

Addis Ababa University

Women's Participation in Nationwide Political Parties in Addis Ababa: analysis of the Legal Framework and the Reality on the Ground

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that the thesis entitled "Women's Participation in Nationwide Political Parties in Addis Ababa: analysis of the Legal Framework and the Reality on the Ground" consists of my original work. In compliance with widely accepted practices, I have duly acknowledged and referenced all materials used in this work.

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SCHOOL OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE STUDIES

Women's Participation in Nationwide Political Parties in Addis Ababa: analysis of the Legal Framework and the Reality on the Ground

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Abbreviations

ACHPR- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

ACDEG- African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance

AU- African Union

BDPA- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

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

CPRW- Convention on the Political Rights of Women

CRPD- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

FDRE- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

ICCPR- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICESCR- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

ICERD- International Covenant on Elimination of Racial Discrimination

HoPR- House of People's Representatives

HRC- Human Rights Committee

PWD- Persons with Disability

RC-Regional Council

UDHR- Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Abstract

In modern democracies, the primary source of political power is through representation and elections. The only legitimate way to assume decision-making positions is by being elected. Political participation, therefore, includes both voting and running for office as candidate. This paper examines the role of women in politics, with a specific focus on their participation in political parties and the reasons for low participation by taking women in Addis Ababa as a case study. Despite women making up approximately half of Ethiopia's total population, their political representation remains relatively low. The paper explores the brief history of women's participation, including up to the most recent national election, to assess the current state of engagement. The findings indicate that while women are represented to some extent, their presence is largely voluntary rather than the result of binding legal requirements. This lack has led to inconsistent and often minimal representation of women in government. Therefore, the paper recommends the introduction of a mandatory quota system for women candidates and it suggests that Ethiopia consider adopting alternative electoral systems such as proportional representation to enhance the political participation of women.

Key Words: women's political participation, representation, election

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In Ethiopia, women account for 51 percent of the population[1]; however, they often do not seem to be well represented in the socio-political phenomenon. Being a country that gives due regard to conservative and religious values, Ethiopian women's role in their community is usually limited to domestic care. Women's role in politics and leadership is nominal, despite accounting for half of the population. Several reasons contribute to Ethiopian women's limited participation in politics. 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.[2]

The 1995 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution speculates that women are entitled to affirmative measures due to the historical inequalities and discriminations women suffered.[3] The National Policy on Ethiopian Women of 1993 also had positive contribution in alleviating gender-based discrimination and facilitated women's participation on all aspects of life.[4] After the adoption of the 1995 Constitution, Ethiopia adopted the National Policy on Ethiopian Women, handling women's affairs at various levels.[5]

Women in Ethiopia face significant underrepresentation in politics. Despite recent progress, such as increased representation in the national parliament – women remain underrepresented in decision-making roles at all levels of government.[6] Additionally, women who participate in

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[1] Seblewongiel Kidanie and Eden Hailu, 'Women's Participation in Ethiopia's 2021 Elections: The Role of Political Parties' (2024) 23 *Journal of African Elections* 5 <https://www.eisa.org/storage/2024/10/2024-journal-of-african-elections-v23n1-womens-participation-ethiopia-2021-elections-eisa-1.pdf?x29006> accessed 5 September 2025.

[2] CEEPS, 'CEEPS Gender Assessment Report: Ethiopia' (2020) <https://www.cepps.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Gender-Assessment-Report-EEPPP.pdf> accessed 20 December 2024.

[3] Kidanie and Hailu (n 1).

[4] Care Ethiopia, 'Review of the National Policy on Ethiopian Women' (2021) 8.

[5] Care Ethiopia (n 4).

[6] NIMD, 'Balancing the Scales in Ethiopia: Women's Role in Politics and the Elections' (7 April 2025) <https://nimd.org/balancing-the-scales-in-ethiopia-womens-role-in-politics-and-the-elections/> accessed 5 September 2025.

politics frequently encounter discrimination, lack of support, and limited opportunities for advancement.[7]

This has been the norm, but such statements don't take away the efforts that have been made by the ruling party to engage women in politics by granting them ministerial and parliamentary positions in the past seven years.

Furthermore, the status of women in Ethiopia and the opportunities available to them have seen improvements in recent years with the opening of civil society and the political space.[8] This however does not seem to be replicated in lower-level governmental structures that require female participation. To the contrary, despite such improvements however, persistent patriarchal cultural norms, ethnic and political conflict and harmful traditional practices continue to create barriers to women's equitable and active participation in society and public life.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution, the supreme law of the land, not only recognizes women's equal participation but also guarantees affirmative action in order to enable them to compete and participate on the basis of equality in political, social and economic life as well as in public and private institutions.[9] Additionally, various international instruments that Ethiopia adopted promote equality of women in all aspects of life, with the inclusion of socio-political rights. Among these instruments, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ensures equality of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant.[10] Other similar international instruments include Universal Deceleration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which in one way or another reference the equal treatment of women in various phenomena.

[7] NIMD, 'Balancing the Scales in Ethiopia' (n 6).
[8] Care Ethiopia (n 4).
[9] Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation No 1/1995, adopted 21 August 1995, art 35(3).
[10] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 3 January 1976) 993 UNTS 3, art 3.

Furthermore, the international drive for the inclusion of women in political decision-making, as manifested in protocols and instruments,[11] such as, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (commonly known as the Maputo Protocol), can be considered. This protocol specifically includes combating all forms of discrimination against women and specifically requires states to "ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making".[12] This is yet another legal instrument that unequivocally calls for the elimination of violation and equal participation of women in political process. The African Charter on Democracy and Governance is another significant regional protocol. This Charter, among other objectives, aims to promote gender balance in governance.[13]

The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation, 1162/2019, sets forth requirements to form a political party. Subsequently, the proclamation puts efforts to incentivize women's participation as candidates, by setting forth an arrangement where parties with more female candidates get more government grant.[14] Moreover, the law pushing for an increased women participation in party leadership by incentivizing government funding is quite plausible and a move in the right direction. Additionally, an increased participation of women in political parties as candidates affords the political party an increased airtime allocation, which allows parties to introduce their party program and their goals.[15]

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of various legal instruments, large gaps still remain in women's representation at different levels of governance and leadership –women's voices still remain a whisper.[16] The struggle of women to gain a fair share of political power remains a work in

[11] Yolanda Sadie, 'African Women in Political Decision-Making: "A Voice that Still Remains a Whisper' (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2020) 65 <https://www.kas.de/documents/288143/11335016/KAS_women_2020_YolandaSadie.pdf> accessed May 3 2025.

[12] Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (adopted 11 July 2003, entered into force 25 November 2005) art 9(2).

[13] African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (adopted 30 January 2007, entered into force 15 February 2012) art 2(11).

[14] Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Elections Code of Conduct Proclamation, Proclamation No 1162/2019, adopted 16 October 2019, art 100(2)(c).

[15] Directive on Use of Media and Airtime Allocation (adopted 2021) art 15.

[16] FDRE Constitution, (n 9) art 35(3).

progress, but the achievements should nevertheless not be ignored. While Ethiopia appointed its first female president in 2018 and conferred half of all ministerial position to women, they are still underrepresented in politics at the parliamentary, regional and community levels.[17] Women have low representation in leadership positions across different institutions, government departments and agencies at the national and sub-national levels and are frequently excluded from decision-making processes. This in some ways can be tied back to minimal participation as well as under representation of women in political parties.

There is a stark difference between what the legal framework enshrines in various legislations and the reality of women's participation as candidates in nationwide political parties. Nonetheless, such participation is not common across all nationwide political parties but rather limited to a handful of them. Evidently, a study done in 2020 (before the sixth Ethiopian General Elections), found that Ethiopia's proportion of women in parliament to be 38.8.[18] However, this is due to a voluntary party gender quota of the ruling party rather than because of a gender quota codified in the legal or regulatory framework.[19]

There are various factors contributing for the gap between the law and the reality on the ground. Without precise implementation of the law, it is apparent that Ethiopia cannot bring about the necessary change in this area. Thus, it is necessary to identify the reason why women do not participate in the political arena as candidates, in spite of legal instruments pushing for the equal treatment of women. Under representation of women in politics goes beyond just including women in politics for the sake of inclusion. Under representation also leads to marginalization of girls and women, as there will not be individuals who will represent their agenda.[20] If the interest of women is not being considered during law making or when high-level decisions are being made, all the efforts made in domestic and international legal instruments will be futile.

It is difficult to argue that a country is utilizing its full potential, when half of the society is excluded from major decision making process. This in turn has its own negative implication for marginalized groups like women. Thus, this study examines the apparent causes for low political participation of women in nationwide political parties in Addis Ababa.

[17] CEEPS Gender Assessment Report, (n 2) 5.
[18] CEEPS Gender Assessment Report, (n 2) 5.
[19] CEEPS Gender Assessment Report, (n 2) 5.
[20] Kidanie and Hailu (n 1) 119.

1.3 Literature Review

Agenagn Kebede Dagnew in his article titled "*Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia from ancient times to the present*" aimed at memorizing Ethiopian women's political participation from ancient times to the present. This article states that there is a misunderstanding on the history of Ethiopian women's political participation. For more than some there is usual outlying which argues that women have been ostracized in political activity of Ethiopia at all level since ancient times. Ignoring cultural, institutional and social barriers women's in Ethiopia has faced. Meron Zeleke however on her article titled "Women in Ethiopia" acknowledges the barriers which are overseen by the previous paper and states that there are number of Ethiopian women from different historical epochs known for their military prowess or diplomatic skills, renowned as religious figures, and more. She also reflects the leading role and status women enjoyed in traditional Arsi Oromo society, both within the family and in the wider community. However, this article tends to be more descriptive of historical events, without an actionable recommendation to promote women political participation in Ethiopia.

SAIS Women Lead (SWL) research on "Increasing Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia: A Barriers Analysis of Women's Political Participation", this research focuses specifically on obstacles to increased women's political participation in Ethiopia, rather than representation, without looking into normative frameworks. Whereas, International IDEA's report, "The Motivation for Women in Politics: The Contemporary Politics of Women's Participation and Representation in Africa" report calls upon African governments to accelerate the implementation of the international, regional, sub-regional and national frameworks on women's participation in politics on an equal basis with men. However, this report does not emphasize on Ethiopia's women political participation.

Emezat H Mengesha's Research titled "Women's representation in Ethiopia's political parties: Issues of inclusion and diversity" states that the discourse on women and politics has focused on increasing the participation of women in politics. While this remains critical, experiences of female political party members show that calls for increased representation mask intersecting aspects of identity that exclude certain categories of women from political party engagement and from factors that propel women into politics. The discourse should expand to examine which women are represented and to what degree women from marginalized groups are represented. This paper is infused with insightful and actionable recommendation, however, it falls short of

looking into international and regional instruments Ethiopia ratified, which can specifically be used to amplify women's political participation in the country.

Ishaku Bitrus Lere and Dantong Rahila Timothy paper looks at the extent to which women have participated in politics and public offices, it also traced the historical involvement of women in politics and public offices from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era, whether they are making break through or they are retrogressing in terms of political participation and involvement in public offices. However this paper only revolves around Nigeria. While, Farzana Bari paper attempts to investigate the conceptual and material bases of women's historic exclusion from the formal arena of politics, analyze strategies adopted around the world to promote women's political participation, identify internal and external conditions and factors that facilitate or hinder the creation of an enabling environment for women's political empowerment, and finally draw policy recommendations for the national and international actors.

Shimels Sisay Belete's research on "Electoral Participation as a fundamental Political Right of Persons with Disabilities in Ethiopia; Critical Examination of the Law and the Practice" While the assessment is valuable, its focus is limited to the struggles faced by persons with disabilities and does not address the distinct hardships and barriers that women encounter in exercising their political rights.

Additionally, though there is extensive research on women's political participation, there still remains a gap in addressing the barriers to women's political participation and historical analysis to identify persistent patterns that can help make an actionable recommendation not to repeat the same mistakes. It also gives priority to female candidates who have experienced the political space first-hand and therefore possess first-hand accounts of it. Hence, it is necessary to further investigate whether the nominal participation of women in political parties stems from legal barriers, cultural factors or a combination of all. Therefore, this research contributes to the discourse, by analyzing international, regional and domestic legal and policy frameworks regarding women's political participation. It will also look into the historical evolution of women's political participation to pin-point patterns and provide recommendations.

1.4 The Objective of the Study

1.4.1General Objective of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the implementation of legal frameworks pertaining to the participation of women in the nationwide political parties in Ethiopia in the light of national, regional and international legal frameworks that encourage women's participation in politics and identify the cause for low level participation.

1.4.2 Specific Objective of the Study

1. To analyze existing legal framework regarding women's political participation;
2. To analyze how these existing frameworks are influencing women's political participation;
3. To assess whether women in Ethiopia are fairly represented in politics and leadership;
4. To assess whether the reality on the ground reflects Ethiopia's commitment regarding equal participation;
5. To identify the major factors that lead to nominal women's participation in politics.

1.5 Research Questions

The main question this study seeks to address is this: What are the main causes of the low level of political participation of women in Ethiopia?

In order to address this issue, the study will necessarily respond to the following questions:

1. What are the existing legal frameworks that encourage women's political participation and how effective are they?
2. What is the current state of women's representation in politics and leadership position?
3. What are the factors that contribute to nominal participation of women in politics, especially as candidates?
4. What should Ethiopia do to enhance women's participation in nationwide political parties?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study is significant as it analyzes women's political participation in light of the Ethiopian legal framework in order to assess gap between the law and reality on the ground. It not only identifies gaps and the causes for low participation but it will also provide finding and recommendation which could be used to further strengthen women's participation in political parties as candidates.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study examines the legal frameworks that opt for women's participation in politics and leadership roles. For the sake of this analysis, women's political participation is limited to participation in federal parliament and regional council. Furthermore, the scope of the study is limited to nationwide political parties registered as per article 66 of Proclamation 1162/2019, with the aim to assess the reality of women's participation in such parties in Addis Ababa. It also analyzes the inclusion of women in nationwide political parties registered in Ethiopia. As nationwide political parties are relatively more financially stable compared to regional ones, the study will identify the extent to which these parties went to be inclusive of women when competing in general election.

