normative framework regarding women's political and electoral participation is well-established in human and political rights declarations, covenants, and conventions.²⁵ Women's full and effective participation in political and electoral processes originates in the principles of non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of political rights enshrined in the various international human rights instruments.²⁶

At the international level, Ethiopia has adopted various human rights instruments to promote women's political participation. These instruments include the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Beijing Declaration Plan of Action (see, table 4 below)

²⁵ UN Women and UNDP.

²⁶ UNDP and UN Women, *Preventing Violence Against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide*, 2017.

The Ethiopian government has enacted various legal and policy documents pertaining to gender rights. Of these, the 1995 FDRE Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, devotes an entire article to the rights of women (article 35) and recognizes general political rights. This article recognizes, among other things, women's right to enjoy the rights (including political rights) and protections provided in the Constitution equally with men;²⁷ It also reiterates the State's international obligation to enforce women's right to eliminate the influences of harmful customs.²⁸

It further entitles women the right to participate in the formation of policies and designing and execution of projects; acquire, administer, control, use, and transfer property (including land); equality in employment, promotion, pay, and the transfer of pension entitlements; and access to family planning education, information, and capacity.²⁹

The FDRE constitution also contains general rights and protections related to political participation.

In addition to the constitution, the Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2020 set forth several provisions that promote WPP in political parties, candidacy, and voter registration. The NEBE has also strived to enforce these by enacting several directives.

Political Party:

1. Financial incentives to political parties that enhance women's participation in formation, candidacy, and leadership positions;³⁰
2. The recruitment of founding members should inter alia reflect gender consideration;³¹
3. consideration of gender representation during the election for a leadership position within a political party.³² To this end, a political party is required to submit an annual report to the NEBE outlining the gender composition of its members.³³
4. Candidacy: financial incentive availed to political parties with an increased number of women nominees for candidacy.³⁴ Media Proclamation No. 1238/2021 asserts that the number of female candidates is one of the factors in determining the allotted campaign airtime.³⁵

²⁷ FDRE Constitution Article 35 (1)

²⁸ FDRE Constitution Article 35(4).

²⁹ FDRE Constitution Article 35(6-8).

³⁰ Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2020, Article 100(2cd)

³¹ Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2020, Article 64(6)

³² Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2020, Article 74(4)

³³ Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2020, Article 74(4)

³⁴ Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2020, Article 100(2cd)

³⁵ Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2020 Article 71 (4c).

Table 4: Some of the International and Regional Human Rights Instruments signed/endorsed by Ethiopia

Name of Document	Type of Document	Relevance to WPP
UDHR	International Human Rights Instrument	contains general provisions that enhance the political participation of everyone (including women). - The right to participate in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives (Article 21(1)). - Asserts that the government's authority shall be based on people's will expressed in periodic and genuine elections based on universal and equal suffrage.³⁶ - protects everyone against discrimination based on, among other things, gender in the entitlement to all rights and freedoms outlined in the declaration.³⁷
ICCPR	International Human Rights Instrument	Recognizes several rights and protections pertinent to WPP - Rights of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights;³⁸ - Rights to hold opinions without interference; right to freedom of expression; right to freedom of association; equal protection of the law without any discrimination;³⁹ - oblige state parties to enforce the rights enshrined therein based on non-discrimination;⁴⁰ - Oblige state parties to avail effective remedy to address any form of violation of the rights and freedoms⁴¹
ICESCR		contains various provisions that recognize, promote, and protect socio-economic rights that are associated with WPP - Right to equality⁴² - Right to work
CEDAW and relevant documents of the committee	International Human Right Instrument	most comprehensive international human rights instruments that specifically aims to address gender issues and the specific needs of women. - obliges state parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country.⁴³ - ensure women's right to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies.⁴⁴ - ensure women's right to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation, and hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.⁴⁵

³⁶ Such elections should further be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures. UDHR Article 21(3)

³⁷ UDHR Article 2

³⁸ ICCPR Article 3.

³⁹ ICCPR Article 19(1 and 2) and 22(1).

⁴⁰ Cumulative reading of Article 2(1) and Article 2(2) of the ICCPR.

⁴¹ Further, state parties have the obligation to ensure that such remedy involves the determination of the complaint (filed by any person) by competent judicial, administrative, or legislative authorities, or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, and to develop the possibilities of judicial remedy. Moreover, state parties have the obligation to enforce such remedies when granted. ICCPR Article 2(3)

⁴² ICESCR Article 3

⁴³ CEDAW Article 7

⁴⁴ CEDAW Article 7(a)

⁴⁵ CEDAW Article 7(b)

		ensure women's right to participate in non-government organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.⁴⁶
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action	National Action Plan endorsed by state members to the UN	most comprehensive and transformative global agenda for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.⁴⁷ In respect of WPP, it incorporates the following: - recognizes the right of women to participate in the political and decision-making process. - recognizes their right to participate in all elections, equal representation at all levels in all electoral processes, and equal participation in the development and implementation of policies and development programs.
African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter)	Regional Human Rights Instrument	contains certain provisions that relate to the enhancement of WPP - obliges states to ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women, and also ensure the protection of the rights of women.⁴⁸ - asserts that every citizen has a right to freely participate in the government, either directly or through freely chosen representatives.⁴⁹
Maputo Protocol	Regional Human Right Instrument	regional counterpart of CEDAW as it obliges all state parties to take measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women. - recognizes the right of women to participate in the political and decision-making process. - recognizes their right to participate in all elections, equal representation at all levels in all electoral processes, and equal participation in the development and implementation of policies and development programs.⁵⁰

In addition to the legal framework, the policy framework at the national level includes the following:

The Women's Policy, which was formulated by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia back in 1993, primarily aims to speed equality between men and women, improve the lives of rural women (by increasing their access to basic social services), and gradually eliminate prejudices, customary and other practices based on patriarchy, and enable women to hold public offices and participate in the decision-making process at all levels.

The Policy obliges the government to take all appropriate measures to ensure the democratic and human rights of women are respected by guaranteeing them their freedom of speech, writing, peaceful assembly, and forming associations as well as their right to work in a governmental or nongovernmental organization, their right to form and join lawful organizations and their right to vote or be elected.

⁴⁶ CEDAW Article 7(c)

⁴⁷ UN Women, *Women's Rights in Review 25 Years After Beijing*, 2020. P.3

⁴⁸ Banjul Charter Article 18(3)

⁴⁹ Banjul Charter Article 13(1)

⁵⁰ Maputo Protocol Article 9(1a-c)

The ten-year development plan outlines a long-term vision of making Ethiopia an “African Beacon of Prosperity” by creating the necessary and sufficient conditions. With respect to WPP, the plan sets the following targets to successfully achieve the main objectives of the social justice and social security development plan for the coming ten years (2020/21-2029/30):⁵¹

- Make Ethiopia the Centre of Africa's Female Leaders by producing 10,000 capable female leaders;
- Increase the share of female decision-makers in the legislative, and judicial to 50 percent, and maintain that of the executive organ at the present 50% level;
- increase the share of women in public institution leadership posts to 36%.⁵²

The institutional framework, on the other hand, includes several institutions including the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, and political parties. MoWSA, established in 2014, serves as the primary coordinator of gender initiatives in Ethiopia. The government has institutionalized gender priorities by creating gender directorates within each line of ministry, which are accountable to both the ministries they support and to MoWSA. The Ministry operates regional and sub-regional offices, with gender focal points extending to the Kebele level, the lowest administrative unit, reflecting the government's dedication to implementing women's policies and achieving gender parity. At the federal level, MoWSA is responsible for coordinating and implementing gender mainstreaming policies and programs. Additionally, the Ministry oversees the National Action Plan on Gender Equality and advocates for women's rights and empowerment.⁵³

NEBE, on the other hand, is established to oversee the regulation and licensing of political parties, as well as execute periodical elections, referendums, and any other elections.⁵⁴ NEBE is structured to include a management board along with its chairman, directors and the necessary staff.

The other important institutions are political parties. According to the Electoral Proclamation, “political party” means an association that is organized by citizens and is a registered entity according to Proclamation No. 1162/2011. A political party formulates political programmes at the national, regional or sub-regional levels in order to gain political power at the national level. Hence, they are key instruments to enhance WPP's as well as participation in the decision making process. As of 2022, there were a total of 20 national parties and 33 regional parties in Ethiopia.⁵⁵

This being said, the legal, policy, and institutional barriers are discussed below.

Lack of Quantifiable and Measurable Temporary Special Measures

Currently, Ethiopia doesn't have a comprehensive and measurable affirmative measure that aim to enhance women's political participation. Specifically, the FDRE Constitution and electoral law fail to provide strong TSMs to enhance women's decision-making.⁵⁶

One of the affirmative actions that can be taken to enhance WPP is the setting of a quota. Research has shown that there is a direct correlation between the quota system and actual representation of women.⁵⁷ Despite this, the Ethiopian legal framework doesn't enunciate a quota system to ensure the representation of women in parliament. Indeed, Ethiopia follows a voluntary quota system relating to the representation of women in Parliament.⁵⁸ This quota system reserves 30% of the candidacy in the ruling party list from women (since 2004).⁵⁹ The problem of the voluntary quota system is that it heavily depends on one party and there is that obvious question relating to what happens if that party loses ground.⁶⁰ Hence, it is important to incorporate quota systems to enhance women's participation in the legislative and executive organs, as well as electoral management bodies.