1.8 Research Methodology

1.8.1 Research Method

This research uses qualitative methodology. This research applies both doctrinal and empirical approach: a desk review of legal frameworks from the archives of the NEBE as well as interview with female candidates of nationwide political parties. Doctrinal research methodology will be applied to closely analyze existing legal frameworks, both national and international, to see where Ethiopia stands in terms of women's participation in politics. Similarly, empirical will be conducted to gauge the reality on the ground despite, legal frameworks set forth to empower and augment women's participation in politics.

1.8.2 Data Collection

The method of gathering primary data for this study was semi-structured interviews. The interview was conducted via a face-to-face interview. Secondary data was collected through

analyzing written materials that are relevant to the issues under study. Accordingly, contents of published and unpublished materials, which are in line with the objective of the study, were reviewed. In this thesis, various data sources will be applicable to gather data in the form of the National Election Board of Ethiopia's (NEBE) official documents, NEBE reports, assessments done by external organizations, interviews of various stakeholders, primarily women candidates and comparative study/research of other African countries. Women candidates of nationwide political parties, NEBE's political party department representatives, as well as other key stakeholders will be used as a quantitative data source. Qualitative data sources that will be utilized for this study are international human rights instruments as well as regional and local legislation's. Additional to existing legal frameworks, research, books, online articles and third-party assessments will also be utilized to further augment the content of the study.

1.8.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis will be applicable to the data gathered from women candidates and identify the difference against what is set in various legal frameworks.

1.8.4 Data Sources

1.8.4.1 Primary Data Sources

1.8.4.1.1 Interview

Interviews will also serve as primary data sources for this study. The researcher conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 10 interviewees selected purposely for this study. Among them, one respondent is from NEBE former board member, NEBE legal department head, NEBE Gender and Social Inclusion department representative, five respondents from four Political Parties registered by the NEBE and two CSO representatives.

With regards to sampling, the study will resort to non-probability sampling technique to be able to interview the above-mentioned stakeholders. Among different non-probability sampling techniques, convenience sampling techniques is employed to identify respondents from political parties, NEBE and CSOs.

1.8.4.1.2 Primary Document Sources

Primary documents for the study are international, regional and national legislation. Accordingly, international human rights treaties, the Constitution and relevant national legislation like the Electoral law are used for this study.

1.8.4.2 Secondary Data Sources

The study will also make use of articles, journals, books and third-party assessment documents to further reinforce the content.

1.9 Organization of the Paper

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one covers a brief background, a preliminary literature review, and a statement of the problem, research objectives, scope, significance as well research methodology. Chapter two deals with contextual framework of political participation and examines international legal framework in regards to women's political participation and a comparative analysis of the electoral laws and electoral system of Kenya, Tunisia and Rwanda. The third chapter discusses Ethiopian legal and institutional framework regarding women's political participation. It also covers a brief overview of women's electoral participation in Ethiopia. The fourth chapter examines the reality of how these legal frameworks affect women's political participation in nationwide political parties and navigates how the implementation of the legal frameworks is affecting women's political participation as well as the cause for low level participation of women. Finally, chapter five provides conclusion and recommendations based on analysis done in previous chapters.

Chapter Two

Conceptual and Normative Framework on Women's Political Participation

Introduction

The concept of political participation is involvement in one's country's politics through, but not limited to, voting, discussions about governmental activities, being members of a political party, assuming leadership positions, etc.[21] It encompasses the freedom of expression, to assemble and associate; freedom to take part in conduct of public affairs; the right to register as a candidate and campaign; to be elected and assume positions at various levels of government.[22] It must be understood that participation in public and political aspect is not an end goal by itself, rather a prerequisite for the enjoyment of other rights.[23]

Political and public participation rights are fundamental to the promotion of democratic governance, the rule of law, social inclusion, and sustainable economic development.[24] They also play a vital role in the realization and advancement of all other human rights. The right to participate in political and public life empowers individuals and communities, enabling them to influence decisions that affect their lives and to challenge systems of marginalization and discrimination.[25] These participation rights are linked to other fundamental freedoms, including the rights to peaceful assembly and association, freedom of opinion and expression, as well as the rights to education and access to information. Together, these rights form the foundation for an inclusive and participatory society.

This chapter examines the concept of women's political participation enshrined under international and regional instruments for the promotion and protection of women's political

[21] Ishaku Bitrus Lere and Dantong Rahila Timothy, 'Political Participation and Women in Public Offices' (2016) 74.
[22] Lere and Timothy (n 21) 74.
[23] The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 'Normative Framework on Participation in the Conduct of Public and Political Affairs' (2014) 21.
[24] OHCHR, 'Equal Participation' <https://www.ohchr.org/en/equal-participation-in-political-and-public-affairs> accessed 9 July 2025.
[25] OHCHR, 'Equal Participation' (n 24).

participation, while also stressing the persistent social, institutional and cultural barriers. Through tracing the evolution of the normative framework and African countries case regarding women's political participation, it highlights the progress and gaps.

2.1 Conceptual Framework for Women's Political Participation

Women's political participation refers to women's ability to participate equally with men, at all levels, and in all aspects of political life and decision-making. [26] Political participation encompasses a wide range of activities, including the exercise of political power, particularly legislative, judicial, executive and administrative powers. It covers all aspects of public administration and the formulation and implementation of policy at the international, national, regional and local levels. The concept also includes participation of civil society, including public boards and local councils and the activities of organizations such as political parties, trade unions, professional or industry associations, women's organizations, community-based organizations and other organizations concerned with public and political life.[27]

Equal access for men and women to power, decision-making, and leadership at all levels is a necessary precondition for the proper functioning of democracy. [28] Consequently, equal participation of men and women in political affairs makes governments more representative of the composition of society; additionally it makes them more accountable and transparent, and ensures that the interests of women are taken into account in policy-making.[29] As affirmed by the Beijing Platform for action, without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.[30] Accordingly, the meaningful participation of women in national, local, and community leadership roles has become an important focus on global development policy because women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including

[26] UN Women, 'Women's Political Participation (UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia SD Glossary) <https://www.unescwa.org/sd-glossary/womens-political-participation> accessed 1 September 2025.
[27] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 'General Recommendation No 23: Political and Public Life' (1997) chap I, para 5.
[28] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), 'Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with Particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership: Expert Group Meeting Report' (Addis Ababa, 24–27 October 2005) para 3.
[29] DESA (n 28) para 3.
[30] United Nations, 'Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women: Beijing, 4–15 September 1995, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action' (27 October 1995) UN Doc A/CONF.177/20/Add.1, para 181.

greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and a more sustainable future.[31]

Studies have shown that a legislator gender impacts their policy priorities.[32] There is also strong evidence that as more women are elected to office, there is a corollary increase in policy making that emphasizes quality of life and reflects the priorities of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities.[33] Women tend to work across party lines, be highly responsive to constituent concerns, help secure lasting peace, encourage citizen confidence in democracy through their own participation, and prioritize health, education, and other key development indicators.[34]

Despite these benefits, women have historically been excluded from political participation. Their access to formal political power structures varies across countries.[35] There is a steady upward trend in women's political participation and representation in developed countries particularly in Nordic countries.[36] However, the improvements in medium and low human development countries are not significant.[37] Even though women's rights to political participation have been reaffirmed by international agreements for decades, including in the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals, implementation lags as barriers to women's political leadership persist globally.[38]

These barriers include women being significantly underrepresented in all aspects of decision-making, and violence against women in public life.[39] Men with power often resist women's

[31] National Democratic Institute, 'Increasing Women's Political Participation Through Effective Training Programs: A Guide to Best Practices and Lessons Learned' (2013) 7 <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Training-Manual-Increasing-WPP-Through-Effective-Training-Programs.pdf > accessed 1 September 2025.
[32] Women Deliver, 'Why Women in Politics?' (Women Deliver) https://womendeliver.org/why-women-in-politics/ accessed 1 September 2025.
[33] Women Deliver (n 32).
[34] NDI (n 31) 7.
[35] Farzana Bari, 'Women's Political Participation: Issues and Challenges' (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Expert Group Meeting on Enhancing Participation of Women in Development through an Enabling Environment for Achieving Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women, Bangkok, 8–11 November 2005) https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/90412453/EGM-WPD-EE-2005-EP.12_20_20draft_20F-libre.pdf accessed 1 September 2025, 3.
[36] Bari (n 35) 3.
[37] Bari (n 35) 3.
[38] UN Women, 'Why so few women are in political leadership, and five actions to boost women's political participation' (UN Women, 10 September 2024) https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2024/09/five-actions-to-boost-womens-political-participation accessed 1 September 2025.
[39] United Nations, Economic and Social Council, 'Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls: Report of the Secretary-General' (E/CN.6/2021/3, 2021).

leadership, even within political parties.[40] Women's higher levels of poverty, more limited access to finance, greater share of care duties, and challenges faced in realizing their sexual and reproductive health and rights, combined with exclusionary institutional rules and procedures, limit their full participation.[41] The attitude that women should not have public roles, enduring norms about gender roles and legal discrimination compounds these challenges and devalue women's contributions to decision-making, threatening sustainable development.[42] Organized opposition to women in public life is sometimes strong and violent, with the situation worsened by democratic backsliding, increased social and political polarization and deepening inequality.[43]

Several models have been proposed to better understand how these barriers affect women in their political careers and professional development.[44] Women politicians, as well as those working in EMBs and other organizations, frequently encounter the "glass ceiling", an organizational barrier understood as the obstacles faced by women who aspire to hold high positions under equal pay and working conditions.[45] Another organizational barrier is the "glass wall", consisting of the horizontal segregation that relegates women to minor roles or denies them access to certain fields.[46] The "cement ceiling", a barrier of psychological nature, refers to women's refusal to accept leadership positions because they think it would be difficult to balance personal and work life.[47] Finally, the "sticky floor" is a cultural barrier that pushes women to deal with domestic chores and care giving roles, which hinders their professional development.[48]

Data shows the result of these barriers as women's under representation at all levels of decision-making worldwide and that achieving gender parity in political life is far off.[49] As of 1 June 2025, there are 27 countries where 31 women serve as Heads of State and/or Government , at the current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130

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[40] UN, Women's full and effective participation (n 39) para 3.
[41] UN, Women's full and effective participation (n 39) para 3.
[42] UN, Women's full and effective participation (n 39) para 3.
[43] UN, Women's full and effective participation (n 39) para 3.
[44] Virginia Garcia Beaudoux, 'Dancing Backwards in High Heels: Women, Leadership and Power' (Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, 2017).
[45] Beaudoux (n 44).
[46] Beaudoux (n 44).
[47] Beaudoux (n 44).
[48] Beaudoux (n 44).
[49] UN Women, 'Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation' (UN Women, 12 June 2025) <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation> accessed 1 September 2025.

years.[50] This slow progress is also mirrored in national parliaments, only 27.2 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses are women, up from 11 per cent in 1995.[51] Furthermore regional disparities persist as women hold 36 per cent of parliamentary seats in Latin America and the Caribbean and make up 33 per cent of parliamentarians in Europe and Northern America. In sub-Saharan Africa, there are 27 per cent of women legislators, followed by Eastern and South-Eastern Asia with 23.5 per cent, Oceania with 20 per cent, Northern Africa and Western Asia with 19 per cent, and Central and Southern Asia with 17 per cent of women Members of Parliament.[52] Similarly in local government, women constitute more than 3 million (35.5 per cent) of elected members in local deliberative bodies.[53]

In conclusion, balanced political participation and power-sharing between women and men in decision-making is the internationally agreed target set in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.[54] While most countries in the world have not achieved gender parity, gender quotas have substantially contributed to progress over the years.[55] In countries with legislated candidate quotas, women's representation is higher in parliaments and local government, respectively, compared to countries without such legislation.[56] Women demonstrate unique political leadership by working across party lines through parliamentary women's caucuses—even in the most politically combative environments—and by championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws, and electoral reform.[57]

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[50] UN Women, 'Facts and figures (n 49).
[51] Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women, 'Women in politics: 2025' (Infographic map, 1 January 2025) <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/03/women-in-politics-map-2025> accessed 1 September 2025.
[52] IPU and UN Women, 'Women in politics: 2025' (n 51).
[53] UN Women, 'Women in Local Government' (UN Women, data as of 1 September 2025) <https://localgov.unwomen.org/> accessed 1 September 2025.
[54] UN Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action / Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome* (UN Women, 2000) para 181, p 119 https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/PFA_E_Final_WEB.pdf accessed 2 September 2025

[55] UN, Women's full and effective participation (n 39).

[56] UN, Women's full and effective participation (n 39) para 16 and 19.
[57] UN Women, 'Facts and figures (n 49).

These persistent challenges are the reason why the international community sought to develop a normative framework regarding women political participation, which is discussed in the next section.

2.2 Normative Framework

International standards for political participation stem from political rights and fundamental freedoms established by universal and regional treaties and political commitments.[58] A wide range of legal instruments affirm individuals' rights to participate in public and political life, emphasizing the importance of inclusive governance. These frameworks span both international and regional levels, each reinforcing political participation as a cornerstone of human rights. At the international level, key instruments include the UDHR, the ICCPR, ICERD, the CEDAW, and the CRPD. Regionally, particularly within the African context, pertinent legal frameworks include the ACHPR, ACDEG, Maputo Protocol, and the BDPA, among others. All of these mentioned instruments outline the obligations and commitments made by member states.

This section provides a brief overview of women's political participation through the lens of international and regional legal as well as policy frameworks.

2.2.1 International Human Rights Instruments for Women's Political Participation

The recognition and protection of women's right to participate in political decision-making are widely supported by international law in conventions, declarations and resolutions on human and political rights.[59] If one were to divide the advancement process of women's human and political rights, three phases could be established.[60]

[58] EU, 'Compendium of International Standards for Elections 2007', pp.5-21
[59] UN Women, 'Political Empowerment of Women: Framework for Strategic Action, Strategic Guide, Latin America and the Caribbean (2014–2017)' (2014) 20 <https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Americas/Documentos/Publicaciones/Strategy%20WPP%20English%20PDF.pdf> accessed 1 September 2025.
[60] UN Women, 'Political Empowerment of Women' (n 59) 20.