In this regard, NEBE has enacted directives to attempt to enhance gender equality and women's participation in politics and elections.

⁵¹ The Ten Years Development Plan (2021-2030) (English Version).

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ MoWSA and UN Women, Ethiopia Country Gender Equality Profile.

⁵⁴ NEBE Establishment Proclamation 1133/2019.

⁵⁵ NEBE, List of Registered Political Parties.

⁵⁶ IDEA (2024), Women's Political Participation: African Barometer.

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

These directives, which supplement the proclamation, encompass provisions that mitigate risks for women during the election process, encourage women's participation in electoral management bodies, and provisions that incentives women's participation. Some of the provisions are outlined in the table below.

Table 5: Example of Provisions that Promote Women Access to Politics and Election

Category	Provision and Law	Feature
Provisions that encourage women participation in electoral management bodies, and as election officers and observers	Article 6(2) of Proclamation No.1133/2019	Assert that the composition of the board shall take into account inter alia sex composition to the possible extent.
	Article 4(3) of Directives No.1/2019	Assert that the recruitment and employment of regional branch office heads considers gender
	Article 13(5) and 15(9) of Proclamation No.1162/2019	Assert that the recruitment of election officials shall ensure gender representation at constituency and polling station level
	Article 13(6) of Proclamation No.1162/2019	Assert that there should be gender consideration in the composition of the Grievance Hearing Committee at Constituency Level.
	Article 15(10) of Proclamation No.1162/2019 Article 7(10) of Directive No.6 on Voter Registration	Assert that the Grievance Hearing Committee (composing 2 members) at the polling station shall include one man and one woman.
	Article 15(11) of Proclamation No.1162/2019	Promotes the deployment of observers that considers gender representation
Provisions that promote women participation as political party members, political party leaders, voter	Article 64(6) and 65(5) of Proclamation No.1162/2019 Article 6 of Directive No.3/2020	Assert that recruitment of founding members shall reflect gender considerations (both national and regional political party)
	Article 74(4) of Proclamation No.1162/2019 Article 18 of Directive No.3/2020	Assert that the election for leadership position within a political party shall consider gender representation
	Article 22(3) of Voter Registration Directive No.6 Article 27(1) of Vote Casting, Vote Counting and Announcement Directive	Prioritizes inter alia persons with disability, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and women accompanied by children during the voter registration and election day
Provisions that incentives women's participation	Article 100(2)(c and d) of Proclamation No.1162/2019	Assert that the amount of financial support shall be based the number of female candidates nominated by the political party, as well as number of female members and females in leadership positions

Non-comprehensive Protection against Violence

As indicated by the CEDAW committee, the legal framework, including the Criminal Code of 2005, does not cover all forms of discrimination against women and is not being implemented properly. Further, research conducted by EWLA states some of the existing laws that treat men and women equally fail to address the historical and structural inequalities, which resulted in perpetuating discrimination against women.⁶¹ The study also revealed that there is a lack of specific procedures for addressing violence against women, despite existing policies aimed at protecting victims during investigations and trials. A review of procedural laws is necessary to ensure proper protection and support for survivors in line with CEDAW standards.

Another gap observed is the absence of effective mechanisms of enforcement, including mechanisms to investigate and remedy grievances of discrimination and abusive practices, which undermine the rights and protections guaranteed to women under the law.

Poor Implementation

The BPFA +25 report (2019) from the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWYC) highlights the difficulties in implementing national legislation and policies as a major obstacle. The enforcement of these laws at the community level remains weak, contributing to the underreporting of gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful traditional practices (HTP). Insufficient budget allocations and capacity gaps within responsible government offices and other stakeholder's further hinder progress. Additionally, rehabilitation and support services for survivors of violence are inadequate compared to the number of women in the country and the scale of the issue.⁶²

Table 6: Gaps and Challenges that Impede MoWSA (2020)

Gaps	Challenges
• Limitation on the access to awareness-raising and services provided to the community in terms of the desired outcomes; • Limitation in coordinated and collaboration works; • Lack of robust support, monitoring and accountability mechanism; • Limitation of not revising the Women Policy and Youth Policy so that it corresponds to the current context and realities; • Limitation in conducting comprehensive research that can solve the problems in the sector, as well as implementing the findings of the research conducted; • Lack of an information system pertaining to women, children and youth; • Inconsistent structure that extends to lower administrative organs; • Lack of access to service providers; • Significant budgetary limitation; and; • Limitation of human resources and high turnover rates.	• Biased community views pertaining to women, children and youth; • Lack of adequate and sustainable employment opportunities; • Weak negotiation and decision-making capacity on the part of women that can enhance their leadership status; • Underrepresentation of women in key decision-making positions; • Prevalent harmful traditional practices and violence against women; • Weak saving capacity of women; • Limitation on proper implementations of laws; • Lack of governance structures that are impartial and robust; • Lack of provision of support to women to grasp decision-making positions; • Government organs do not consider women issues as their part of ordinary mandate; and • Overlap of powers and duties of the MoWSA with other government organs.

Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, Ten Year Strategic Plan (2021-2030).

⁶¹ EWLA (2021), *A Rapid Assessment on Gender Discriminatory Laws and Practices in Ethiopia*.

⁶² NEWA(2021), *Ethiopian Gender Development Index*.

Political Party Dynamics

Political parties are key to women's participation in politics, as they recruit and select candidates for elections and determine a country's policy agenda. However, within political parties, women tend to be overrepresented at the grassroots level or in supporting roles and underrepresented in positions of power. Without access to established networks of influence, and with very limited resources, few role models and mentors, and sometimes even limited family and community support, it is understandable that women's participation in political parties has remained well below that of men.⁶³

On paper, most political parties in Africa declare their intention to ensure women's participation and leadership in different structures. But these commitments are not reflected in party leadership structures. The presidency of political parties is overwhelmingly occupied by men. The only exception is Tanzania, where President Samia Suluhu Hassan is the leader of her political party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi.⁶⁴

Similarly, according to Wbante (2018), the political system and structure in Ethiopia had not been conducive to the inclusion of women, largely due to a masculine political culture and socialization. For a long time, Ethiopian politics has been seen as a male-dominated arena, making it more favorable for men within the community.⁶⁵

Accordingly, the participation of women in political parties is low in Ethiopia. This is evident as a gender audit of political parties conducted by NEBE in 2020 revealed:

- Only 10% of the reviewed parties explicitly state that women ought to occupy certain proportion of the membership of party structures such as general assembly, central committee and executive committees.
- only one party had a woman as a leader and another party as a deputy leader.
- 30% (21) of the political parties reviewed for this study have women represented in party structures central committee, executive committee, audit committee.

63 NDI UNDP. (2012). *Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Guide to Promote Women's Political Participation*. New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved from UNDP.

64 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). (2021). *Women's Political Participation: Africa Barometer 2021*. International IDEA and African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET).

65 Wubante A. and Manju V. (2018) *Barriers hindering women in political leadership: Evidence from Ethiopia, East Africa*. International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews (IJRAR) Vol. 5, Issue 4.

Further, with due focus on the Ethiopian Electoral System and Women's Political Participation, findings from MoWSA (2021) revealed that the current electoral system, a first-past-the-post (FPTP) model, often limits women's chances due to highly competitive male-dominated elections. This system favours established male candidates and marginalized women, especially newcomers. A study conducted by Ethiopia's electoral system poses challenges for women's political participation. The first-past-the-post electoral system tends to favor established candidates, who are often men. Research by the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (2021) indicates that proportional representation systems have been more effective in increasing women's representation in other contexts, suggesting that electoral reform could enhance women's political engagement in Ethiopia.

Ethiopian political party structures are often male dominated, with systemic barriers that restrict women's participation and leadership. Although Ethiopia has implemented policies for gender equality, including a 1993 Women's Policy, the political landscape still limits the influence of these policies, partly due to Ethiopia's historical focus on ethnicity-based politics. This focus has sidelined gender considerations and fostered male-dominated party leadership, with few formal mechanisms to promote female representation in decision-making roles⁶⁶.

In Ethiopia, the internal party structures are characterized by male-dominated leadership, which often lacks enforceable frameworks to support female candidates. According to a study conducted by Wubante (2018), focus group discussions highlighted this male dominance, emphasizing that the political party structures are not conducive to women's participation, as patriarchal norms prevail at all levels. This situation significantly hampers women's effectiveness in the political leadership process. Furthermore, a lack of openness and internal democracy within political parties exacerbates these issues. When democratic principles are absent in party structures, participation especially for women faces numerous obstacles. Many parties maintain hidden discriminatory rules and non-transparent nomination processes that hinder women's involvement. Often, women are included merely to comply with empowerment policies or to secure funding from the electoral commission. Additionally, discussions revealed a lack of discipline and democratic culture among party members, who are more focused on vying for power than fostering a democratic environment.