2.2.1.1 The First Phase: General Human Rights Instruments

In the first phase, the principles of the right to equality and the prohibition of discrimination, which are the basis of gender equality and women's political participation and representation in politics and decision making, are enshrined.[61] Despite the existence of these comprehensive frameworks, the legal effects of these provisions vary.[62]

Post World War II, the Charter of the United Nations adopted in 1945, made the first reference regarding the concept of human rights without it being fully contextualized. Thereinafter, the works done by the Committee charged with formulating comprehensive human rights led to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).[63] The UDHR is the UN's foundational human rights document and the cornerstone for the international human rights system, setting a framework for the understanding and content of rights that has stood the test of time.[64] Building off of the UN Charter, the UDHR includes provision for equal treatment of men and women regardless of class, race, ethnicity, religion or color.[65] For example, women have the right to freedom of opinion and expression (article 19), while the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association (article 20) accords them space to participate in politics.

Article 21 of the UDHR states that, *"Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives"* [66]; that (2) "*Everyone has the right of access, on equal terms, to public service in his country*". This article guarantees individual's rights to participate in the government of their country through universal suffrage. While the means could either be direct or through representation, it is evident that such participation is settled either through a referendum or election. However, the UDHR framing of political participation in such manner did not receive automatic implementation, across the world, women continue to encounter significant discrimination in fully exercising their right to participate and

[61] Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, 'Role of Political Parties on Women's Participation and Representation*' (International IDEA) 2 <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/65/EGM/IDEA_Observer%20Paper_Political%20Parties_EGMCSW65.pdf> accessed 1 September 2025.
[62] Kandawasvika-Nhundu, 'Role of Political Parties' (n 61) 2.
[63] EU, 'Compendium of International Standards for Elections' (n 58) 5–21.
[64] Tamara Lewis Arredondo, 'Contextualizing the UDHR Master Narrative' (6 May 2023) 6 <https://citizenshipdebates.pubpub.org/pub/vc8dns65/release/6> accessed 2 September 2025.
[65] Annie Barbara Chikwanha and Theresa Moyo, 'The Motivation for Women in Politics: The Contemporary Politics of Women's Participation and Representation in Africa' (2024) 4.
[66] EU, 'Compendium of International Standards for Elections' (n 58) 5–21.

still face significant barriers to access positions of power at all levels of decision making, exemplifying the recognition of right by itself cannot solve deeply rooted barriers.[67]

Moreover, sub-article (3) of the same article states "*The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures*". A combined reading of the two sub-articles opts for citizen`s participation as well as setting the requirement for an election. Under sub-article (3) there are a series of requirements set forth, such as the need for election; the need for such election to be periodic as well as genuine; the requirement to have a secret vote and equal and universal suffrage. From women's political participation perspective, the presence of quality election expands gender equality in political participation by signaling the system's openness to women's voice, confirming their political competency, and highlighting their stake in political decisions. Although, Article 21 is not recognized as a generally enforceable customary international law as the UDHR is non-binding, this article is one of the first international legal instruments that legitimized the claims for voting rights and encouraged the international community to take further steps toward creating a legal framework for the right to vote and to run for office.[68]

The 1952 Convention on the Political Rights of Women (CPRW) further advanced the first phase by recognizing that (Article 1) "Women have the right to vote in all elections"; (Article 2) "Women will be eligible for all elective public bodies, established by national law, on equal terms, without discrimination"; (Article 3) "Women have the right to hold public office and perform all public functions, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without discrimination." The convention establishes equal political rights for men and women and commits member states to eliminate gender discrimination and aligns with the UN Charter and the UDHR, which affirm the right of all individuals to participate in public and political life. Unlike the UDHR this convention stipulated that women should have equal rights to vote, stand for election, and hold appointed offices, thereby aiming to eliminate gender-based political discrimination. Despite the adoption of this convention, its impact varied, as only half of the UN member states ratified it by 1968, and some countries continued to impose restrictions on

[67]Kandawasvika-Nhundu, 'Role of Political Parties' (n 61) 2.
[68] Muhammad Al-Musbeh, 'Right to Vote and to be Elected in the International and Regional Standards and Legal Instruments' 4.

women's political rights. Nevertheless, the convention served as a foundational document for subsequent international human rights instruments and initiatives, highlighting the ongoing struggle for women's equality in political spheres globally.[69]

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provided effective legislation and the creation of a permanent treaty organ known as the Human Rights Committee (HRC).[70]The ICESCR and its companion treaty, the ICCPR, both came into existence after the United Nations issued its Declaration of Human Rights, and these two treaties were meant to embody and implement the rights recognized by the Declaration.[71] With regards to women's political participation the most relevant articles in the ICCPR are article 3 and 25. Article 3 of ICCPR mandates states parties to the covenant to take measures "*to ensure the equal right of women and men regarding the enjoyment of all civil and political rights provided in the agreement*[72]", a principle that is directly linked to women political participation. The inclusion of such provision under this covenant changes mere aspiration to binding obligations as it ensures the promotion of women's participation in the political sphere. Additionally, the issue of participation is further reinstated under article 25. This article overall guarantees "*Every citizen's right and opportunity to participate without unreasonable restrictions*".[73] Sub-article (b) of the same article reiterates the right "*to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors*[74]".This article guarantees citizens to engage in conduct of public affairs, to engage in the electoral process both as a voter and/or candidate, to be entitled to non-discriminatory access to national public services. Specifically, this article introduces a term, "every citizen", which limits this right to only citizens as opposed to "everyone" mentioned under article 21 of the UDHR. Moreover, it identifies elections as an essential aspect of political

[69] Laura M. Calkins, 'United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women Is Approved' (EBSCO, 2023) https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/united-nations-convention-political-rights-women-approved accessed 2 September 2025
[70] Lere and Timothy (n 21) 74.
[71] Haley Palfreyman Jankowski, 'The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: A New Conception' (1 January 2015) 8.
[72] Chikwanha and Moyo, 'The Motivation for Women in Politics' (n 65) 4.
[73] EU, 'Compendium of International Standards for Elections' (n 58) 5–21.
[74] EU, 'Compendium of International Standards for Elections' (n 58) 5–21.

participation while at the same time providing series of election-related elements as a minimum level of participation.[75]

The HRC, the permanent treaty organ for the ICCPR[76], interpretation regarding article 25 on General Comment 25 further strengthens the above assertion. According to paragraph 3 of the General comment 25, "*No distinctions are permitted between citizens in the enjoyment of these rights on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status*[77]". This provision further obliges State Parties to ensure that no citizen is subjected to discrimination in the enjoyment of the rights protected under Article 25 of the ICCPR. Women, as citizens, are equally entitled to these rights, and thus, this provision serves as a crucial safeguard for their full and equal participation in political life. By upholding the principle of non-discrimination, it reinforces the obligation of States to guarantee that women have the same opportunities as men to take part in politics and public affairs.

In addition to the UDHR and ICCPR, other international human rights instruments also discuss about political participation of women. Under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), state parties are obliged to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination and to guarantee everyone, without difference, the enjoyment of political rights, particularly the right to participate in elections both as a voter and/or candidate on the basis of equal and universal suffrage.[78] While the ICERD emphasizes non-discrimination, within it are elements of positive measures when affirming the right to participation for everyone without distinction to color, race, national or ethnic origin.[79] Similarly, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities (PWDs).[80] Article 29 of CRPD sets forth positive obligations requiring the state to duly consider disabled voters.[81] According to this article, a person with disability has both the right and

[75] EU, 'Compendium of International Standards for Elections' (n 58) 5–21.
[76] Al-Musbeh, 'Right to Vote and to be Elected' (n 68) 4.
[77] Human Rights Committee, 'General Comment No 25: The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service (Art 25)' (12 July 1996) CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7 para 3.
[78] International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (adopted 21 December 1965, entered into force 4 January 1969) art 5.
[79] Lere and Timothy (n 21) 14 .
[80] The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 'Normative Framework on Participation in the Conduct of Public and Political Affairs' (2014) 21.
[81] Danish Institute for Human Rights, 'Normative Framework' (n 80) 21.

opportunity to vote and be elected.[82] This protection extends to women who aspire to participate in politics.

The general human rights instruments have made significant impact on women's political participation. However these instruments tend to use generic statements where one has to deduce the promotion and protection of women's right to political participation from close reading of the articles. On the other hand the CEDAW being an instrument designed for women specifically, it has somehow bridged the gap in this sense.

2.2.1.2 The Second Phase: Specific Instruments on Women's Political Participation

A second stage and turning point occurs in 1979 with the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).[83] Unlike general human rights instruments (discussed on 2.2.1.1) CEDAW marked the first formal attempt to codify a legal framework specifically aimed at addressing the rights and interests of women. It clearly defines what constitutes an act of discrimination against women recognizing that as a result of historical discrimination, women are not on equal terms with men and therefore some laws that intend to formally promote equality may in fact produce greater inequality for some women.[84] Therefore the CEDAW played a vital role in reminding State Parties of the fact that women are part of the people.[85]

With the objective of reaffirming women`s participation, the CEDAW undertakes the important function of reminding state parties of the fact that women make up a substantial part of the people and thus tries to make sure the position held by women in governmental structures should be reflective of their share of the general population.[86] This convention acknowledges some laws that intend to formally promote equality may in fact produce greater inequality for some women, therefore, the convention lays groundwork on allowing and encouraging temporary special measures for women. This, in light of the thesis would mean the article improves women's

[82] Danish Institute for Human Rights, 'Normative Framework' (n 80) 21.
[83] Danish Institute for Human Rights, 'Normative Framework' (n 80) 21.
[84] Chikwanha and Moyo, 'The Motivation for Women in Politics' (n 65) 20.
[85] EU, 'Compendium of International Standards for Elections' (n 58) 5–21.
[86] EU, 'Compendium of International Standards for Elections' (n 58) 5–21.

political participation by encouraging special measures like affirmative action and setting quotas for women in political parties or similar associations. [87]

Additionally the convention requires *"state parties to fulfill all the appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right.[88]"* Among the list set forth in Article 7, *"(a) to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; [...][89]"* is more appropriate in promoting inclusiveness for women. Similarly, subsequent sub-articles (b) and (c) guarantee the practical function in office and participation in public and political life.[90] Article 8 further brings a positive obligation towards states to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without discrimination, the opportunity to represent their governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations. The Convention requires governments to incorporate the CEDAW's definition of substantive equality in their legal framework and in consequence to review their legal instruments and constitutions thoroughly to ensure that the legal framework as a whole supports gender equality.[91]

The treaty body of CEDAW, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women among its significant contributions is the 1997's General Recommendation No.23 which deals with the aforementioned articles of the CEDAW. It not only denotes the structural bases of discrimination against women but also lists down number of requirements and obligations state parties are obliged to fulfill.[92] Some of these requirements include campaigns aimed at ensuring equal participation, targeting women for appointment to public positions; and setting numerical goals and quotas.[93]

The momentum towards the protection of women political participation generated by CEDAW was further supported by international policy frameworks. The Fourth World Conference on

[87] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (adopted 18 December 1979, entered into force 3 September 1981) art 4.
[88] CEDAW, art 7 (n 87).
[89] CEDAW, art 7 (n 87).
[90] Jankowski, 'The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' (n 71) 14 .
[91]UN Women, 'Political Empowerment of Women' (n 59) 21.
[92] Hanna Beate Schöpp-Schilling, 'The Role of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Monitoring Procedures for Achieving Gender Equality in Political Representation' (2004) 3.
[93] Schöpp-Schilling, 'The Role of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women' (n 92) 3.

Women held in Beijing in 1995 produced a major transformation by focusing on the need to shift the attention from women to the concept of gender. The outcome of the conference was embodied in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.[94] The BDPA for Action of 1995 acknowledges that realizing equality, fostering peace, and achieving sustainable development will remain an unfulfilled aspiration unless women are actively involved and their viewpoints are fully integrated at all levels of decision-making.[95] Although not a legally binding document, one can argue that area of concern and recommendation are linked to articles of various international conventions.[96] According to Strategic Objective G.1 of the BDPA, various measures are enumerated to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. The document categorizes actions to be taken by government, political parties, by women's organization and NGOs, by the UN and other stakeholders.[97]

This trajectory to accelerate the enjoyment of women's political participation was further reinforced in 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration,[98] an ambitious agenda for reducing poverty, its causes and manifestations, as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).[99] MDG3 calls states to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. Gender equality also implies equal representation in public and political life.

2.2.1.3 The Third Phase: Resolution 66/130. Women and Political Participation

The third phase begins after the adoption in December 2011 of the historic General Assembly resolution relating to women's political rights.[100] This resolution reaffirms commitments discussed in the previous section such as the UDHR, CEDAW, and the BDPA.[101] Building upon these foundational conventions and policy frameworks, this resolution acknowledges the active participation of women, on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making to be essential for the achievement of equality, sustainable development, peace and democracy.[102] At the same

[94] UN Women, 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action' (n 54) part G ,79.
[95] Danish Institute for Human Rights, 'Normative Framework' (n 80) 21.
[96] Danish Institute for Human Rights, 'Normative Framework' (n 80) 21.
[97] UN Women, 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action' (n 54), Strategic objective G.1.
[98] UNGA Res 55/2 'United Nations Millennium Declaration' (8 September 2000) MDG 3.
[99]UN Women, 'Political Empowerment of Women' (n 59) 22.
[100]UN Women, 'Political Empowerment of Women' (n 59) 22.
[101] UNGA Res 66/130 'Women and Political Participation' (19 December 2011) UN Doc A/RES/66/130, preamble.
[102] UNGA Res 66/130 (n 101) preamble.

time it also expresses concern that women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere.[103]

This resolution importantly calls upon states to eliminate laws, regulations and practices that, in a discriminatory manner, prevent or restrict women's participation in the political process.[104] This includes to promote and protect women's political participation to engage in political activities[105], expressing their opinions and imparting information freely[106], and to participate in the formulation and implementations of policy.[107] It further stipulates that in situations of political transition to take effective steps to ensure the participation of women on equal terms with men in all phases of political reform, and transitional governments.[108]

Moreover, the resolution made the scope of women's political participation broader in contrast with the general and international instruments. Accordingly, it ensures women's equal participation, and encourages international and regional organizations to assist states in their national efforts.[109] This includes to take all appropriate measures to eliminate barrier to women's access to and participation in the political sphere[110], create an environment of zero tolerance for violence, assault and harassment of women elected officials and candidates[111], and to take proactive measures to address factors hindering women from participating.[112]

Thus, the third phase presents a consolidated framework to address institutional and cultural barriers besides reinforcing the state's legal obligation outlined on CEDAW and also other relevant instruments regarding women political participation.