66 Assefa, H. & Seifu, E. (2022). *Women's participation in Ethiopia's political sphere and internal party structures*. Institute for Security Studies, East Africa Report.

Overall, most Ethiopian political parties lack the necessary democratic practices to support meaningful participation at all levels.⁶⁷ Although some parties express rhetorical support for gender equality, concrete steps such as gender quotas or gender-responsive internal rules remain largely unimplemented.⁶⁸

The limited representation of women in Ethiopian political structures reflects broader challenges within the country's political and social systems, where even high-level commitments to gender equality often fail to translate into significant changes in party operations. Consequently, gender biases persist in leadership roles, and women's representation in influential political spaces remains low, and this further brings limited opportunities to influence party platforms and candidate nominations which restricts their broader participation and weakens gender-sensitive representation within policy frameworks.⁶⁹

Ethiopian political parties have often been structured in ways that limit significant women's representation at higher decision-making levels, though some parties have made commitments to increase gender equity within their rank.⁷⁰ The shifting alliances and political fragmentation also seen in Ethiopia have sometimes marginalized women, as coalition parties prioritize stability over inclusivity.⁷¹ This is partly attributed to the prioritization of ethnic and regional affiliations over gender representation in political discussions. The relatively low representation is also exacerbated by the ongoing conflicts and political instability in parts of Ethiopia have disproportionately affected women and discouraged participation. The political environment, perceived as hostile, often discourages women from seeking or sustaining public office. Lack of mentorship and support from established political figures also reported to reduce their career advancement prospects within political parties.⁷²

Socio-Cultural Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia

The socio-cultural barriers to women's political participation in Ethiopia are deeply intertwined with traditional gender roles, societal norms, and family responsibilities. These factors not only shape how women perceive their roles in society but also influence how others view their participation in politics. To overcome these barriers, it is essential to challenge gender stereotypes, change societal attitudes about women in leadership, and provide greater support for women balancing family and political responsibilities. This section will discuss each of these socio-cultural barriers.

Gender Stereotypes

Most African societies are patriarchal, with deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and power imbalances. Traditional beliefs and customs often assign women to domestic roles, limiting their involvement in public and political spheres. This can create barriers and hinder women from actively participating in politics. Cultural norms and stereotypes that associate women primarily with caregiving, nurturing, and domestic tasks can make it challenging for women to be seen as capable political leaders. These stereotypes may limit society's perception of women's abilities and undermine their potential political contributions.⁷³

Gender stereotypes often portray women as inherently suited for private, caregiving roles and men as better suited for public, decision-making positions. These stereotypes are reinforced by traditional beliefs that question women's leadership capabilities and limit their influence in political settings.⁷⁴ Likewise, social norms and cultural expectations create a rigid environment where women who pursue political roles often face criticism for deviating from accepted gendered behaviors. Such norms dictate acceptable behavior for women, reinforcing limitations on their political engagement. Triggered by gender stereotypes and social expectations, the dual burden of family responsibilities and professional commitments often poses a major constraint on women's political ambitions in Africa. Expectations that women prioritize household and childcare responsibilities make political careers challenging to pursue.⁷⁵

67 Wubante Ayalew Dessie (2018), *Barriers Hindering Women Political Leadership: Evidence from Ethiopia, East Africa*.

68 EISA (2021). *Women's Participation in Ethiopia's 2021 Elections: The Role of Political Parties*. Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa.

69 International IDEA (2021). *The Role of Political Parties on Women's Participation and Representation*

70 Abebe, A. (2022). *Women's Representation in Ethiopian Politics: An Analysis of Party Structures*. Ethiopian Political Review

71 Ethiopian Institute for Peace. (2023). *Coalitions and Gender Representation in Ethiopian Political Parties*. EIP Reports.

72 UNDP Ethiopia. (2023). *Mentorship and Support Systems for Women in Politics*. UNDP Publications.

73 IDEA (2024), *Women's Political Participation: African Barometer*.

74 Tamale, S. (2000). *Gender Trauma in Africa: Patriarchy's Last Stand*. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(1), 83-92

75 Madsen, D. (2019). *Social Norms and Women's Participation in African Politics*. *Politics & Society*, 47(2), 159-187

Here is a breakdown of these barriers with a focus on context-specific challenges, along with the analysis of its impacts.

In Ethiopia, as in many patriarchal societies, traditional gender roles dictate that women are primarily responsible for domestic tasks and caregiving, while men are expected to lead in public, economic, and political spheres. These gender roles are deeply entrenched in Ethiopian society, where women are often perceived as being more suited to nurturing roles within the family than to leadership roles in politics. Taking this general finding as a springboard, here's a structured way to present reviewed literature categorized by national, regional, and local contexts.

Alemayehu (2023) reveals that cultural norms in Ethiopia significantly limit women's opportunities in political leadership. The study highlights that stereotype about women's leadership abilities contribute to their underrepresentation in parliament, suggesting a societal perception that undermines women's capabilities as effective leaders. These norms act as barriers to accessing political resources, resulting in lower political engagement among women.

Bekele and Endale (2022) finds that while legal measures have been taken to support women's political participation, public opinion—rooted in traditional gender roles—continues to limit their success in elections. This illustrates a gap between policy efforts and societal acceptance, indicating that entrenched stereotypes overshadow legislative advancements. Yeshanew (2023) analyzes the influence of patriarchal structures on women's representation in politics and highlights that patriarchal norm dictate the political landscape, making it challenging for women to compete on an equal footing with men. These structures reinforce the stereotype that women are not suited for leadership, thus limiting their participation in national elections. This problem is also exacerbated by media coverage, as media often perpetuates gender stereotypes by portraying women politicians in ways that emphasize traditional roles. This portrayal influences public opinion and contributes to lower political participation among women. The study suggests that the media's focus on traditional gender norms significantly impacts how women are viewed as leaders (Girma, 2024).

These national-level literature indicates that entrenched cultural norms, patriarchal structures, and media influence are major barriers to women's full political engagement.

Despite legislative efforts to increase women's representation, societal attitudes steeped in stereotypes persist. These factors collectively contribute to the ongoing underrepresentation of women in Ethiopian politics, highlighting the need for broader societal change alongside policy reforms.

The effect of gender roles, norms, and stereotypes on women's political participation in Ethiopia varies significantly across different regions due to diverse cultural, religious, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds. Discussion in this regard is presented hereunder.

Studies conducted by Mekonnen (2023), Dereje, Mulatu, (2024 compares political participation across regions in Ethiopia, focusing on how cultural differences influence gender roles and found the substantial impact of regional cultural contexts on women's involvement in politics. Regions with strong patriarchal norms demonstrate significantly lower participation of women in politics, indicating a direct correlation between cultural attitudes and women's political involvement. Other literatures on the same topic also revealed how gender norms vary between regions and their effect on women's political participation. It delves into both cultural and religious norms as key factors. Cultural and religious norms in certain regions are identified as substantial barriers to women's involvement in politics, creating disparities in political engagement.

The study conducted by Zerihun (2023) evaluates the efforts of regional councils to empower women politically, tracking both progress and obstacles over time. Hence, the outcomes vary widely by region, showing mixed success depending on the local political culture. It also reiterated that some regions have made strides in empowerment, while others lag due to entrenched traditional attitudes.

Majority of the reviewed documents showed that Ethiopian women who attempt to enter politics face significant opposition from both men and women who believe they should focus on their roles as mothers and caregivers. In association with this, female politicians in Ethiopia continue to encounter resistance within political parties, where male leaders are less likely to support women's advancement to leadership roles. This is highly observed in Somali, afar and Gambelia regions.

Gender Roles and Family Responsibilities

Women often face a double day, balancing career and family responsibilities, thus limiting their opportunities for career advancement. Many women politicians are, or plan to be, mothers. Because of this role, there is an unwritten expectation that women will perform the reproductive tasks involving care and maintenance of the household, such as cooking, cleaning, and looking after children, the sick, and the elderly. Male politicians generally do not have to bear this burden, creating the time for them to invest in formal and informal politics.⁷⁶

Society assigns women and men different, often unequal roles, allocating a dominant role to men and a subordinate role to women. Society relegates women to the private sphere, extending their reproductive roles to taking care of the home and family. Conversely, society assigns men to the public sphere, running the affairs of state.⁷⁷

At the national level, the double burden of domestic responsibilities is a pervasive barrier that influences women's political engagement across Ethiopia. Ethiopian women, like many women around the world, face the "double burden" of balancing their professional lives with their domestic responsibilities. In Ethiopia, women are primarily responsible for household chores, childcare, and caregiving, even when they are also working outside the home or engaged in political activities.

The central point of the reviewed documents is that the expectation that women will take on the bulk of domestic responsibilities leaves them with little time or energy to engage in political activities. It is fact that political participation often requires long hours, travel, and the ability to network and campaign, all of which are difficult for women who are juggling family obligations. As a result, many women [in rural and pastoral contexts in particular] feel they cannot commit to a political career without neglecting their family duties. In association with this, the reviewed literatures further revealed that in many cases, women who seek political office do not receive adequate support from their families. Husbands, in-laws, and other relatives may view women's political engagement as a distraction from their "primary" responsibilities at home. This lack of support can be a significant obstacle, as women are often expected to fulfil both their political and family duties without assistance.

The lack of familial support can discourage women from entering politics, as they may feel overwhelmed by the prospect of managing both family and political responsibilities. Additionally, women who do not have strong family support systems may find it difficult to attend political meetings, campaigns, or other events that require them to be away from home for extended periods.

At the national level, the double burden of domestic responsibilities is a pervasive barrier that influences women's political engagement across Ethiopia to Time Allocation: to support with selected literatures on the subject matter, a study by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (2022) revealed that Ethiopian women spend an average of 4.5 more hours per day on unpaid domestic work compared to men, which significantly limits their ability to attend political meetings or campaign activities. Research by the Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth (2023) highlights those cultural expectations reinforce traditional gender roles, placing primary responsibility for household chores on women, even in dual-income families. This cultural norm dissuades many women from seeking political office due to the perceived conflict with family duties. Likewise, the UN Women Ethiopia Report (2022) found that women in urban areas, who are often better educated, still face societal pressures to prioritize family over politics. This expectation reduces women's representation in national political spaces despite recent legislative efforts aimed at improving gender parity.

In Ethiopia's regional states, such as Amhara, Oromia, and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), the impact of domestic responsibilities on women's political involvement varies, often tied to the enforcement of traditional gender norms.

To enrich this generalization findings by region specific literatures, the study conducted by Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (2021)⁷⁸ in Amhara showed that women spend up to 70% of their day on household chores. The implication is that this expectation is a critical barrier to engaging in regional political activities, where long hours and travel are needed. Though According to urban centers like Addis-Aba-ba, Bahir Dar in Amhara and Adama in Oromia have seen an increase in female political participation due to improved access to domestic helpers [according to CSA (2022)]⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Africa Barometer.

⁷⁷ Africa Barometer (2024).

⁷⁸ Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association. (2021). *Gender Roles in Amhara Region*.

⁷⁹ Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia. (2022). *Time Use Survey on Unpaid Domestic Work*.

and UNDP's Regional Gender Gap Report (2023), this progress is limited and not representative of rural areas of the respective regions. Feeling of fatigue and hopelessness is another finding worth mentioning. To make more specific, the research by the Addis Ababa University, Gender Institute (2022) indicated that women (in Oromia) in politically active roles frequently face burnout due to balancing political responsibilities with household duties. This stress is a common reason cited for resignations or reduced political ambition among women.

From pastoral vs. agrarian context perspectives, regions dominated by pastoralists (including Afar, Somali, and parts of Oromia and Gambella) were reported to have exceptional challenges that further complicate and exacerbates women's political participation due to their distinct cultural settings and nomadic lifestyle intersected with other inhibiting variables. To support with the mostly cited documents; A report by Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia (2022)⁸⁰ found that women in pastoralist communities carry a heavier domestic load, including child care, water fetching, animal care, and food preparation. Women in these settings are suffered from time-poverty, as these tasks are time-intensive and leave minimal space for political involvement. In similar fashion, the Afar Regional State Gender Office Report (2023) revealed that women's representation in local councils remains below 10% in pastoral regions, largely due to [among other factors] the overwhelming domestic duties that leave little time for political engagement. Likewise, the study conducted by the Somali Regional State Women's Affairs Bureau (2023)⁸¹ noted that women in these areas often lack access to education, training and resources (including formal and informal networks) that are critical for political participation. The bottom line is that the double burden of domestic chores combined with limited support services exacerbates this participation gap.

As cited by majority of the reviewed literatures, due to access to education, media exposure and shifting gender norms, urban environments have shown a relative increase in opportunities for women's political participation compared to rural settings. Studies such as Tsega (2023)⁸² and Kumsa (2024)⁸³ indicate that urbanization plays a pivotal role in reducing barriers for women.

Higher education levels and greater awareness in cities like Addis Ababa have allowed more women to participate in politics, challenging traditional gender stereotypes. Urbanization has also facilitated a shift in gender norms, with urban communities gradually accepting women in leadership positions. However, as Eshete (2023) and Abebe (2022) highlight, while opportunities have improved, deeply entrenched stereotypes still limit the visibility of women in executive and decision-making roles in general. Thus, it can be safely concluded that urban women are benefiting from better access to education and exposure to progressive ideas, contributing to a more inclusive political landscape. Yet, stereotypes persist, particularly at higher leadership levels.

Triggered by traditional norms and barriers as well as cultural resistance, rural areas in contrast continue to exhibit strong resistance to women's political involvement due to entrenched cultural and traditional norms. For example, studies conducted by Desta (2022)⁸⁴ and Asfaw (2023) consistently point to traditional norms that reinforce male dominance in rural political structures and operations. In the remote agrarian and pastoral settings in particular, cultural expectations often dictate women's roles as caretakers, limiting their ability to engage in politics. In similar fashion, women in rural leadership positions face considerable obstacles, as described by Wondimu (2024)⁸⁵ who highlights the cultural expectations that discourage women from pursuing political careers. The influence of agricultural livelihoods, as examined by Taye (2022), underscores how economic roles impact political participation, with women's responsibilities largely centered around household and caregiving responsibilities and mandates. Thus, from this it can be concluded that rural women face significant structural and cultural obstacles that inhibit political participation. Deep-rooted gender roles remain a powerful force, maintaining a status quo that favors male political dominance.

Urban vs. Rural Divide: The reviewed documents and reports also explicitly reveal a clear divide in the political experiences and active participation in election process of urban and rural women. Urban women, particularly in cities like Addis Ababa, encounter fewer cultural barriers, enjoy better education, and have greater access to awareness campaigns that support their political engagement. However, the persistence of stereotypes means that the battle for gender equality in politics is far from over, even in urban areas.

80 Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia. (2022). *Pastoral Women's Challenges in Political Engagement*.

81 Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth. (2023). *Ethiopia's Gender Equality Report*.

82 Tsega, Y. (2023). *Urban Women in Politics: Breaking the Gender Stereotype*. *Journal of Urban Development*, 8(4), 220-240.

83 Kumsa, S. (2024). *The Role of Urbanization in Changing Gender Norms in Politics*. *Urban Political Review*, 7(2), 130-145.

84 Desta, E. (2022). *Gender and Politics in Rural Ethiopia: An Examination of Barriers*. *Rural Development Journal*, 12(3), 210-225.

85 Wondimu, R. (2024). *Women's Leadership in Rural Communities*. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 16(2), 180-197.

On the other hand, the rural women counterparts continue [with slow improvements] face more rigid gender expectations and less access to education, which significantly hampers their participation in politics. Traditional norms in rural districts make it difficult for women to challenge male dominance, leading to limited representation and influence in political spaces. Thus, the urban-rural divide is stark, with urban women experiencing more favorable conditions for political participation, while rural women remain largely constrained by traditional roles.

Despite the discovered differences, the reviewed documents also revealed several commonalities between the urban and rural contexts. The identified commonalities [⁸⁶ ⁸⁷] [inter alia] include;

- **Enduring Stereotypes:** Stereotypes about women's roles in leadership and decision-making are present in both urban and rural contexts, albeit to different extents. Even in urban areas, women struggle to break into executive-level positions, reflecting persistent biases.
- **Influence of Education and Awareness:** Access to education is a critical factor in enabling women's participation. In urban areas, education has been a driver of progress, while its absence in rural areas continues to hinder women's political engagement.
- **Cultural and Structural Obstacles:** Both contexts highlight those cultural and structural barriers though more severe in rural areas affect women's ability to participate in politics, signaling the need for societal change.

To sum-up, across all contexts—national, regional, and pastoral—the double burden manifests in similar ways, though the intensity varies. The reviewed documents showed that across the board, women's disproportionate engagement in domestic work is the most cited reason for their limited political participation at national, regional and local levels. This is particularly acute in rural and pastoral areas, where patriarchal thinking are rampant and traditional expectations are stronger. In pastoral areas women who enter politics face social ostracism and are seen as neglecting their family roles, leading to limited female political involvement.

Lastly, with marked regional and contextual differences, the deep-rooted cultural norms assign domestic roles to women, making political engagement seem secondary. This cultural pressure is a consistent barrier highlighted across multiple reports and documents.

Social Norms and Cultural Expectations

The reviewed documents [conducted at national level] showed that Ethiopia's social structure is largely patriarchal, meaning men dominate political, economic, and cultural life. Social norms in patriarchal societies often reinforce male authority and discourage women from stepping into leadership roles, particularly in politics. Women are expected to be obedient, modest, and focused on their family responsibilities, while men are encouraged to be assertive and pursue leadership opportunities.

The collective impact is that social norms create significant barriers to women's political participation. Women who defy these expectations by entering politics may face criticism, social ostracism, or even harassment. Furthermore, cultural taboos surrounding women in public life can make it difficult for women to speak out, campaign, or engage with male colleagues in the political arena. In this regard, majority of the documents reviewed tends to the generalization that in rural women who engage in politics may be perceived as neglecting their familial duties or overstepping their social boundaries, which can lead to significant social backlash. In addition, the social expectations of female modesty often make it difficult for women to participate in debates, assert their opinions, or take on leadership roles that require a strong public presence.