2.3 African Regional Human Rights Systems

[103] UNGA Res 66/130 (n 101) preamble.
[104] UNGA Res 66/130 (n 101) para 2.
[105] UNGA Res 66/130 (n 101) para 3 (a).
[106] UNGA Res 66/130 (n 101) para 3 (e).
[107] UNGA Res 66/130 (n 101) para 3 (g).
[108] UNGA Res 66/130 (n 101) para 4.
[109] UNGA Res 66/130 (n 101) para 6
[110] UNGA Res 66/130 (n 101) para 6 (b).
[111] UNGA Res 66/130 (n 101) para 6 (I).
[112] UNGA Res 66/130 (n 101) para 6 (n).

The African Union (AU) has taken numerous steps to promote good governance and democratic consolidation across the continent.[113] The AU Constitutive Act enshrines the principle of gender equality and, together with other AU declarations, resolutions, and decisions, calls for the full participation of women as equal partners in Africa's development.[114] Additionally, concepts pertaining to electoral rights are enshrined under the African Charter on Human and People's Right (ACHPR), adopted in 1981.[115] Moreover, the AU Declaration of 2002 deepened these obligations listing down more pervasive articles such as the enunciation of rights and obligations for citizens, political parties, candidates, the media and other stakeholders. These were later reinforced by the African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance under Article 17 reaffirms State Parties commitment to "regularly holding transparent, free and fair elections". In doing so the Article requires State Parties to establish an electoral body; establish mechanisms for electoral dispute resolutions; ensure equitable access to state owned media; as well as ensure the adoption of a binding code of conduct.[116]

The regional African human rights system is primarily based on the ACHPR, which entered into force on October 21, 1986 following ratification by a simple majority of member states of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).[117] The most prominent contributions of the charter are codification of the three "generations" of rights, including the inventive concept of peoples' rights, and the imposition of duties on individuals.[118] Similar to what is promulgated in the ICCPR and UDHR, Article 13 of ACHPR has a participation clause allowing "*the right to participate freely in the government of his country*[119] *[…]*". One distinction of this regional instrument is the inclusion of a claw-back clause when compared to its international counterparts, is the fact that according to the ACHPR, implementation of this right is almost fully predicated

[113] Community of Democracies, 'Advancing Women's Political Participation: African Consultation on Gender Equality and Political Empowerment' (Johannesburg, March 2017) 10 <https://community-democracies.org/app/uploads/2018/06/WPP-African-Consultation-2.pdf> accessed 2 September 2025.
[114] Community of Democracies, 'Advancing Women's Political Participation' (n 113) 10.
[115] Lere and Timothy (n 21) 74.
[116] African Union, 'African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance' (adopted 30 January 2007, entered into force 15 February 2012) art 17(1–4).
[117] Makua Mutua, 'The African Human Rights System: A Critical Evaluation' (2000) Human Development Report Background Paper <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2000/papers/MUTUA.pdf> accessed 20 June 2025.
[118] Mutua, 'The African Human Rights System' (n 117).
[119]African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (adopted 27 June 1981, entered into force 21 October 1986) art 13(1).

upon national laws as prefaced in the term[120] " *in accordance with the provisions of the law."*[121] The AU took the onset to safeguard this right by obliging state parties to submit procedural periodic report, thereby reinstating the Charter's determinations to protect electoral rights.[122]

Building on the ACHPR, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa also known as the Maputo Protocol reaffirms principles of equality between men and women and the abolition of discrimination against women.[123] It is considered the most comprehensive regional document in regards to women's rights. It protects and promotes rights such as right to participate in political and decision-making processes, free of violence.[124] Article 9 of the Maputo Protocol requires State Parties to ensure " *a) women participate without any discrimination in all elections; b) women are represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes; c) women are equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of State policies and development programs".*[125]

The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (the Democracy Charter) further consolidated the commitments of member states. The charter was adopted by the AU in 2007, is a legally binding document that sets the rules that African countries should follow when it comes to governance. It was significant to simplify various African commitments and declarations and bundle them together as one package that could be more easily considered and agreed upon.[126]

Finally, the commitment to uphold women's political participation has been reinforced through regional policy frameworks such as all the African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, African Union Gender Policy (2009) and Agenda 2063. These frameworks underscore the importance of women's equal participation in political, economic, and social

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[120] Lere and Timothy (n 21) 74.
[121] Schöpp-Schilling, 'The Role of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women' (n 92) 3.
[122] EU, 'Compendium of International Standards for Elections' (n 58)
[123] Dunia Tegegn, 'Beyond Numbers: Promoting Women's Meaningful Political Participation in Ethiopia' (6 May 2018, last revised 8 May 2018) 4 <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3166207> accessed 2 September 2025.
[124] International IDEA, 'Women's Political Participation: Africa Barometer' (2nd edn, 2024) 137 <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2024-07/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2024.pdf> accessed 2 September 2025.
[125] Maputo Protocol, art 9 (n 17).
[126] ACDEG, art 17(1–4) (n 119)..

spheres, and call for the implementation of concrete measures—such as gender parity in leadership and affirmative action—to ensure inclusive governance across the continent.

2.4 Women's participation in politics: A Comparative Overview

As inequality between men and women is universal, this has led to women being confined to domestic aspect of life, while reserving public life for men. Throughout history, women were not only denied to participate in politics, they couldn't own properties nor get basic education.[127]Despite, major advancements in various aspects of human lives during the past 100 years, women's meaningful political participation has however become a phenomenon that is rather novel. The BDPA of 1995 acknowledges that realizing equality, fostering peace, and achieving sustainable development will remain an unfulfilled aspiration unless women are actively involved and their viewpoints are fully integrated at all levels of decision-making. In African, regional frameworks have sought to reinforce this commitment through incorporating measures that eliminate discrimination against women in elections, further ensuring women's equal representation through the provision of equal opportunities.*[128]*

To better understand this issue, this section will briefly provide other African country's legislative experience in regards to women's political participation. For the purpose of comparative analysis, the next sub-chapter will look into the Kenya, Tunisia and Rwanda's experience in regards to women's political participation. These African countries were identified as they are multicultural and multiethnic societies like Ethiopia. These nations also have either commendable legislatives that encourage women's political participation or have a political system that is more conducive for women's participation - approaches Ethiopia could adopt to its national legislation.

Kenya has bicameral parliament and has a presidential political system, operating under First-Past the Post electoral system.[129] Like many African countries, it has ratified various international as well as regional instruments that promote women's equal participation in the political space. Among these instruments, the prominent ones are the CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol.[130] The

[127] Lere and Timothy (n 21) 74.
[128] Maputo Protocol, art 9 (n 17).
[129] Chikwanha and Moyo, 'The Motivation for Women in Politics' (n 65) 4.
[130] Chikwanha and Moyo, 'The Motivation for Women in Politics' (n 65) 4.

rewriting of Kenya's Constitution in 2010 gave prominence to gender equality by enshrining under articles 27(6), and (8) a fixed gender quota for parliament.[131] Article 27 of the Kenyan Constitution covers principles of equality and freedom from discrimination. Under sub-article 6 "[…] *the State shall take legislative and other measures, including affirmative action programs and policies designed to redress any disadvantage suffered by individuals or groups because of past discrimination*".[132] This move towards recognizing past discrimination and taking positive measures such as affirmative action has contributed to an increase in women in Kenyan politics. Additionally sub-article 8 of the same article provides "[…] *the State shall take legislative and other measures to implement the principle that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender".*[133] The Kenyan Election Act, adopted in 2011 has further promoted the operationalized gender equality. For instance, Article 36(7) of the Act requires the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission to decide from party lists the figures necessary to fulfill the two-thirds gender rule when allotting special seats in the county assemblies.[134] This means that no more than two-third members of the assembly should be of the same gender. With regards to increasing meaningful participation of women, the Code of Conduct provides various requirements for political parties to ensure gender equality and promotion of women's political participation. Accordingly, under section 16 of the Act, "Every registered political party referendum committee, candidate and agent shall—(a) ensure security and full participation of women and persons with disabilities as candidates and voters […].[135] As a result of the comprehensive legal framework, Kenya's general election held on August 2022 saw an increase in women's political participation with women candidates making up an estimate 11% of the total number of candidates. The introduction of the above mentioned legislation at national and local levels as well as application of gender quotas has positively impacted the increase in participation. Although, gender parity value of Kenya stands below 30%, there has been a significant improvement in women's participation nonetheless. There has been a 17%

[131] Chikwanha and Moyo, 'The Motivation for Women in Politics' (n 65) 4.
[132] Constitution of Kenya (published in Kenya Gazette Vol CXII, No 88, 3 September 2010) art 27(6) <https://www.constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/constitution_of_kenya.pdf> accessed 15 July 2025.
[133] Constitution of Kenya, art 27(8) (n 132).
[134] Election Act (published in Kenya Gazette, 9 September 2011) art 36(7) <https://www.kenyalaw.org/lex/actview.xql?actid=No.%201/2011> accessed 15 July 2025.
[135] Election Act, art 36(7) (n 134).

increase in women's representation in parliament between 2004 and 2023, which can be attributed to the changes made in the constitution and Electoral Act.[136]

On the other hand, Tunisia has become one of the prominent African countries that have made progress in promoting women's rights and participation. Following independence in 1956, the country's adoption of the Code of Personal Status in 1957 gave specific rights to women[137] and served as a catalyst for feminist movements. Moreover, Tunisia has ratified both the CEDAW and Maputo protocol further strengthening its commitment regarding women's political participation[138]. An apparent move to encourage women's participation following the 2011 Arab spring in Tunisia was the adoption of Decree Law No. 2011-35 on the election of the National Constituent Assembly. Here, the Decree introduced the principle of vertical parity requiring Candidates *to "file their candidacy applications on the basis of parity between men and women".*[139] This requirement made sure candidates' list alternates between women and men candidates, unless the number of seats, in the relevant constituency, is odd. Moreover, the Tunisian Constitution of 2014, further promoted protection of women's rights. Regarding women's political participation article 34 of the Tunisian Constitution states, *"The rights to election, voting, and candidacy are guaranteed, in accordance with the law. The state seeks to guarantee women's representation in elected bodies".*[140] Similarly, Article 46 reaffirms the State's commitment in protecting women's rights and strengthening the development of those rights as well as guaranteeing equality between men and women at all levels.[141] Furthermore, this article postulates that "The state works to attain parity between women and men in elected Assemblies".[142]

Both Organic Law No. 2017-7 and Organic Law No. 2017-58 increased and encouraged women's political participation through compelling political parties to use vertical parity and the

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[136] Chikwanha and Moyo, 'The Motivation for Women in Politics' (n 65) 123-128.
[137] Chikwanha and Moyo, 'The Motivation for Women in Politics' (n 65) 4.
[138] Schöpp-Schilling, 'The Role of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women' (n 92) 3.

[139] Decree No 35 of 10 May 2011 on the Election of the National Constituent Assembly of Tunisia (2011) art 16.
[140] Tunisian Constitution (translated by UNDP and reviewed by IDEA, 2014) <https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014> accessed 15 July 2015.
[141] Tunisian Constitution (n 140).
[142] Tunisian Constitution (n 140).

commitment to eliminate all types of violence against women, including political violence.[143] Unfortunately, all the women's electoral quotas introduced since 2011 were removed in 2021, in Presidential Decree No. 117, due to a change in the electoral system from proportional representation to first past the post.[144] This has staggered the changes introduced in Tunisia since 2011. According to article 51 of the new Constitution of Tunisia adopted in 2022, "*The state seeks to achieve parity between women and men in the elected councils*".[145] However, the constitution is silent on implementation mechanisms. Women's representation has declined in Tunisia since 2015; however the Country still managed to elect its first ever female prime minister in 2022.[146] Women also held ten other appointments in the cabinet. While Tunisia has gone through phases that's impacted women's participation, the rights advocated in the Constitution and the high number of women in cabinet is likely to result in improvements in women's inclusion in politics and governance.[147]

Rwanda is considered among the world's success stories in guaranteeing equal representation and participation in politics. In addition to domestication of international and regional agreements that endorse gender equality, the country's legislation of policies that encourage women's political participation through national legal frameworks.[148] At international level the country has ratified the UDHR, lCESCR, ICCPR, CEDAW and BDPA. At the regional level, Rwanda has ratified the Maputo Protocol (2003), and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. As a result of such initiative, 64% of members of parliament are women.[149] The Rwandan Constitution, adopted in 2003 and revised in 2015 became an attestation to Rwanda's dedication regarding women's rights. This is further reaffirmed by various provisions within the Constitution.[150] Out of these provisions, article 10 provides fundamental principles upheld by the State. Accordingly, sub-article 4 of the same article states, "*building a State governed by the rule of law, a pluralistic democratic Government, equality of all Rwandans and between men and women which is affirmed by women occupying at least thirty percent (30%) of positions in decision-making*

[143] Constitution of Kenya, art 27(6) (n 132).
[144] Constitution of Kenya, art 27(6) (n 132).
[145] Tunisian Constitution, art 51 (n 140).
[146] Constitution of Kenya, art 27(6) (n 132).
[147] Constitution of Kenya, art 27(6) (n 132).
[148] Chikwanha and Moyo, 'The Motivation for Women in Politics' (n 65) 98-104.
[149] Chikwanha and Moyo, 'The Motivation for Women in Politics' (n 65) 98-104.
[150] Chikwanha and Moyo, 'The Motivation for Women in Politics' (n 65) 98-104.

organs;".[151]In addition, article 56 of the same Constitution requires equality of men and women when recruiting members, establishing leadership organs of political organization.[152]

According to recent data, the proportion of women's representation rose to 61% in 2023, which was at 27% in 2000.[153] All of this is attributed to the formulation of policies that advocate for the equality of men and women. These policies include National Gender Policy, the National Policy against Gender-Based Violence and the National Policy for Family Promotion.[154] Despite the atrocities Rwanda witnessed as a result of the 1994 genocide, the country is a beacon of resilience. As a result of recovery measures taken by the Rwandan government post-genocide, women have risen to prominence making Rwanda having one of the highest proportions of women in parliament.

[151] Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda (2003, rev. 2015) art 10(4) <https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Rwanda_2015> accessed 15 July 2025.
[152] Rwandan Constitution, art 56 (n 151).
[153] Rwandan Constitution, art 56 (n 151).
[154] Rwandan Constitution, art 56 (n 151).

Chapter Three: National Legal Frameworks on Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia

Introduction

This chapter examines the political participation of Ethiopian women from the Emperor Haile Selassie regime to the present day. Despite the longstanding adage that women cannot engage in politics, Ethiopian women have a documented history of political participation, which has grown more as the country's political systems have evolved.[155] The historical and legal aspects of women's political participation is important because it shows how women's right in political participation has progressively been realized on paper but deviates in practice. This chapter further illustrates the opportunities and challenges faced in Ethiopia under different regimes, to identify constant patterns and helps assess if the current normative framework translate in to an active and meaningful political participation of women.

3.1 History of Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia

The roots of women's political participation in Ethiopia can be traced back to the 10th century. One important female figure in Ethiopian history is the legendary Queen of Sheba (Saba , Makeda, or Belqis),[156] who is associated with the birth of the Solomonic dynasty in Ethiopia[157]. Another significant female figure in Ethiopian history is Queen Yodit (Judith),[158] she is remembered for her attacks on the Aksumite kingdom and on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.[159] The reign of Emperor Zara Yacob was a time when female leadership was a reality in Ethiopia. Emperor Zara Yacob appointed his daughters and female relatives to govern most parts of the country, including his nine daughters who were chosen as governors,[160] There are notable

[155] Agenagn Kebede Dagnew, 'Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia from Ancient Times to the Present' (January 2020) SSRN Electronic Journal <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3540966> accessed 15 July 2025.
[156] Meron Zeleke Eresso, 'Women in Ethiopia' (25 March 2021) 2 <https://www.readkong.com/page/women-in-ethiopia-meron-zeleke-eresso-department-of-social-8337082> accessed 6 September 2025.
[157] Peter Schwab, 'Ethiopia: Politics, Economics and Society' (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1985).
[158] Minale Adugna, 'Women and Warfare in Ethiopia', Gender Issues Research Report Series 13 (Addis Ababa: Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa, 2013); Paul B Henze, 'Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia' (New York: Palgrave 2000) 48.
[159] Teshale Tibebu, 'The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896–1974' (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press 1995).
[160] Richard Pankhurst, 'The Role of Women in Ethiopian Economic, Social and Cultural Life: From the Middle Ages to the Times of Tewodros', in Richard Pankhurst, Ahmed Zekaria and Taddesse Beyene (eds), 'Proceedings of the

Ethiopian women who were known for their essential leadership roles and diplomatic skills. Prominent women such as Eleni, Dil Wenbera, and Seble Wengel shaped Ethiopian history in the 16th century, while Empress Mentewab emerged as a powerful figure during the Zemene Mesafint (1769–1855). In the 19th century, Empress Taytu Betul played a decisive role in resisting Italian colonialism, advancing women's rights, engaging in diplomacy, and founding Addis Ababa as the capital. [161] The aforementioned women are among those who played a significant role in national politics in the early and later medieval history of Ethiopia. These examples demonstrate that Ethiopian women' resilience and capacity in political leadership.

The 1931 constitution, the first ever written constitution of Ethiopia was introduced by the emperor in implying of modernization and codification of laws. The 1931 Constitution granted Ethiopian citizens certain rights and duties, even though the people were still regarded as subjects of the Emperor, however, it did not guarantee political rights, such as the right to vote, the right to be elected, or any form of political participation.[162] On the other hand, the Revised Constitution of 1955 introduced a broader set of civil rights and duties. Prominent among these were the right to equality before the law (Article 37), freedom of speech and of the press (Article 41), and the right to assembly (Article 45).[163] The revised constitution marked a significant step toward democratization by providing for the election of members of both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies based on universal suffrage allowing women to vote and run for office, it was during this timeline Sinidu Gebru, the first woman was elected to the parliament and served as vice president of the Upper House Senate.[164]

During this regime female students joined active opposition parties such as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All Ethiopia Socialist Movement (referred to as MESON) and women had active presence in the uprising against the monarchical regime. The Derg regime, which overthrew the imperial government and declared itself a socialist state, marked a time of increased politicization of women's demands and resulted in the formation of

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First National Conference of Ethiopian Studies' (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University 1990) 345–63.

[161] Eresso, 'Women in Ethiopia' (n 156) 3.

[162] Ethiopian Constitution of 1931

[163] Ethiopian Constitution of 1931 art 35, 41, 47 (n 162)

[164] Eresso, 'Women in Ethiopia' (n 156) 6.

the Women's Coordinating Committee (WCC) in 1975.[165] Women from both the EPRP and MEISON joined the committee.[166] Among the goals of the committee was to address women's political challenges, through bringing women's issues to the national agenda and in organizing lectures, seminars, and political education forums for women.[167] In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Derg streamlined women's mobilization as part of its strategy to consolidate power, most notably through the Edget-Behebret ("Development through Cooperation") Campaign launched on December 21, 1974, which sent students and teachers to rural areas to promote its 'Ethiopia Tikdem' ideology. While many women participated as campaigners, spreading the 'woman question' and seeking to build a nationwide women's movement—the Derg dismissed these efforts as specious, as various actors used the campaign to advance their own political agendas.[168] The campaign was officially ended in July 1976.[169] The Derg launched the "Red Terror" in November 1977, which aborted the arising women's movement by banning the movements and silencing the radical women in society.[170] The Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA) was established on July 17, 1980. This was a nationwide umbrella women's association whereby all women associations in the PAs were part of the REWA branches in their respective areas.[171]

Moreover, the 1987 Constitution incorporated the rights of women political participation. A joint reading of article 35 and 36 of the 1987 constitution is an apparent endorsement of this proposition. As per article 35(1) "*Ethiopians are equal before the law, irrespective of nationality, sex, religion, occupation, social or other status".*[172] Furthermore, the subsequent article provides *"In the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia women and men have equal rights".*[173] Article 36 also obliges the state with the responsibility of providing women with special support to put

[165] Eresso, 'Women in Ethiopia' (n 156) 7.
[166] All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement, 'All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement' (Wikipedia, 2 July 2025) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-Ethiopia_Socialist_Movement> accessed 1 September 2025.

[167] Zenebework Tadesse, The Conditions of Women in Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, 1976), 49.

[168] John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia: Review of African Political Economy (Nottingham: Russell Press, 1985).
[169] Markakis and Ayele, 'Class and Revolution in Ethiopia', (n 168)
[170] Schwab, 'Ethiopia: Politics, Economics and Society' (157) 40.
[171] Christopher Clapham, Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[172] The Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1988) art 35(1).
[173] Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1988) art 36(1) (n 172).

them in equal footing with their male counterparts. Ethiopia also signed CEDAW in 1987 which further allowed women to establish organizations out of domestic nature.[174] These periods signifies that the legal framework alone cannot guarantee women's political participation unless backed by political openness.

The Derg regime's effort regarding women's political participation contributed toward monitoring women's movement in the country and stifling any form of potential radicalism and consciousness. In May 1991, the Derg was defeated by the EPRDF, a coalition of left-wing ethnic rebel groups that overthrew the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WEP). Women played a significant role in the armed struggle against the Derg regime.[175]

In the early 1990s the Ethiopian political space shifted to a democratic political system where women enjoyed moderate spaces in politics[176] During the EPRDF regime, gender equality in the political and economic life was fully encouraged due to ratification of various international instruments. Since 1992, the Ethiopian government has taken several steps to enhance women's participation such as the establishment of Women's Affairs Office by the Prime Minister's Office, and led by a woman at the ministerial level. Various women's associations were also formed to promote the social, economic, and political rights of women in public life.[177]

During this the Transitional Government of Ethiopia developed the National Policy on Ethiopian Women (NPEW) seeking to advance equality between men and women and eradicate gender-based discrimination. The women's policy of 1993 as well as the Ten Year Development Plan all encourages the equal participation of women. Particularly, the Ten Year Development Plan calls for guaranteeing women's participation in political space and promoting their participation in all branches of government.[178]

The 1995 FDRE Constitution further reinforced these efforts by guaranteeing gender equality under the law (Article 25) and promoting equal access to economic and political opportunities

[174] Margaux Herman, 'History of Women in Ethiopia' (Ad'É Books, Contemporary Horn of Africa 2024) 120–28.
[175] Herman, 'History of Women in Ethiopia' (Ad'É Books, Contemporary Horn of Africa 2024) 120–28 (n 174)
[176] Dagnew, 'Women's Political Participation' (n 155).
[177] Dagnew, 'Women's Political Participation' (n 155).
[178] Emezat H Mengesha, 'Women's Representation in Ethiopia's Political Parties' (Institute for Security Studies-East Africa Report 2022) <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ear-48.pdf> accessed 20 May 2025.

(Article 35).[179] More recently, legal reforms such as updates to the family law and the introduction of affirmative action policies have been implemented to support women's advancement in education, employment, and leadership.[180]

While reviewing women's political participation in Ethiopia, it is necessary to understand that historically many political parties started movements along ethnic lines.[181] This is partly due to the repressive political system that contributed to the limited options for political party formation. This in turn has adversely affected the development of multi-party system in the country. The dominance of the then ruling party was a testament to the fact that only political parties established along ethnic lines took a front row seat. However, this also led to an authoritarian regime with minimum opening of the political space.

Ethiopia has made significant progress in recent years in bolstering women's political empowerment.[182] During this timeline, 10 women were appointed to top ministerial position, with women holding half of the cabinet position. In addition to 50% women cabinet members, the first chief justice and first president were both women. Women also accounted for 30% of the judiciary.[183]

Despite women's involvement in politics and leadership positions, women's participation still faces criticism.[184] There are factors that affect women's participation among which are cultural, economic and gender roles.[185] As a patriarchal society that accepts leadership belongs to men as divine order, women oftentimes neglect active participation within their communities.

There still remains under representation of women in leadership positions within the party and government thereby affecting genuine representation. During the electoral law reform process there had been a recommendation advocating for quota system for vulnerable groups such as PWDs and women.[186] However, this recommendation was pushed back by political party

[179] FDRE Constitution, (n 9) art 25 and art 35.
[180] Dagnew, 'Women's Political Participation' (n 155).
[181] Mengesha, 'Women's Representation in Ethiopia's Political Parties' (n 178) .
[182] SAIS Women Lead, 'Increasing Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia: A Barriers Analysis of Women's Political Participation' (2023) 10.
[183] Seblewongiel Kidanie and Eden Hailu, 'Women's Participation in Ethiopia's 2021 Elections' (2024) 5.
[184] Kidanie and Hailu (n 183) 5.
[185] Tegegn, 'Beyond Numbers' (n 123) 3.
[186] Sisay A Yeshanew and Abadir M Ibrahim, 'Righting Human Rights through Legal Reform: Ethiopia's Contemporary Experience' (Ethiopian Human Rights Law Series, Vol XII, 2020) 310–12.

representatives citing women's lack of interest to participate in politics. Due to the resistance of political parties, the revised law used language that incentivizes women's participation instead of implementing a quota system.[187]

The current policies and laws on political participation all have a common shortcoming which is lumping women as homogeneous groups, all with similar interests. This approach is not cognizant of the intersectionality of women's needs.[188] The priority of NEBE thus far is adequate numerical representation of women that reflects their share within the society. This attempt means that diversity of women has not been the priority regarding women's participation in political parties.[189]

3.2 Women's Electoral Participation in Ethiopia

As briefly mentioned in the above sub-sections, women's political participation pre-dates the adopting on its first written constitution in 1931. However, with the intention of assessing women's political participation after the adoption of the 1995 constitution, this section will cover women's participation during the various elections held after 1995.

Elections in Ethiopia could be indicated as a recent phenomenon, with the country holding six national elections, four local elections and eight referendums since the adoption the 1995 FDRE constitution. [190] On a national level, the notion of election is buttressed by various legal frameworks ranging from the constitution to proclamations as well as various directives adopted by the NEBE. The following will highlight women's participation in previous elections as candidates.

According to article 58(3) of the FDRE constitution, the HoPR's term is set to five years requiring the NEBE to hold elections every five years.[191] Ethiopia held elections in regular five-year intervals between 1995 and 2015.

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[187] Yeshanew and Ibrahim, 'Righting Human Rights through Legal Reform' (n 186).
[188] Mengesha, 'Women's Representation in Ethiopia's Political Parties' (n 178) 8.
[189] Mengesha, 'Women's Representation in Ethiopia's Political Parties' (n 178) .
[190] National Election Board of Ethiopia, 'Past Elections' <https://nebe.org.et/am/past-elections> accessed 15 June 2025.
[191] FDRE Constitution, (n 9) art 58(3).

The 1995 General Election was held across all regional states and two city administrations covering 547 constituencies.[192] A total of 43 political organizations competed in the election, of which 21 were affiliated with the EPRDF and its associated organization. During this election, a total of 10 women were able to secure seats in the HoPR, while 77 women were elected to regional councils. The number of women members was 116, accounting for a total of 21.4 %.[193]

The next General Election was held in 2000. During this election, 42 women were able to secure seats in the HoPR, while 240 managed to win a seat in regional councils, which showed an increase in participation of women both for HoPR and Regional Council seats.[194]

During the 2005 General Elections, 37 political parties[195] registered to compete in the 2005 General election with 1,845 candidates (including 273 women)[196], there were 3662 candidates of which 116 women were elected to join the House of Representatives out of 545 and 218 women had seats in regional council.[197]

During the 2010 General Elections, 63 political organizations competed in the election. The EPRDF won 99.6% of the seats through the four Front organizations and partner organization. With regards to women's participation, 12.4% of the candidates for the HoPR and 15.3% of candidates for the regional council election were women.[198]

The 2015 general election saw participation from 52 political parties and 9 independent candidates. The EPRDF won 500 seats in the HoPR, of which 38.8% (212 candidates) were held by women. 40.3% of were held by women in various regional councils.[199]

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[192] NEBE, 'Past Elections' (n 190).

[193] Sisay Kinfe, 'Women's Political Representation and Transition to Democracy in Ethiopian Federalism: An Analysis of the Gaps in the Institutionalization of Women's Right' (20 June 2025) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373603245_Women's_Political_Representation_and_Transition_to_Democracy_in_Ethiopian_Federalism_An_Institutional_Analysis> accessed 20 June 2025.