In Ethiopian culture, women are often expected to display modesty and humility. These expectations clash with the qualities often associated with successful politicians, such as assertiveness, charisma, and public speaking skills. Women who are seen as too outspoken or ambitious may be viewed negatively, reinforcing the idea that political life is not appropriate for women. This creates a double standard where women in politics must balance the demands of public leadership with cultural expectations of modesty. Female politicians may also face harsher scrutiny than their male counterparts, both for their personal lives and for how they conduct themselves in public.

To support with selected documents, Alemayehu and Mulugeta (2022) highlights that deep-rooted patriarchal norm in Ethiopia's society continue to shape perceptions of women's roles.

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Asfaw, L. (2023). *Challenges for Women's Political Engagement in Rural Districts*. *Rural Politics Review*, 14(1), 98-115.

There's a prevailing belief that politics is a male domain, leading to stigmatization of politically active women. Similarly, Wondimu Daba (2023) noted that cultural expectations that prioritize women's roles as caregivers over leaders. Political participation is seen as secondary to family responsibilities, discouraging many potential female leaders. To know whether the government's effort to address the problem works, Berhanu Tefera (2023) conducted research and concluded that despite policy reforms, societal acceptance lags behind, with media and other intersectionalities (like religion, context, age) often reinforcing stereotypes about women's capacities for leadership.

In this regard, the Gender Social Norm Index (2022) reveals that at least 98.77% of the Ethiopian population holds at least 1 bias relating to women's participation in education, economy, political and physical integrity; and 77.75% of the population holds at least 2 biases. The study further reveals that more than half of the population (45%) holds at least 1 bias against WPP.

From regional perspectives, several studies indicated that Ethiopia's cultural diversity results in varying degrees of socio-cultural barriers to women's political participation. The barriers at the regional level differ due to local traditions, religious influences, and historical practices. For example, as reported by OXFAM (2022) and UN-Women (2020), in Oromia, traditional gender roles are deeply rooted, though some cultural reforms have been introduced to support women's empowerment. Patriarchal norms remain strong in rural areas, where women are expected to prioritize family responsibilities. Likewise, the influence of Islam in some parts of Oromia also affects women's political participation, as religious leaders in conservative areas may discourage women from taking public roles.

According to the several reports published by Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association (EWLA), Amhara is known for its conservative social norms, where women are often confined to domestic roles. There is a strong expectation that women should manage the household, making it difficult for women to participate in political activities. Likewise, marriage and motherhood are highly valued in Amhara society, which places additional pressure on women to conform to traditional gender roles, leaving them little time to engage in politics. The conservative social structure of the Amhara region discourages women's participation in political leadership. Cultural expectations favor women staying within domestic roles, which acts as a barrier to entering politics.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Tesfaye, K. (2023). Amhara Region's Cultural and Social Barriers to Women's Political Leadership. *Amhara Regional Review*

The traditional values in SNNPR significantly limit women's political opportunities, with local elders and leaders often opposing women's ambitions as they are seen to contradict cultural norms.⁸⁹ On the other hand, UNDP report (2023), showed that regions fall to the former SNNPR region have significant ethnic diversity, and the cultural expectations regarding women's roles vary between ethnic groups. Some ethnic groups are more progressive, while others maintain stricter gender roles: Practices like bride price and early marriage in rural areas further limit women's freedom to engage in politics.

In Tigray, Mekdes (2024)⁹⁰ explored the barriers to women's political leadership in Tigray, specifically within conflict-affected region and Solomon (2022)⁹¹ explore explicitly on the ways conflict impacts the perception of women's roles within the community, noting that traditional norms are not static but are often exacerbated during crises. The study posits that conflict has reinforced traditional gender roles, leading to a regression in women's political rights and leadership opportunities. The compounded impact of recent conflicts in the region, which have intensified conservative values and further restricted opportunities for women's political involvement. The research suggests that the ongoing socio-political instability in Tigray has led to a reinforcement of traditional gender roles. As communities become more conservative in times of crisis, the space for women in leadership positions has shrunk, confining them to roles perceived as non-threatening or supportive. Solomon also emphasized that in times of socio-political upheaval, there is a tendency for communities to fall back on established gender norms, viewing women's leadership as an additional risk in unstable conditions.

In areas like Afar and Somali, regions' strong patriarchal traditions and cultural expectations continue to impose significant barriers to women's political participation. Social pressures make it challenging for women to engage in politics actively.

⁸⁹ Mesfin, S. (2022). Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) - Women's Political Participation and Societal Pressures. *Southern Ethiopia Journal of Social Sciences*

⁹⁰ Yohannes, M. (2024). Gender Roles and Political Engagement in Tigray: A Societal Perspective. *Tigray Political Science Journal*.

⁹¹ Solomon, A. (2022). Women's Political Leadership in Conflict-Affected Regions: The Case of Tigray. *Ethiopian Journal of Gender Studies*

In the pastoral regions, women are frequently excluded from decision-making processes, both at the community and political levels, which reduces their opportunities to take on leadership roles or influence policy-making.^[92 93 94]

Structural Barrier

Lack of Access to Resources

Economic barriers affecting women's political participation

A significant barrier to women's political participation is the lack of resources compared to their male counterparts. Women are less likely to have access to the same resources to support their political ambitions, which can dissuade them from taking an active role in the electoral process. Campaigns are expensive, and without a political party's support, competing is challenging. Even where women politicians have the support of their parties, this often does not translate into financial support.⁹⁵

The reviewed documents underscore those substantial economic barriers continue to affect women's political participation in Ethiopia. With marked geographical and contextual differences, financial limitations are widely cited as a primary challenge, preventing many women from pursuing candidacies or sustaining effective campaigns. To support this with selected literatures on the subject matter IDEA (2019) and Tesfaye & Bekele (2023) concluded that campaign financing disparities are key factors as campaign funds often prioritize male candidates, due to a perception that they are stronger contenders, which constrains women's ability to access resources. Findings from the studies conducted by Mekonnen (2022), Ethiopian Women's Policy Institute (2023) showed that engaging in politics involves significant expenses, including those for networking, organizing events, and campaign promotion, which disproportionately affect women lacking independent financial means.

According to the reports from Abebe & Kebede (2022) and Mohammed (2023), economic dependency on male family members frequently discourages political ambition among women, limiting their independence and decision-making power. Similarly, Alemayehu (2023) found that access to credit through microfinance has shown promise in enhancing local political involvement among women.

Specific to the election process, the reviewed documents showed that running for political office [regardless of the context and women groups] in Ethiopia often requires considerable financial resources. In this regard, women continue to face unique economic barriers [with slow improvements] due to the existing gender-based inequalities. For example, Teshome, (2023) conclude that campaign financing is one of the primary economic barriers for women. Political campaigns demand significant funds for transportation, outreach, communication, and promotional materials. Unlike men, women are often at a disadvantage because they generally have less access to personal financial resources, political networks, and donor support. Another type of cost women often incur during election process is an opportunity cost. To make it more explicit, the study conducted by Ali & Mekonnen (2022) revealed that Ethiopian women frequently face higher opportunity costs when they decide to run for office. Engaging in politics may involve leaving or reducing their involvement in income-generating activities. Given the significant role that many women play as primary caregivers, the financial burden is compounded.

Another finding worth mentioning is fundraising disparities between men and women. Female candidates often face difficulties in raising funds compared to their male counterparts due to societal biases that favor men as leaders. This economic disparity reduces women's chances of effectively campaigning and mobilizing voters (Abate, 2022). Specifically, the systemic economic barriers remain a hindrance at higher political levels. The challenges women face in politics are compounded by other social identities, including ethnicity, class, and age. Women from marginalized ethnic groups often face additional barriers to participation due to systemic discrimination (Aregawi, 2020).

With regard to the impacts, the study conducted by Tadesse (2024) and UNDP (2024) revealed that broader economic inequalities (rampant in pastoral and rural contexts of the countries in particular), including poverty and property ownership disparities, especially in rural regions, are noted as significant obstacles to women's participation.

92 Ahmed, H., & Meressa, B. (2023). *Gender and Politics in Ethiopia: Women's Political Participation in the Afar and Somali Regions*. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 59(2), 150-175.

93 Ibrahim, S., & Tesfaye, A. (2022). *Challenges and Opportunities for Women's Empowerment in the Somali Region of Ethiopia*. *Ethiopian Social Development Review*, 12(3), 89-110.

94 Ali, F. (2024). *The Role of Culture and Tradition in Shaping Women's Political Participation in the Afar Region*. *Gender and Development in Ethiopia*, 15(1), 22-47.

95 IDEA (2024), *Women's Political Participation: African Barometer*.

In general, majority of the reviewed documents showed that women with stable income sources and economic empowerment are more likely to engage in politics, suggesting that financial independence directly impacts political engagement potential. Furthermore, challenges women face in politics are compounded by other social identities, including ethnicity, class, and age. Women from marginalized ethnic groups often face additional barriers to participation due to systemic discrimination. Understanding these intersecting identities is crucial for developing effective strategies to enhance women's political engagement through economic empowerment.

These findings collectively illustrate the need for context-based policies addressing economic inequities to create a more inclusive political landscape at national, regional, and local levels. Enhanced support for women through economic empowerment initiatives, equitable campaign financing, and microcredit access could help bridge the gap in political representation.

Education-related barriers

Plenty of literatures on this topic showed that, across Africa, limited access to education continues [with slow improvements] to be persistent barrier to women's full political participation. Education equips individuals with the skills, confidence, and knowledge required to engage in political discourse and decision-making processes. However, social, economic, and cultural constraints often limit educational opportunities for women, which in turn affects their political involvement.

Mirroring to this general finding, national level studies conducted by Ayele, T. (2022)⁹⁶ revealed that the national education policies often fail to address barriers women face, such as early marriage and socio-economic status. And this lack of education significantly limits women's ability to engage in political discourse, participate in voting, and hold office. Similarly, a comprehensive and comparative study conducted by Hailu et al. (2023)⁹⁷ indicates that educated women are more likely to participate in political activities. The study underscored those educational disparities persist, affecting women's representation in political positions at the national, regional and local level.

Findings from Ethiopian Ministry of Education (2023) also indicated that educational attainment is closely linked to political participation. While Ethiopia has made strides in increasing female enrolment in education, gaps remain. Highlights that women are less likely to pursue higher education, which is often a prerequisite for political candidacy. This educational disparity perpetuates cycles of underrepresentation.

Regional and contextual differences also matter, viz, there are regions with track record of lower [women] levels of education, thereby tending to have less political awareness, reduced confidence, and fewer leadership skills compared to their educated counterparts in other regions/contexts. Such contexts further limit their ability to run for political office, engage in political activism, and influence decision-making processes. This regional differences in accessing to education also hinders women's understanding of their rights and civic duties, diminishing their participation in elections and public discussion as well as increasing regional divergence. To support this with selected studies, Biruk, H. & Desalegn, G. (2022)⁹⁸ identified a significant gap in women's education in the Afar and Somali regions, as compared to women from Oromia, Amhara, Addis-Ababa and Tigray regions correlating with lower political engagement and representation in local governance. Similarly, study focused on the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) and demonstrates how limited educational opportunities hinder women's capacity to participate politically. It highlights community-based initiatives aimed at enhancing women's education and political involvement.⁹⁹ Regions like Amhara and Tigray report higher literacy rates among women compared to Afar and Somali regions, leading to different levels of political engagement. Literacy often correlates with a woman's ability to participate in political dialogues, access information, and hold leadership positions.¹⁰⁰

Another finding worth mentioning is that limited civic education programs, especially in rural regions, fail to educate women on political rights and responsibilities.

⁹⁸ Biruk, H. & Desalegn, G. (2022). *Regional Disparities in Women's Education and Political Participation in Ethiopia*. *Ethiopian Journal of Gender Studies*, 10(3), 77-92.

⁹⁹ Amsalu, K. (2024). *The Intersection of Gender and Education in Ethiopian Political Life: A Regional Perspective*. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(1), 55-70.

¹⁰⁰ Bekele, S. (2023). *Education and Political Engagement of Women in Ethiopia: A Regional Analysis*. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*.

⁹⁶ Ayele, T. (2022). *The Role of Education in Enhancing Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia*. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 55(2), 25-45.

⁹⁷ Hailu, S. (2023). *Women's Political Participation and Education: A Comparative Analysis in Ethiopia*. *African Journal of Political Science*, 18(1), 112-130.

In regions like Tigray and Amhara, more robust civic education initiatives have shown a positive impact, encouraging women's political participation. In addition to this, regions with targeted policies for women's education, like Amhara and Tigray, show progress in women's political involvement. In contrast, pastoralist and rural regions like Afar and Somali lag behind due to insufficient and non-adaptive educational policies.^{101 102 103}

From urban-rural and agrarian context, with marked regional differences, educational access is better in urban regions, enhancing women's political participation. Rural areas face cultural constraints, inadequate resources, and lack of infrastructure and continue to struggle due to limited educational resources, cultural norms, and fewer opportunities for political engagement.¹⁰⁴

From the key findings of the reviewed literatures, it can be safely concluded that limited access to education [with marked regional difference and slow improvements] significantly hampers Ethiopian women's political participation across various contexts and groups. In pursuit of this, national and regional policies need to address educational disparities [now only as compare to men counterparts, among the women themselves living in different contexts and regions] and create an environment conducive to women's political engagement at national, regional, and local levels.

Barriers to access networking resources

As noted by research conducted by (Ballington, 2008; Tripp et al., 2009), networking resources, including social connections, mentorship, and organizational networks, have a significant impact on women's political participation in Africa. Access to these resources enables women to build influence, overcome socio-cultural barriers, and gain visibility in male-dominated political spaces. Networking helps women access campaign support, funding, and guidance on navigating political institutions, which are often crucial for successful political involvement.

The researcher further noted that women who are part of networks or mentorship programs are more likely to overcome barriers to entry, such as discrimination and lack of resources, and sustain long-term political careers. In line with this finding, documents pertinent to Ethiopian context were reviewed thoroughly and the results of selected papers and reports are summarized hereunder. The reviewed documents revealed that that traditional gender norms in Ethiopia often discourage women's participation in informal social gatherings where political discussions occur. Social stigma and family responsibilities further alienate them from political spaces. The impact is that it hinders women's ability to access informal social capital, crucial for political mobility.^{105 106 107}

From professional networking perspectives, the studies conducted by Tadesse (2023)¹⁰⁸, Ayalew (2022),¹⁰⁹ Gebru (2024)¹¹⁰ showed that women's participation in professional networks continue to be limited due to socio-cultural restrictions and gender biases. Cognizant of marked regional and contextual differences, a significant lack of female mentorship within political and professional spaces exacerbates these issues. Its impact is that women continue to struggle to gain access to mentorship, sponsorship, and political support, limiting their career progression.

From the perspectives of formal political networks that includes formal political parties, governmental structures, and official platforms where political decisions are made, (Tesfaye, 2023; Tegegne, 2024) noted that Ethiopian women in general (those living the rural and pastoral contexts in particular) continue to face systemic discrimination in access to these spaces, and male-dominated leadership often excludes them from key political circles.

101 Mengistu, A. (2024). *Barriers to Women's Political Participation: An Educational Perspective*. *Ethiopian Women's Research Forum*

102 Gebremedhin, D. (2024). *Regional Differences in Education Policies and Women's Political Engagement in Ethiopia*. *Ethiopian Policy Review*

103 Hagos, T. (2022). *The Impact of Education on Women's Political Participation in Pastoral Communities in Ethiopia*. *Journal of Pastoralism*, 12(1), 34-50

104 Dawit, S. (2023). *Agrarian Women's Political Participation and Educational Challenges in Ethiopia*. *Ethiopian Journal of Development Studies*, 15(2), 66-81

105 Asfaw, S., & Tadesse, G. (2023). *Gender Dynamics in Political Participation: A Case Study in Rural Ethiopia*. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 31(2), 112-127.

106 Belayneh, E. (2024). *Women and Informal Political Networks in Ethiopia*. *Ethiopian Journal of Social Sciences*, 19(1), 58-74.

107 Mengesha, M., & Yohannes, S. (2022). *The Invisible Barrier: Gendered Social Norms and Women's Political Engagement*. *African Journal of Gender and Development*, 28(3), 210-225

108 Tadesse, D. (2023). *Women in Professional Networks: The Case of Political Career Development in Ethiopia*. *Ethiopian Review of Political Studies*, 14(2), 143-160.

109 Ayalew, B. (2022). *Mentorship and Sponsorship in Political Arenas: Bridging Gender Gaps*. *Journal of Women's Empowerment*, 27(1), 93-108

110 Gebru, K., & Alemayehu, R. (2024). *Professional Associations and Women's Leadership in Ethiopia*. *Political Science Review*, 12(4), 214-231

As part of the informal social networks with due focus on informal gatherings, community-based discussions, and social clubs where political opinions are shared, the reviewed documents showed that the deep-rooted patriarchal norms discourage women's presence in these settings, limiting their access to informal but influential decision-making forums (Asfaw & Tadesse, 2023; Belayneh, 2024).

From the dimension of professional networks and associations, studies conducted by Tadesse (2023) and Ayalew (2022) clearly noted that gender biases and lack of mentorship continue to hinder women's participation and advancement in these spaces. In addition, as compare to men, women face economic networks with due focus on networks involving access to financial resources, fundraising events, and economic platforms supporting political ambitions. In effect, according to Birhanu (2022) and Desta (2023), the limited financial resources, gendered financial exclusion, and lower participation in fundraising events restrict women's engagement in these networks. This is aligned with the study conducted by Mekonnen, A. (2022)¹¹¹ that highlighted that women's lack of access to financial resources hampers their ability to run campaigns and engage in political activities. High costs associated with political involvement, including networking and campaigning expenses, were identified as major barriers.

The implication of the findings is that the limited access to financial, educational, and networking resources significantly hampers Ethiopian women's political participation at the national, regional, and local levels. Financial constraints restrict their ability to fund political campaigns, access training, or engage in initiatives that could enhance their political visibility and influence. This financial disparity creates a gap in women's ability to compete on equal footing with their male counterparts, leading to underrepresentation in decision-making roles in general and the rural and pastoral contexts in particular.