[194] Kinfe, 'Women's Political Representation and Transition to Democracy' (n 217).

[195] Carter Center, 'Observing the 2005 Ethiopia National Elections' (2009) 9–11 <https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/ethiopia-observing-2005.pdf> accessed 16 July 2025.

[196] Amnesty International, 'Ethiopia: The May 2005 Elections and Human Rights—Recommendations to the Government, Election Observers and Political Parties' (2005) <https://www.amnesty.be/IMG/pdf/engafr250022005.pdf> accessed 14 July 2025.

[197] Eresso, 'Women in Ethiopia' (n 156)

[198] Carter Center, 'Observing the 2005 Ethiopia National Elections' (n 195).

[199] Carter Center, 'Observing the 2005 Ethiopia National Elections' (n 195).

3.3 National legal framework that promotes women's political participation

3.3.1 The 1995 Constitution

The starting point of national legal frameworks is the FDRE Constitution which provides the principles equality and non-discrimination as a fundamental right. In regards to equality, article 25 of the constitution mentions *"All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law".*[200] This right is a good foundation when discussing women's political participation as it promotes the protection and the enjoyment of their rights as much as their male counterparts. The principle of non-discrimination is essential in the pursuit of political participation.

With regards to participation, primarily, the right to vote and be elected is the most appropriate right here. This article has a preamble that's inclusive of every citizen's socio-economic and political reality. "*Every Ethiopian national, without any discrimination based on color, race, nation, nationality, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion or other status".*[201] This preface entails a substantial requirement for the enjoyment of the succeeding rights listed, which is the need to be an Ethiopian national. Once, this is fulfilled, however the ensuing rights are indiscriminate of color, race nationality, sex, language and other similar statuses.

"(a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly and through freely chosen representatives;

(b) On the attainment of 18 years of age, to vote in accordance with law;"

Here, the first sub-article underlines how citizens can exercise direct participation by holding office themselves or by being a legislative body, or through decisions on public matters either through an election or referendum.[202] On the other hand the second sets out the requirement for the attainment of a voting age, 18 to participate accordingly. However, the phrasing of these two

[200] FDRE Constitution, (n 9) art 25.
[201] FDRE Constitution, (n 9) art 38.
[202] Sophia Mård, 'The Right to Participate in Public Affairs: ICCPR Art. 25 – A Practical Guide for Civil Society Organizations' (CCPR Centre 2021) 9 <https://ccprcentre.org/files/media/WEB_Guidelines_Art25_(ENG-2021).pdf> accessed 20 June 2025.

sub-articles is put in place to affirm Ethiopian citizens who are and/or above the age of 18 can enjoy this right.

"(c) To vote and to be elected at periodic elections to any office at any level of government; elections shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors". Here, with this phrase, the Constitution replicates what is provided in the ICCPR by entailing features like genuine and periodic in addition to elections being held in secret while promoting universal and equal suffrage.

On the other hand, a brief overview of Article 29 of the Constitution ultimately deliberates on the fact that a person, among other things, *"has the right to hold opinions without any interference*". Subsequent article affirms this freedom of expression as well.

Similarly, per Article 31, a person has the right to form associations for any reasons or purpose. This among other things would allow, women, like any other members of the society person to be part of a political party either as member of in leadership position. All of the aforementioned articles, while not directly linked to the right to vote and be elected, they fully buttress the notion and feed into it. The right of assembly and the right to freedom of association are also apt in assuring every person's political will and aspirations.

3.3.2 Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation

Out of the various provisions within the election proclamation, one provision stands out as it directly promotes women's political participation. This provision includes criteria for government funding that incentivizes gender inclusivity within political parties. Among the list of eligibility requirements for government funding[203] "c) the number of female candidates it nominates;" and "d) the number of female members of the party and the number of females in leadership positions are taken into account when allocating financial support. This encourages political parties to meaningfully engage women in both candidacy and leadership roles, promoting realistic gender representation in the political space.

[203] Proclamation No 1162/2019, art 100(2)(c) (n 14).

Under the electoral proclamation, a political party may be recognized as a nationwide party if it meets the following criteria: it has a minimum of 10,000 founding members; no more than 40 percent of these members reside in any one region; the remaining members are permanent residents of at least four other regions of Ethiopia; and each of these regions contributes at least 15 percent of the total founding members.[204] Unlike, political parties registered as regional parties, nationwide political parties can submit candidates both for HoPR and regional councils.

Article 31 of the proclamation sets out the requirements for candidacy whereas Article 32 governs the process of candidate nomination. Accordingly, a candidate running for a seat in the HoPR must present 3,000 endorsement signatures from voters residing in the constituency where the candidate is standing for election.[205] If the candidate in question has disability, the endorsement signature requirement is lowered to 1500. Similarly, a candidate running for regional council should produce 1000 endorsement signatures and a candidate with disability should provide 750 signatures.

In addition to the proclamation, the NEBE drafted various directives to fully elaborate on the provision within the proclamation or when the proclamation itself has a caveat stating that NEBE will issue a directive to tackle a broader topic. The next section will cover directives.

3.3.3 Directives

Since its re-establishment in 2019, the NEBE has undertaken significant steps to enhance the legal and procedural framework governing elections in the country. As part of these efforts, the NEBE has adopted more than 22 directives designed to ensure transparency, fairness, and efficiency in the electoral process.[206] These directives have served as essential tools for regulating various aspects of election administration, including voter registration, candidate registration, campaigning, voting and vote counting procedures, and the management of electoral complaints and disputes.[207]

[204] Proclamation No 1162/2019, art 64(1) (n 14).
[205] Proclamation No 1162/2019, art 32(2) (n 14).
[206] National Election Board of Ethiopia, 'Election Laws' <https://nebe.org.et/am/election-laws> accessed 20 May 2025.
[207] NEBE, 'Election Laws' (n 206).

Among these directives one is the directive on the Obligations of Registered National and Regional Political Parties (under Proclamation 1162/2019). This directive is issued by the NEBE on the basis of its mandate assigned to it pursuant to article 160(2) of the proclamation which states that *"any political party registered before the adoption of the Proclamation shall be required to fulfill the requirements set out in the Proclamation according to the time table established by the Board".*[208]The directive lists down obligations parties should fulfill in order to register as political parties. Among these requirements, one article stands out in promoting the participation of women and ensuring gender composition of the founding members of political parties. Accordingly, in regards to the composition of the founding members, the article states, "*The political party shall recruit founding members in accordance with article 64(6) of the Proclamation in a manner that reflects gender considerations and the contribution/composition of different members of the local community in the area".*[209] On the other hand, the directive also requires gender consideration to be taken by political parties when electing representatives in a leadership position. "*Any political party shall take into consideration gender representation when conducting elections for leadership positions. In the absence of this, the party shall provide proof of sufficient effort made in this regard by the party*". This article not only calls for the ensuring gender representation, but also requires parties to prove that they made all the necessary efforts possible to them in order to maintain gender balance or fair composition when nominating representatives/members in leadership position.

Another relevant directive is directive on Candidate Registration, Collection of Endorsement Signatures and Selection of Symbols no. 7/2021. The directive is applicable on matters relating to candidate registration, endorsement signature collection and registration of candidates, collection of endorsement signature and selection and usage of symbols during the various types of election.[210] In the directive, article 14(1)[211] requires gender representation is maintained when

[208] Proclamation No 1162/2019, art 160(2) (n 14).

[209] National Election Board of Ethiopia, Directive No. 3/2020 on the Obligations of Registered National and Regional Political Parties (2020) art 6 <https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/4Directive%20No.%2003.2020%20on%20the%20Obligations%20of%20Registered%20National%20and%20Regional%20Political%20Parties%28Final%20for%20publishing%29.pdf> accessed 10 July 2025.

[210] National Election Board of Ethiopia, Directive No. 7/2021 on the Conduct of Candidate Registration, Collection of Endorsement Signatures, and Selection of Symbols (2021) art 14 <https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/8Directive%20no.%2007.2021Directive%20on%20the%20Conduct%20of%20Registration%20of%20Candidates-Final%20version%20WAA%20Clean.pdf> accessed 20 July 2025.

collecting endorsement signatures. This article further promotes women's participation during endorsement signature collection process.

Similarly directive on political party funding no. 16(2) builds on article 100(2) of the proclamation which governs government funding, the directive allots government funding based on the number of female members and female leadership members, given they make up more than five percent of the total members of the political party.[212] Thus, as long as a party fulfills the minimum 5% threshold, they are eligible for government funding. One can argue that this directive not only incentivizes women's participation as members and candidates, but also puts a minimum threshold to receive government funding thereby encouraging parties to women's substantive representation and participation, not just superficial representation.

Furthermore, the NEBE in collaboration with Ethiopian Broadcast Authority jointly managed the allocation of airtime on both private and public media for registered political parties.[213] This arrangement is based on article 44(2) of proclamation 1162/2019 which states, "Candidates shall be entitled to get access to free airtime on state-owned Mass Media".[214] Candidates are allowed to conduct election campaign from the day s/he receives a certificate of candidature until four days to the Election Day, using various means. One way of campaigning is through the use of private and public media to introduce the political program of a party or candidate. According to the allocation, political parties that field women and persons with disability will be allocated more airtime. Political parties will receive 20% allocation based on number of women candidates.[215]

3.4 Institutional framework

Women's meaningful political participation in Ethiopia in addition to the normative frameworks discussed in the above section, is also shaped by key institutional actors. Three sets of institutions are particularly relevant these are, the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), Political

[211] NEBE, Directive No. 7/2021 (n 210) art 14.
[212] National Election Board of Ethiopia, Directive No. 16/2021 on Political Party Funding (2021) art 14(3) <https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/Directive-on-Political-parties-funding-signed.pdf> accessed 10 July 2025.
[213] Proclamation No 1162/2019, art 44(3) (n 14).
[214] Proclamation No 1162/2019, art 44(2) (n 14).
[215] Ethiopian News Association, 'Airtime Allocation for Election Campaign' <https://www.ena.et/web/eng/politics> accessed 13 July 2025.

Parties, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Each has their own distinct role in providing a cohesive environment for women's political participation in Ethiopia.

3.4.1 The National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)

Electoral management bodies (EMBs) are central actors in promoting women's electoral and political participation. Inclusive EMBs ensure that their own internal systems and processes do not discriminate against women and, where necessary, institute gender-targeted measures to redress any past discrimination. EMBs also promote women's participation in the electoral process by considering the gendered impact of mainstream electoral processes such as registration, voting and voter outreach.[216]

The NEBE is the election management body of Ethiopia mandated to conduct election. It is established by the FDRE constitution in order to conduct in an impartial manner, a free and fair election in Federal and State constituencies.[217] It is an independent institution whose Board members are appointed by the HoPR, upon recommendation by the prime minister.[218] Following widespread protests in various parts of the country between 2015 and 2017 and political transition in leadership, there were revisions of normative frameworks among which were the election law.[219] The NEBE reestablishment proclamation, adopted in 2019, reestablished the NEBE "*in order to enable citizens to exercise their right to self-government through representatives that they elect by way of free, fair and peaceful elections conducted at various levels;".*[220] With the establishment of the NEBE, article 3 provides that "*hereby established having its own legal personality as an autonomous organ independent from any influence, in order to conduct free and proper election in the Federal and State constituencies".*[221]

EMBs like NEBE play a vital role in promoting women's empowerment through their internal staffing practices and through the actions that they take to ensure women's access to the electoral process and also as advocates for gender equality in broader areas of political participation and

[216]UN Women and UNDP, Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation (2021) 103.
[217] FDRE Constitution, (n 9) art 102(1).
[218] FDRE Constitution, (n 9) art 102(2).
[219] Mengesha, 'Women's Representation in Ethiopia's Political Parties' (n 197) .
[220] Proclamation No 1133/2019, National Electoral Board of Ethiopia Establishment Proclamation, 25th Year No 71, Addis Ababa, 6 June 2019, Preamble.
[221] Proclamation No 1133/2019 (n 220) Preamble.

public debate.[222] These areas include promoting national dialogue, informing women candidates of key information on the electoral process and offering broader information to political parties on gender inequalities.[223] Consistent with this principle, the management board of the NEBE is made up of five board members serving full time[224], with proportional gender balance, demonstrating neutrality to become management board member.[225]

As part of its mandate in conducting election, NEBE registers and supervises political parties. NEBE also ensures that all stakeholders not only abide by the electoral rules, but also that there is an environment conducive to the exchange of political views and policy platforms. A good practice in facilitating that environment is to work with a variety of partners and stakeholders, including political parties, the media and civil society organizations.[226]

3.4.2 Political Parties

Political parties are consistently identified as responsible for women's under-representation, given their role as the main 'gatekeepers' to elective positions of power and decision-making at all levels in most countries. [227] As deduced from Seblewongiel Kidanie and Eden Hailu article " *Women's Participation in Ethiopia's 2021 Elections: The Role of Political Parties"*, political party systems are often defined as 'democratic', but given that the female half of the population is substantially under-represented, this is an obvious contradiction: in Ethiopia, women continue to be under-represented at all levels of decision making, including within political parties. This exclusion is deeply tied with the organization and structure of political parties. These include the identification, selection and nomination of candidates for internal leadership and public decision making positions. In Ethiopia, to encourage women political participation in political parties, a financial incentive is introduced in Proclamation 1162/2019. The amount of financial support that a political party receives besides other criteria is determined by the number of female candidates

[222] UN Women and UNDP, Inclusive Electoral Processes (n 216) 88.
[223] UN Women and UNDP, Inclusive Electoral Processes (n 216) 88.
[224] Proclamation No 1133/2019 (n 220) art 23(1).
[225] Proclamation No 1133/2019 (n 220) art 5 (2).
[226] Proclamation No 1162/2019, (n 14) part three chapter two, part four and part 5.
[227] International IDEA, 'A Framework for Developing Gender Policies for Political Parties' (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2016) <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/a-framework-for-developing-gender-policies-for-political-parties.pdf> accessed 13 July 2025.

it nominates and the number of female members of the party and the number of females in leadership positions.[228]

Political parties are organization of groups of individuals with shared ideologies and objectives.[229] These organizations are established with the aim of gaining political power through democratic elections. The NEBE reestablishment proclamation, "*Political Organization or Political Party means a grouping which, having formulated a political program pursues its aims in a lawful manner".*[230]These organizations are the main actors for the peaceful transition of power through election. Political parties are the main organs that can encourage the meaningful participation of women in politics. This is the case because women's representation increases through their role either as members, candidates or leaders within political parties.