With marked regional and contextual differences, educational barriers also continue to play a crucial role, as limited access to quality education and training workshops for women impacts their political engagement and leadership skills. Women who are less educated lack the knowledge, skills, and confidence required to navigate the complexities of the political landscape, diminishing their presence in election process.

The networking constraints further gear the problem. This is due the fact that societal norms and traditional gender roles, women often have fewer opportunities to build strategic alliances, gain mentorship, or access influential networks that are essential for political success. This isolation limits their visibility and chances to advance in political careers, keeping the leadership landscape skewed and male dominated.

Thus, addressing these disparities requires a multifaceted approach that includes policy interventions, targeted education programs, financial empowerment initiatives, and the creation of inclusive networking platforms with due focus on different contexts and women groups. Empowering Ethiopian women politically demands systemic changes that provide equal access to resources and support, fostering a more inclusive and representative political environment at all levels.

Psychological Barriers

There are several psychological barriers that emanate from gender stereotypes as well as Ethiopia's political landscape. The trauma from nearly two decades of civil war and recent political unrest has made politics unappealing to both women and men.

Further, as indicated in a study by CEPSS, negative societal attitudes toward women and their role in both political processes and leadership positions remains the greatest obstacle to elevating the status of women and increasing their meaningful civic and political participation. Public and private spheres have long been viewed as distinct, with women traditionally assigned to the private realm, associated with reproduction and child-rearing—activities often regarded as inferior. In contrast, public life, which is esteemed and encompasses a wide range of activities, has been dominated by men, who have exercised power to confine women to the private sphere. Cultural traditions and religious beliefs across all nations have further contributed to this confinement, effectively excluding women from active participation in public life.¹¹² This internalized gender norm restricts and discourages women from participating in politics.

Lose of hope and political apathy are also other factors. For instance, a study conducted by SAIS and IRI (2021), revealed a gender divide in the fear that constrains political participation; five women citing fear of violence as a primary reason for their disinterest, whereas no men did.¹¹³

¹¹² Wubante Ayalew Dessie (2018), *Barriers Hindering Women Political Leadership: Evidence from Ethiopia, East Africa*.

¹¹³ SAIS Women Lead (SWL) and International Republican Institute (IRI), *Increasing Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia: A Barriers Analysis of Women's Political Participation*.

¹¹¹ Mekonnen, A. (2022). *Economic Barriers and Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa University Press.

Female participants expressed concerns about the risks associated with political involvement, noting that men often prevent women from participating if violence is a possibility.¹¹⁴ Female participants expressed concerns about the risks associated with political involvement, noting that men often prevent women from participating if violence is a possibility.¹¹⁵ This community separation is compounded by a lack of role models in politics, making it difficult for women to see themselves as participants. Additionally, women's voting agency is limited, as family decisions often dictate their choices, and outside influences pressure them at the polls. Finally, while some women participate in politics for monetary incentives, this highlights a broader issue where they feel their voices are undervalued in the political process.¹¹⁶

Violence Against Women in Politics

Additionally, violence against women also restricts women's participation. Violence against women is a destructive tool used in various ways throughout the electoral cycle to dissuade women from participating as election administrators, voters, and candidates. In addition to physical harm, much of this violence is verbal and psychological. Political violence, social stigma, and the notion that politics is a "dirty game" are significant disincentives to women entering politics.

¹¹⁷In Africa, VAWP is common. IPU and APU (2021), Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women in Parliaments in Africa conducted a study covering 24 women from 50 African countries (more than 90 per cent of countries in Africa), including 137 women parliamentarians and 87 female members of parliamentary staff. According to this study, 80 per cent of women parliamentarians who participated in the study have experienced psychological violence over the course of their mandate.

Table 7: Forms of VAWP in Africa against Parliamentarians and their staffs by Prevalence, Specific Form and Perpetrator

Form of Violence	Prevalence	Specific Form of Violence	Perpetrators
Psychologica	80%	sexist behavior or remarks	Male parliamentarians
		sexist attacks online (internet, social media, smartphones).	Citizens (online anonymous)
		death threats, rape threats or threats of beating or abduction directed at them or their loved ones.	Citizens (online anonymous) Militant groups
		faced intimidation or psychological harassment.	Citizens (online anonymous) Militant groups
Sexual	40%	sexually harassed.	Male parliamentarian
		affected by sextortion (requests for sexual favours)	

¹¹⁴ *ibid*

¹¹⁵ *ibid*

¹¹⁶ *ibid*

¹¹⁷ *ibid*

physical violence	23%	Physical assault (slap, push or hit)	Male parliamentarians
		Threat to use or had used a firearm, knife or any other weapon	
economic violence.	29%	Refusal to an entitled fund	Male parliamentarians

Source: IUP and APU (2021)

In the Ethiopian context, the 2016 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS) found that 23% of women have experienced physical violence and 10% have faced sexual violence in their lifetime. Additionally, 15% of women reported experiencing physical violence in the past year, with 16% of rural women affected compared to 11% in urban areas. The 2022 humanitarian needs overview indicated that the number of people requiring a response to gender-based violence (GBV) rose from 3.5 million in 2021 to 5.8 million, primarily in conflict, drought, and flood-affected regions. Alarming, the EDHS also revealed that 63% of women aged 15-49 believe it is justifiable to beat a woman for violating social roles, compared to 27.7% of men, highlighting the urgent need for awareness-raising interventions to educate women about their rights.

Here it is important to note the findings of EWLA's election observation that revealed various forms of VAWiE during the 6th National Election. the election observation covered all regions, with an exception to Tigray Regional State. EWLA has a structure at regional level that includes a project coordinator and paralegals that aid the community; and this structure was used to conduct the election observation, during voter registration, campaigns, Election Day, and so on. The election observation focuses on two cycles: pre and during election. The pre-election observation involves receiving and verifying cases from survivors, and hearsays. Further, EWLA had utilized a hot-line 7711 (that applies to any violence against women) to receive complaints. However, the during-election observation involves cases identified by the observers. The election observers assigned by EWLA observed the polling stations remotely, due to financial and resource limitations. Notably, unverified cases were excluded from the election observation report.

Table 8: Summary Finding of the Violence against Women in Elections Observation during the Sixth Ethiopian National and Regional Elections

Election Cycle	Finding
Pre-election phase	- voter education materials targeting women were seen or heard in Addis Ababa, although to a limited extent; 27 cases of threatening or intimidating against women were reported; 5 cases of sexual harassment against women were reported; 4 cases of physical assault/physical attacks, and 2 cases of security forces interrupting campaigning of women candidates was witnessed; - In 10 cases, women voters were discouraged to participate in voter education or campaign events; - Destruction of property of women candidates (6 cases) were recorded;

	• Women were excluded from campaign events (10 cases); • reported 21 cases of political party members, and local government representatives attempting to buy votes of women voters or potential women voters. • On 49 occasions, EWLA observers witnessed or heard complaints from persons with disabilities about access to the election and/or mistreatment by election officials.
Election day (June 21,2021)	• There were cases reported by EWLA observers of sexual harassment of women voters in queues; • EWLA observers also reported 13 cases of violence against women on election day, including physical violence (2), sexual harassment (3), and psychological violence (12).
Election Day (September 30 residual elections)	• Although there was no reported significant interference, at 3 polling stations out of 59 visited by EWLA observers, between 1 to 10 women voters were not allowed to vote because they were not on the voters' list and at one polling station between 1 to 10 women voters were not allowed to vote for a different reason.

Source: EWLA

Another point worth mentioning is that violent conflict and war. Many African countries have recently experienced or are currently experiencing conflict or war both within and across borders. The effects of war continue for years after the fighting ends. While entire communities suffer the impact of armed conflict, women and girls are often the first to lose their rights to education, political participation, and livelihoods. On the other hand, social ruptures and shocks can produce rapid structural change. As conflicts and struggles in Africa have shown, conflict can catalyze shifts in gender relations.¹¹⁸

Strategies to Overcome Barriers in Ethiopia

Of all the areas of decision-making, politics is the most public of spaces and, therefore, has been among the most hostile for women to access. Yet, it is one of the most critical spheres for effecting change. The seminal Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) in 1995 identified women in power and decisionmaking as one of the 12 critical areas of concern for governments to address. Sustainable Development Goal 5.5 is to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Africa Barometer (2024)

¹¹⁹ IDEA (2024), Africa Barometer.

Socio-Cultural Interventions

Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns

In Ethiopia, entrenched gender stereotypes often discourage women from pursuing leadership roles. Public advocacy can challenge these stereotypes, fostering a culture that values and supports women's contributions in politics. Partnering with influential figures helps ensure cultural relevance and acceptance, making it easier to implement broader societal changes.

Strategies:

- Launch national and regional campaigns through media and community engagement to challenge traditional gender roles and promote the value of women's participation in politics.
- Partner with religious and cultural leaders to advocate for gender equality, leveraging their influence to reshape attitudes.
- Utilize educational institutions to introduce gender studies and awareness programs to the youth, encouraging a shift in perspectives from an early age.