The NEBE, per its mandate given by the law, manages the overall activity of political parties through registration, follow up and supervision.[231] This regulatory role is a significant entry point to allow the board to hold political parties accountable for ensuring inclusivity, and further strengthen women's active and meaningful participation.

3.4.3 Civil Society Organization (CSO)

The role of civil society organizations in elections often takes the form of support for the institutional processes of a democratic election as well as the more substantive development of a democratic electorate.[232] CSOs have a significant role in promoting political participation in Ethiopia. Proclamation No. 1162/2019 acknowledges local election observers and international election observers. Local election observers are legally registered, impartial and not-for-profit, non-governmental local CSO's which the Board has authorized, based on the organization's request to observe elections through its representatives.[233] While international election observers includes international or regional non-governmental agencies operating in or out of the country

[228] Proclamation No 1162/2019, (n 14) art 100 (2) (c&d).
[229] Comparative Politics-Issues and Trends, 'What Are Political Parties? Definitions and Perspectives' <https://www.polsciinstitute.com/what-are-political-parties-definitions-and-perspectives> accessed 14 July 2025.
[230] Proclamation No 1133/2019 (n 220) art 2 (5).
[231] Proclamation No 1133/2019 (n 220) art 7 (3).
[232] Shauna Mottiar, 'The Role of Civil Society in Elections: The KwaZulu-Natal Democracy and Elections Forum – Reducing Conflict Dynamics and Promoting Peace' (Report, page 1).
[233] Proclamation No 1162/2019, (n 14) art 2 (20)& 114(1).

and invited by the government to observe elections based on international treaties to which Ethiopia is a party.[234]

These election observers have the right to move around in the polling station to monitor the election process; and request and obtain appropriate information.[235] The observers have the right to look at the election materials and observe the voting and counting processes.[236] The proclamation also outlines that CSOs can provide voter education. As CSO's have an advantage of being close to the people at the grassroots level both in distance and trust which has been built over the years.[237] This serves as opportunity to engage civic organizations and citizens in democratic politics through voter education, election monitoring, policy research and advocacy. Additionally, it provides an avenue for the participation of women, who traditionally have had less access to politics and governance. For example, a CSO that is purely focused on women from minority groups is likely to find it easier to reach such women with voter information messages than an EMB.[238] CSOs can build the capacity of women aspirants, sensitizing communities on the importance of inclusive political representation and lobbying governments and political parties to promote greater participation of women in politics and elections.[239] CSOs represent diverse interests which deserve articulation in a democratic society and CSOs can also prevent government abuse by acting as watchdogs as well as enhance political participation through civil education.[240]

[234] Proclamation No 1162/2019, (n 14) art 2 (21) & 114 (2).
[235] Proclamation No 1162/2019, (n 14) art 116 (1) .
[236] Proclamation No 1162/2019, (n 14) art 116 (1) .
[237] Alice Muthoni Murage, 'The Contribution of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Advancing Women's Political Participation and Effectiveness: A Case of the Mon Women Movement in Myanmar' 9.
[238]UN Women and UNDP, Inclusive Electoral Processes (n 216) 90.
[239] Commonwealth Secretariat, 'Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Elections' (Commonwealth Secretariat 2018) 98 <https://www.thecommonwealth-ilibrary.org/index.php/comsec/catalog/download/128/125/793?inline=1> accessed 1 September 2025.
[240] Murage (n 237) 7.

Chapter Four

Assessing Women's Political Party Participation in Nationwide Political Parties in Addis Ababa

Introduction

As covered in previous section, the NEBE is mandated with drafting various directives to support the conduct of elections. Among these are directives that guide political participation of candidates. This chapter covers an assessment of female candidates in nationwide political parties in Addis Ababa. Moreover, the chapter will draw comparison between what is provided in NEBE's legal framework and the reality. The information provided in this section is from various NEBE documents and data collected from interviews held with female candidates and other stakeholders.

On women's participation in political parties, interviews were conducted with representatives from NEBE former Board Member, NEBE legal department Head, NEBE Gender and Social Inclusion department, four political parties: Enat Party, Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA), Prosperity Party (PP) and Hibir Party. Additionally, representatives from CSOs such as Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CECOE) and Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organization (CEHRO) were interviewed. Data that is discussed hereafter is based on these interviews.

Political party formation and candidate registration

Ethiopia has a majoritarian first-past-the-post electoral system where members of the HoPR are elected on the basis of the majority of votes cast in single-member constituencies.[241] This statement can be deduced from Article 54(2) states "*Members of the House shall be elected from candidates in each electoral district by a plurality of the votes cast".*[242] Thus, a candidate that receives the majority of votes per constituency wins in the said single-member constituency.

As an institution that plays a very prominent role in representative democracy, political parties are at times the only vehicle to guarantee inclusive participation and accountable

[241] Elections in Ethiopia, *Ace Electoral Knowledge Network* <https://aceproject.org/aceen/topics/vo/annex/voy/voy_et/mobile_browsing/onePag> accessed 15 June 2025.
[242] FDRE Constitution, (n 9) art 35(3).

representation.[243] It is through such political parties, where people choose their representatives. In the case of Ethiopia too, it is usually through these entities that candidates run for election. While the presence of independent candidates is common, political party-affiliated candidates tend to dominate the electoral space. Political parties still remain the major entities where citizens can choose their representatives.[244]

4.1 Women's Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle

The electoral cycle is a globally acknowledged framework that illustrates the main elements of the electoral process in a visual format. It views the organization and execution of elections as a continuous, cyclical process, rather than isolated events. The cycle is broken down into specific stages that occur before, during, and after the voting period.[245]

4.1.1 Pre- election

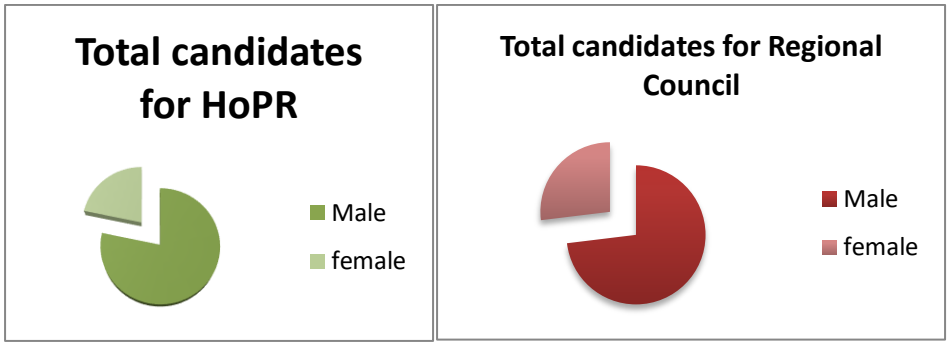
a) Candidate registration

The seats in the House of People's Representatives (HoPR) are based on single-member constituencies, meaning each of the 547 seats are won by a single candidate. For the sixth general election, there were a total of 1976 female candidates nationwide.[246] In Addis Ababa, there were 23 HoPR seats available. A total of 48 female candidates and 173 male candidates were nominated by 14 political parties, with women representing 21.7% of the total candidates.[247] For the 138 Addis Ababa City council seats, 234 women and 635 men were nominated as candidates, with female candidates making up 26.92% of the total.[248]

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[243] International IDEA, *The Role of Political Parties on Women's Participation and Representation*, International IDEA Technical Paper 1/2021 (October 2021) 2 <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/the-role-of-political-parties-on-womens-participation-and-representaion-en.pdf> accessed 1 September 2025.
[244] International IDEA, *The Role of Political Parties on Women's Participation and Representation* (n 243) 2.
[245] International Foundation for Electoral Systems, *Gender Equality & Election Management Bodies: A Best Practices Guide* (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2014) 19 <https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/migrate/gender_equality_and_emb_best_practices_guide_final_2.pdf> accessed 15 June 2025.
[246] National Election Board of Ethiopia, *CEDAW Performance Report* (NEBE, 2021).
[247] National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, *Addis Ababa – HOPR Candidate June Final June 16* (National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, June 2021) <https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/Addis%20Ababa%20-%20HOPR%20Candidate%20June%20Final%20June%2016.pdf> accessed 15 June 2025.
[248] NEBE, *Addis Ababa – HOPR Candidate June Final June 16* (n 247).

The pie chart below provides a visual representation of the data.[249]



b) Election campaign, airtime allocation and debates on TV and radio

Election campaign takes place from the beginning of receiving candidate certificate until four days until the election.[250] Political parties utilize this timeline to introduce their political programs and policy to the public.

Some interviewees mentioned being met with challenges during the campaign period. One female candidate stated "I experienced intimidation, including dismissive remarks from passerby –"*As if you are going to make a difference*".[251] Moreover she noted, the challenge was not only from the outside but I faced rejection from the men in our party as well as they wanted to gain more visibility during the campaigning period.[252] In contrast, some interviewees reported that the campaign process was generally uneventful. One interviewee noted that the NEBE had established a violence-against-women desk that responded promptly to complaints .[253] Another interviewee mentioned a female candidate from our party withdrew from the race just weeks before the election. Although she did not provide a clear reason for her decision, many of us believe she was intimidated into

[249] NEBE, *Addis Ababa – HOPR Candidate June Final June 16* (n 247).
[250] Proclamation No 1162/2019, (n 14) art 43.
[251] Interview with Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party female candidate for HoPR, 18 July 2025.
[252] Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party interview (n 251).
[253] Interview with EZEMA Party female candidate for RC in Bole, 18 July 2025.

stepping down.[254] Such incidents continue to hinder women's full and meaningful participation in the political process.

In addition, women's issues were sometimes overlooked during the campaign period, as opposition parties "*as the opposition parties sent male candidates to represent them in debates".*[255] Although airtime was allocated to all parties by the NEBE, the female candidates interviewed noted that the majority of this airtime was utilized by male candidates.

As for public debates between political parties, several concerns were raised. Interviewees noted that the debates lacked competitiveness, largely due to the absence of representatives from the ruling party.[256] As one participant shared, "*In Addis Ababa, the incumbent's representatives did not attend any of the debate platforms, denying us the opportunity to challenge each other's policies and viewpoints*".[257] Another recalled that major public television debates were even cancelled because "*only opposition party representatives showed up"*[258] These circumstances severely limit the potential for open and constructive discussion of political programs and policy alternatives. These platforms would have created a conducive environment for female candidates to fully represent their party's program.

4.1.2 Election-day and post-election period

While electoral law mandates that priority be given to certain groups, such as the elderly and pregnant women, [259] interviewees reported instances of unfair preferential treatment during Election Day. "*Candidates affiliated with the incumbent party were allegedly granted priority*

[254] Interview with Enat Party female candidate for RC in Yeka, 19 July 2025.
[255] Interview with Mesud Gebeyehu, Executive Director of CEHRO, 23 July 2025.
[256] EZEMA Party interview (n 253).
[257] EZEMA Party interview (n 253).
[258] EZEMA Party interview (n 253).
[259] Proclamation No 1162/2019, (n 14) art 52.

access at polling stations", despite there being no legal provision allowing such treatment[260] and while opposition candidates were not afforded the same treatment.

Regarding the election results, although political parties and their agents accepted the outcomes, several interviewees stated that this acceptance came with reservations.[261] There were also concerns about the competence of some electoral officials, who struggled to perform their duties thereby affecting the polling process. In addition, one interviewee cited "*lack of independence between NEBE election officers and government*[262]" as one reason to not fully accept the result.

Overall, as briefly mentioned above, women accounted for 21.7% of the total list of candidates for HoPR in Addis Ababa. On the other hand, female candidates made up almost 27% of the total number of candidates that competed for Addis Ababa Regional Council.

The following table depicts the number of male and female candidates for each party that competed in Addis Ababa.

Political party	Total number of candidates	Male candidates	Female candidate
All Ethiopian Unity Party	17	16	1
Balderas for True Democracy	23	18	5
Enat Party	23	22	1
Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice	23	21	2
Ethiopian Democratic Union	3	2	1
Ethiopian Freedom	2	2	0

[260] Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party interview (n 251).
[261] Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party interview (n 251).
[262] Enat Party interview (n 254).

Party			
Ethiopian National Unity Party	2	1	1
Ethiopian Peoples' Revolution Party	8	8	0
Ethiopian Social Democratic Party	11	9	2
Freedom and Equality Party	23	15	8
Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party	23	19	4
New Generation Party	13	8	5
Oromo Liberation Movement	3	2	1
Prosperity Party	22	13	9
Raya Rayuma Party	9	7	2

List of candidates for HoPR (Addis Ababa)[263]

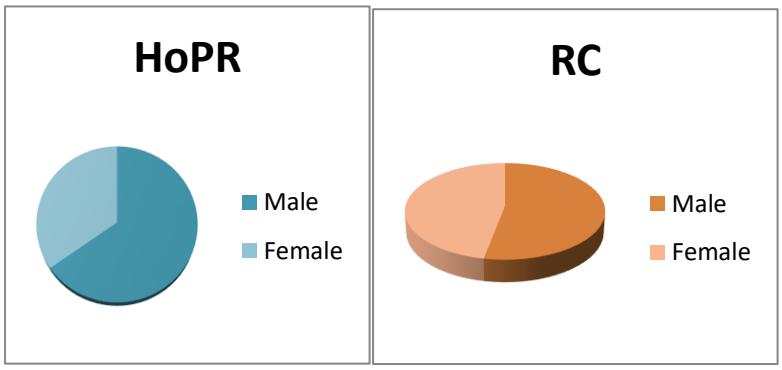
These figures helps one deduce that providing female candidates is on a voluntary basis thereby resulting in the fluctuation of female candidates. Nationwide political parties with the highest female candidates were Prosperity Party, Freedom and Equality Party and Balderas for True Democracy respectively nominating nine, eight and five female candidates for HoPR. On the

[263] NEBE, *Addis Ababa – HOPR Candidate June Final June 16* (n 247).

other hand parties submitted the lowest numbers of female candidates were Ethiopian Freedom Party, Ethiopian Peoples' Revolution Party, Enat Party, All Ethiopian Unity Party, Ethiopian National Unity Party and Oromo Liberation Movement.