Promoting Shared Domestic Responsibilities

One significant barrier to Ethiopian women's political participation is the disproportionate domestic workload they bear. By promoting shared domestic responsibilities, women can have more time and energy to engage in political activities. Policies supporting equal distribution of household duties would address the "double burden" they face, particularly in rural areas where traditional expectations are stronger.

Strategies:

- Encourage legislation that mandates paternal leave and incentivizes businesses to create family-friendly policies that support shared domestic duties.
- Create community-based childcare services to reduce the burden on women, allowing them more time to engage in public affairs.
- Organize workshops that promote the equal sharing of household tasks among couples, with a focus on rural and pastoral areas where traditional roles are most dominant.

Structural Reforms

Reforming Political Party Structures

Many Ethiopian political parties lack structures that encourage women's participation and leadership. Internal reforms, including quotas and support networks, can directly address these gaps and create pathways for women to ascend within political hierarchies.

Strategies:

- Introduce mandatory internal quotas for women within party leadership and decision-making bodies.
- Establish committees within political parties dedicated to promoting gender equity and creating a supportive environment for women candidates.
- Implement mentorship and support programs within parties to encourage women's participation, with a focus on identifying and addressing structural biases.

Enhancing Access to Resources

Limited access to financial resources, education, and professional networks hinders Ethiopian women's ability to compete in politics. Targeted interventions in these areas would equip women with the necessary tools to effectively participate and succeed in political arenas.

Strategies:

- Provide financial support for women candidates through special funds and grants, with emphasis on low-income women from marginalized regions.
- Create dedicated educational programs, scholarships, and training sessions aimed at building women's skills and knowledge in politics and governance.
- Develop women's political networks that offer mentorship, peer support, and knowledge-sharing opportunities to strengthen their capacity and resilience.

Legal and Policy Interventions

Implementing Gender-Sensitive Policies

Gender quotas have proven effective globally in increasing women's political representation. In Ethiopia, implementing similar measures could directly address gender disparities in political leadership and ensure women have a voice in policy-making processes.

Strategies:

- Enact gender quotas at the national and local government levels to ensure a minimum percentage of women representation.
- Introduce incentives for parties that meet gender targets, such as additional funding or access to political platforms.
- Review and amend existing legislation to ensure it adequately addresses the barriers to women's political participation.

Strengthening Legal Protections

Women in Ethiopian politics often face harassment and violence, deterring many from participating. Strengthening legal protections would create a safer and more supportive environment, encouraging more women to engage in political processes without fear of reprisal.

Strategies:

- Enhance laws that protect women from harassment, discrimination, and violence in political spaces, ensuring stricter enforcement mechanisms.
- Provide legal support services, including free legal aid for women facing discrimination in politics.
- Establish clear codes of conduct for political parties, focusing on gender equality and the fair treatment of all candidates.

Empowerment and Capacity Building**Leadership Training and Mentorship Programs**

Building confidence and leadership skills is crucial for women aspiring to political roles. Targeted training and mentorship can bridge the skill gap and empower women, particularly those from underrepresented groups, to assume leadership positions.

Strategies:

- Develop specialized leadership training programs that focus on building women's skills in public speaking, negotiation, and political strategy.
- Create mentorship networks linking experienced female politicians with aspiring women leaders, providing guidance and role models.
- Conduct workshops in rural and underserved communities to ensure that leadership opportunities are accessible to women from all backgrounds.

Encouraging Women's Political Engagement

Encouraging more women to engage in politics requires sustained motivation and support. Community engagement and visibility of successful women leaders can inspire others, while practical resources and incentives can reduce the barriers women face in starting their political journey.

Strategies:

- Organize forums, debates, and community events that specifically encourage women to participate in political discussions and activities.
- Use social media and online platforms to engage young women in politics, offering resources and information on how to run for office.
- Partner with NGOs and international organizations to create incentive programs that reward women who engage in political activities and leadership roles.

Conclusion

WPP in Ethiopia is both a fundamental right and a cornerstone for inclusive development and democracy. Despite significant progress, such as increased representation in federal and regional councils and legal frameworks promoting gender equality, systemic challenges persist. These include socio-cultural norms, structural inequalities, economic barriers, and political dynamics that collectively hinder women from fully realizing their potential in political spheres.

The barriers to women's political participation are deeply rooted in Ethiopia's socio-cultural and institutional frameworks. Traditional gender roles, lack of resources, limited access to education, and underrepresentation in political party leadership continue to marginalize women. VAWP and VAWE further exacerbate these challenges, deterring active participation.

Addressing these barriers requires a multi-dimensional approach. This involves strengthening legal and policy frameworks, implementing comprehensive affirmative actions like measurable quotas, enhancing economic and educational opportunities for women, and dismantling socio-cultural norms that restrict their participation. Moreover, fostering supportive networks, mentorship programs, and safe political environments is critical to empowering women and ensuring their sustained engagement in political life.

The realization of gender parity in politics is not merely a goal for Ethiopia but a necessity for the country's democratic and sustainable development. By actively engaging women in decision-making processes, Ethiopia can unlock their potential as catalysts for change, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society. This report underscores the urgent need for concerted efforts by all stakeholders—government, civil society, political parties, and the international community—to bridge the gender gap in political participation and leadership.

Recommendations

National Context

Legal and Policy Reforms:

- Strengthen gender-sensitive electoral laws and policies to ensure a minimum quota for women's representation in political and decision-making roles.
- Enforce the existing policies and frameworks that promote women's rights and participation in politics.
- Provide incentives for political parties that prioritize women candidates.

Capacity Building and Leadership Training:

- Establish national programs that offer training, mentorship, and capacity-building for aspiring women leaders.
- Create platforms that provide public speaking, negotiation, and leadership skills for women, targeting potential female candidates.

Gender-Sensitive Civic Education:

- Implement nationwide campaigns focused on gender equality and the importance of women's participation in politics.
- Develop and integrate a gender-sensitive civic education curriculum in schools and universities.

Financial and Resource Support:

- Provide funding and resources for women's participation in election campaigns, including subsidies or grants for female candidates.
- Create networking platforms for women to access financial and logistical support for political engagement.

Regional Context

Strengthening Regional Gender Policies:

- Develop and enforce region-specific gender policies that ensure women's political representation and participation.
- Encourage regional governments to adopt affirmative action measures that empower women in decision-making roles.

Promoting Inclusive Political Parties:

- Engage regional political parties to include more women in leadership positions and decision-making processes.
- Foster the formation of women's political caucuses at the regional level to advocate for women's rights.

Regional Awareness Campaigns:

- Launch awareness programs to shift traditional gender norms and stereotypes that hinder women's political participation.
- Collaborate with regional media outlets to highlight successful female leaders and their contributions.

Local Context

Empowerment at the Grassroots Level:

- Establish women's groups and community organizations at the local level to create a supportive environment for female political candidates.
- Implement local leadership development programs targeting young women.

Enhancing Community Participation:

- Promote local forums and discussions that involve both men and women to address social and cultural barriers to women's participation.
- Use local leaders and role models to advocate for women's involvement in politics and elections.

Support for Local Female Candidates:

- Provide tailored training for local female candidates on campaign management, community engagement, and public speaking.
- Offer logistical and material support, like access to transportation and communication tools, for local women candidates.

Pastoral Context

Culturally Sensitive Awareness Campaigns:

- Design culturally sensitive awareness programs that address the specific barriers faced by women in pastoral communities, focusing on the importance of women's political engagement.
- Utilize traditional leaders and influential figures in pastoral areas to support women's participation in elections.

Adapting Political Structures to Suit Pastoralist Lifestyles:

- Implement flexible voting systems that account for the nomadic lifestyle of pastoralists, such as mobile voting units.
- Encourage the adaptation of political structures to be more inclusive of pastoral women's voices, incorporating traditional decision-making forums.

Economic Empowerment and Education:

- Develop programs that economically empower pastoral women, such as livelihood and income-generation activities, to reduce financial dependence.
- Increase access to education and information through mobile education units or community schools to improve literacy and awareness of political rights.

Formation of Pastoral Women's Associations:

- Create pastoral women's associations that can serve as advocacy platforms and provide a collective voice for pastoral women in political matters.
- Establish networks for pastoral women to share experiences, support each other, and engage with regional and national political processes.

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Likewise, in the Ethiopian context, although WPP has significantly progressed, women remain underrepresented in political institutions and the electoral process. Ethiopia ranks 7th among African nations and 31st globally, with 41% representation of women in the lower house (HoPR) and 30% in the upper house (HoF). Moreover, Ethiopia has yet to have a female prime minister, the highest executive power. At the state minister level, representation is also lacking; as of October 20, 2021, only 15 of 52 positions (29%) were held by women in 2020. Further, Gender disparity persists in elections, particularly regarding voters and candidacy.

Despite these challenges, WPP is recognized as a fundamental right and a critical norm in international and regional frameworks. Thus, countries must respect, promote, and enforce WPP merely because it is a human right. In the Ethiopian context, in addition to the international commitments made, the government must respect, promote, facilitate, and enforce WPPs as per national legislation (specifically, the FDRE Constitution). WPP is further a crucial element for achieving gender equality, sustainable development, and democratic governance.



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