4.2 Women's representation in the HoPR and RC in Addis Ababa

Following the most recent general election in Ethiopia in 2021, women accounted for 21.7 and 27% of competition in HoPR and RC. Out of this, eight women candidates were able to assume seat in the HoPR, accounting for 34.78% of the total seat for the 23 constituency in Addis Ababa. On the other hand, female winners for Addis Ababa City Council accounted for 46.37%. While the level of women's representation in both councils is commendable, it is important to note that all the elected female candidates came from a single political party. This reality shifts the focus from celebrating women's participation to questioning the broader inclusiveness of the electoral process. No opposition party candidates, both male and female, were able to secure seats in the HoPR and RC. These outcomes in a way show the limitations of the first the first-past-the-post electoral system, which often fails to reflect the diversity of political views and can hinder the representation of marginalized groups such as women.



Pie chart representing female winners in AA[264]

4.3 Women's representation within their political parties

Women's membership varies within various political parties. While some political parties have a significant participation of women as members, others have nominal participation.

[264] National Election Board of Ethiopia, *AA City Administration HoPR Election Results Table* (National Election Board of Ethiopia, 2025) <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1v08mgro21oDIcsQxv4E3E6h4cetOt_Fs/view> accessed 6 July 2025.

According to NEBE's gender audit conducted in 2020, out of 70 political parties, 12.8% did not have documents with the list of founding members disaggregated by sex. The proportion of women's membership was between 0.6% and 46.7%.[265] While NEBE is yet to have a recently developed an updated gender audit data, the following information showcases the current reality. For example, in Addis Ababa, Prosperity Party[266] has 800,000 members and above 350,000 of these members are women. This roughly means around 43.75% of the members are women. For Enat Party, a party whose first election took place in 2021, more than 15,000 of their members are women while the total numbers of their members are 47,000. This means women account for around 31% of the total number.[267] For Hibir party, around 1200 out of 11,000 are women accounting for 10.9%.[268]

According to the data gathered, women face challenges not only from external sources but also from within their own political parties. Many male members fail to support their female counterparts and often compete with them for limited opportunities. Furthermore, the majority of party leadership positions are held by men who rarely recognize the unique struggles that women face in politics. "*Almost all party's core management such as chairperson and vice chairperson, PR are in all political parties are men. The women's involvement in core committee is very minimal."*[269]

Although women makeup around 42% of the ruling Prosperity Party candidate, other opposition parties were not as successful in including a substantial amount of women in their candidate list. Even though parties adopted specific gender policies, only 13 parties qualified for additional funding for meeting the threshold requirement.[270]This undermines the promotion of participation of women for a country as big as Ethiopia.

The incentive package NEBE provides for political parties were found favorably by recipient parties. However, NEBE lacks the mechanism to ensure whether the funds provided for parties to

[265] National Election Board of Ethiopia, *Mapping of Political Parties and Gender Equality: National Case Study (Gender Audit of Political Parties)* (NEBE, December 2020).
[266]Interview, Head of Addis Ababa Women's League, Prosperity Party, 26 July 2025.
[267] Enat Party interview (n 254).
[268] Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party interview (n 251).
[269] Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party interview (n 251).
[270] International IDEA, Women's political participation African Barometer (n 124) 115.

incentivize women's participation is actually being used for the right reasons.[271] The effectiveness of the incentives remains a challenge as these funds are being used for various purposes such as rent, staff salaries, training and meetings.[272] This shows the need for NEBE to devise stronger mechanisms for check and balance regarding public funding.

4.4 The causes for the low level political participation of women in Ethiopia

The previous sections have shown the low level of women's political participation in nationwide political parties in Addis Ababa. This section will present the causes for the evident low participation of women in political parties.

From a legal standpoint, one interviewee mentioned that "*there are no mandatory quotas set under the election law*".[273] This has significantly affected women's participation in political parties as their participation was voluntary and not backed by mandatory requirement to allocate certain candidature numbers to females. This viewpoint was also shared by the NEBE legal department head who stated "*the incentive package that is bestowed for political parties to engage women is not enough, meaning this approach wasn't really effective; therefore, it may be a better approach to put a quota system".*[274] Moreover, a former NEBE board member stated that there are "*very limited provision within the electoral law with regards to incentivizing women's overall participation in general and increasing women's political participation in particular*".[275] While the electoral law does not have mandatory quota, as there are various provisions that are inclusive such as providing financial incentive for women as candidates and in leadership positions. However, there were shortcomings as the NEBE did not have an effective checking and monitoring mechanisms to check if indeed women were participating in the political arena.[276] This meant that while NEBE did award political parties financial incentive for number of women candidates and women in leadership position, it was unable to actually verify whether women are in fact participating through political parties makes the incentive mechanism ineffective.

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[271] Interview with Kibrework Neguissie, NEBE GESI Department Head, 5 September 2025.
[272] Firehiwot Sintayehu, Assessing the Effectiveness of Incentives in Enhancing Women's and PWDs representation in political parties and Elections (2025), pp. 52
[273] Interview with CECOE (Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections) representative, 31 July 2025
[274] Interview with Menen Abebe, NEBE Legal Department Head, 30 August 2025.
[275] Interview with Mme Bizuwork Kitet, Former Board Member of NEBE, 7 August 2025.
[276] Interview with Menen Abebe,(n 274).

Moreover cultural and social perceptions play a role in stagnating women's participation in the political arena. Ethiopia's deeply rooted patriarchal culture plays a significant role in discouraging women from participating in politics. Traditionally, women are expected to focus on domestic responsibilities, while politics is widely viewed as a male domain. "*Many women have psychological fear and don't want to pursue politics because their husband's, family and community are not supportive".*[277] Even when women are confident enough to join political parties with the intention of making valuable contribution to their communities, they are often times met with negative comments from people. "*Most people don't think we (women) can bring about change"*[278] says a candidate, which further discourages their spirit. Another respondent remarked, "*Our culture is discriminatory towards women; especially older people don't believe in women's capacity and believe Ethiopia's politics is not for women"*[279] There is a negative societal perception "*politics is only for women; however women are multidimensional and capable so they should be given a chance".*[280] Although violence against women in election (VAWiE) affects female voters throughout the electoral process, female candidates are also very susceptible to attacks or provocations. Being constantly ridiculed and verbally assaulted discourages them from pursuing their political aspirations. This type of narrow political space is intimidating and disheartening for candidates especially for women.

Limited access to quality education is another significant barrier to women's political participation. Many women do not progress far in their educational journey, and when they do, it is often for personal development rather than political engagement. "*I believe we as a country have not produced many women that are capable of reasoning out independently".*[281] This harsh reality affects a significant representation and decision-making. That is why educating women at grass root level is vital. One interviewee notes that "*education and exposure is the only empowering tool for women to come forward and engage in politics, as it boosts their*

[277] Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party interview (n 251).

[278] Interview with Enat Party candidate for RC in Nifas Silk Laphto (July 17, 2025)

[279] Interview with Mesud Gebeyehu (n 255)
[280] EZEMA Party interview (n 253).
[281] EZEMA Party interview (n 253).

confidence".[282] Moreover, the resistance and reluctance of women to join politics should not be taken lightly. While there is a shortage of educated and competent women, there is also notable reluctance among competent women who, in general, do not wish to enter political life.

Non-competitive political space also affects women's political participation. Interviewees expressed that the current political space is seen as harsh and intimidating for everyone. The harshness not only deters women but also men, who may be met with hostility. "*The political environment is the problem as many don't want to risk their safety. While it is difficult for men it is worse for women."*[283] Moreover, the political space is not inclusive of people from various walks of life has impacted women's participation. "*The political space is not free and inclusive."*[284] Moreover, the political space in general is not encouraging for women. "*Politics in Ethiopia is harsh and no one wants to face that kind of hardship."*[285] One female candidate notes as she expresses the difficulty. This further hinders women from political participation out of fear of jeopardizing their own and their family's safety.

Another factor that hinders women's participation is finances. A woman being economically disadvantaged not only discourages her confidence but also stops her from pursuing political aspiration. "*One's economy must be enhanced to fully and effectively deploy resources*"[286] one interviewee emphasized. Campaigning requires significant resources for personal expenses, logistics, and outreach. At present, political parties rely primarily on membership fees and limited funding from NEBE .[287] This usually restricts parties from doing extensive campaign and will only pick few locations or areas.[288]

[282] Interview with Mesud Gebeyehu (n 255)
[283] Enat Party interview (n 254).

[284] Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party interview (n 251).

[285] Enat Party interview (n 254).
[286] EZEMA Party interview (n 253).
[287] Enat Party interview (n 254).
[288] Enat Party interview (n 254).

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This thesis has tried to get a brief overview of women's participation in politics, with an emphasis on the most recent election to get the most recent information. From the findings of the study, it is apparent that there are various factors that hinder women's political participation all ranging from social factors to economic factors. While addressing all of these factors is the ultimate solution to increase women's participation, one also needs to look at the legal aspect as well.

During the result announcement of the most recent election, the number of women candidates that won differed in the two councils. For HoPR election, where only one winner get to win a seat in the 23 constituencies in Addis Ababa, the women who ended up getting elected were 34.78% of the total winners. On the other hand, for RC election, 47% of the winners were women. This shows that there is a 12% difference between winners of RC and HoPR.

In recent times, women's political participation has been based on voluntary initiative from the government which leads to an inconsistent implementation. While the government's initiation to increase women's representation is formidable, it being based on a voluntary basis and not emanating from law has led to inconsistent application of this. Participation should not be symbolic but rather meaningful and significant.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research from desk review and interview with relevant stakeholders, the writer would like to recommend the following points in regards to enhance women's participation in the political space:

- **For the NEBE:**
    - Conduct various ongoing sensitization programs so women at various levels in political parties are aware of their rights and duties. Additionally, strengthen the capacity building training NEBE rolls out to political party members, including women during the election period and should it periodic.

- Develop a more systemic financial support mechanism where women's participation is encouraged. Moreover, NEBE should establish a monitoring system to ensure if and whether the money is being used to address women's engagement within the political party.
- In collaboration with CSOs, conduct various targeted intensive civic education programs so the public, especially women are aware of their political rights.
- Ensure the implementation of electoral laws and conduct monitoring and evaluation to assess effectiveness.

- **For the Government:**
  - The government should play a vital role in strengthening participation by creating a safe and competitive political space free from intimidation.
  - Uphold its duty to cooperate with NEBE and other stakeholders to make sure the law is effectively implemented.
- **For CSOs:**
  - CSOs should take the initiative to provide civic education at grass root level so children are informed about political participation from a very young age.
  - In collaboration with the government, CSOs, through school curriculum and clubs, should create conducive platforms where children are able to exercise leadership from a young age.
- As a key actor in shaping public opinion, the media should provide balanced political coverage and actively support civic education efforts throughout the year to encourage citizen's participation.
- **For Political Parties:**
  - Political parties should themselves promote the meaningful participation of women beyond numbers. This could be achieved by exposing their members and candidates to trainings, mentorship and prominent roles.
- Political Parties Joint Council should be inclusive of women not only through the women's wing, but also through executive leadership positions.

- **On the electoral system:**
  - The legal framework should incorporate mandatory quota system as opposed to voluntary participation;
  - As to the electoral system itself, the writer recommends Ethiopia considers other forms of electoral systems such as the proportional representation with the aim of increasing the political participation of vulnerable groups such as women and PWDs.

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Annexes

Annex: 1 Interview Questions Prepared for the National Election Board Officials and CSOs

I am a graduate student from AAU, LLM in human rights law program looking into women's political participation in Ethiopia. I'd like to ask some questions about your thoughts and opinions regarding women in the political space.

I will be taking notes to help me remember your responses and the interview will be audio recorded, but all audio files will be destroyed after use. Knowing all of this, are you willing to participate in this discussion?

1. Respondent's Profile
   1.1 Sex: Male ___ Female ___
   1.2 Represented institution:
   1.3 Official capacity:
   1.4 Duration of engagement with the institution represented:

Interview questions

1. What measures were taken during the 6th General Election to increase women's participation as candidates and voters? (e.g., legal provisions, training, financial or media support)

2. What challenges did women face throughout the electoral process? (Include registration, campaigning, airtime access, safety, and post-election participation)

3. Were there any instances of gender-based discrimination or violence during the election? If so, how were they addressed?

4. What legal or institutional barriers still hinder women's political participation in Ethiopia?

5. How effective were collaborations between EMBs, CSOs, and political parties in promoting gender inclusion?

6. What practical steps should be taken to enhance women's representation in future elections?

7. What role can your institution play to improve women's political participation going forward?

Annex: 2: - Interview Questions Proposed for selected political parties

I am a graduate student from AAU, LLM in human rights law program looking into women's political participation in Ethiopia. I'd like to ask some questions about your thoughts and opinions regarding women in the political space.

I will be taking notes to help me remember your responses and the interview will be audio recorded, but all audio files will be destroyed after use. Knowing all of this, are you willing to participate in this discussion?

1. Respondent's Profile
   1.1 Sex: Male ___ Female ___
   1.2 Represented institution:
   1.3 Official capacity:
   1.4 Duration of engagement with the institution represented:

Interview questions

a) How many members does your party currently have, and how many of them are women?
b) How many female candidates did your party nominate for the 6th General Election in Addis Ababa?
    i. House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR): _____
    ii. Addis Ababa Regional Council:
c) Of the nominated female candidates, how many were successfully elected?
    i. House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR):
    ii. Addis Ababa Regional Council:
d) What specific measures or incentives did the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) introduce to promote female political participation?
e) Based on your experience, how effective were these measures in practice? (Please reflect on key stages such as candidate registration, ballot placement, airtime allocation, campaigning, and both during and after the election period).
f) In your view, what are the main reasons for the limited number of women running as candidates in Ethiopian politics?
g) Are there any legal, structural, or practical barriers that hinder women's full participation in political life? Please elaborate.

h) What concrete actions should be taken at the national level to strengthen women's representation within political parties and public office?
i) What additional recommendations do you have to enhance women's political participation in Ethiopia?
j) In your opinion, how has women's political participation evolved over the past two or three decades in Ethiopia?