



The Right to Political Participation of Women in Addis Ababa: Support Systems and Protection Mechanisms

By: **Selam Tesfaye**

Advisor: **Mizanie Abate (Ph.D.)**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of **Master of Laws (LL.M.) in Human Rights** at the School of Law, Addis Ababa University

July 2025

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Declaration of Originality

I, Selam Tesfaye, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted, either in part or in full, for the fulfillment of a degree at any other university or institution. I further affirm that all sources and materials referenced in the thesis have been properly acknowledged. The data collection and research processes were carried out in full compliance with established ethical standards.

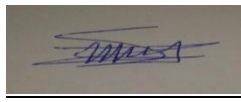
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAPPJ: Addis Ababa Political Parties Joint Council

AU: African Union

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

CSOs: Civil Society Organizations

EWLA: Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association

EZEMA: Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party

FDRE Constitution: Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

GBV: Gender Based Violence

HoPR: House of Peoples Representatives

ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

MoWSA: Ministry of Women and Social Affairs

NAMA: National Movement of Amhara

NEBE: National Election Board of Ethiopia

NEWA: Network of Ethiopian Women Associations

OAU: Organization of African Union

PP: Prosperity Party

UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN: United Nations

UPR: Universal Periodic Review

VAW-E: Violence Against Women in Election

VAW-P: Violence Against Women in Politics

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the availability and effectiveness of support and protection mechanisms for women politicians in Addis Ababa. It explores the extent to which legal frameworks, political parties, and other stakeholders contribute to the support, protection, empowerment, and meaningful participation of women in Ethiopia's political sphere, with a specific emphasis on the lived experience of women politicians in Addis Ababa. To achieve this, the study applies both doctrinal and non-doctrinal legal research methods. The doctrinal approach is used to analyze relevant national and international legal frameworks, while the non-doctrinal approach investigates practical realities through interviews with women politicians, political party representatives, CSOs, and government institutions. A purposive sampling method is used, and the data is analyzed qualitatively by comparing legal standards with real-life experiences. The findings reveal that although various stakeholders have introduced initiatives aimed at supporting and protecting women in politics, significant gaps remain. These gaps continued to hinder the promotion and safeguarding of women's meaningful participation in the political arena.

Key Words: women's political participation, support and protection mechanisms

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

A nation requires the involvement of all its citizens in every aspect of life, without any discrimination. True and lasting progress cannot be realised without the full engagement of all segments of the community. All forms of discrimination hinder citizen's participation and harm the community by limiting its ability to reach its full potential for the development of the state. Hence, every citizen should have equal opportunities to engage freely in all aspects of public life, without experiencing discrimination.

Political participation is an aspect of public life that can be broadly described as citizen's engagement in activities that impact a state's political process.¹ Joining political parties, running for office, and holding governmental decision-making positions are key aspects of political participation. However, the representation of women in these areas remains weak at the global level.² As the Inter-Parliamentary Union's report demonstrates, as of January 2025, the global representation of women in Parliament constitutes 27.2%, while in East Africa, it stands at 32.1%.³ Furthermore, research by Seblewongiel and Eden revealed that the percentage of women candidates for the Federal Parliament from Prosperity Party (PP), Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA), National Movement of Amhara (NAMA), and ENAT political parties during the 6th National Election of Ethiopia were 41%, 3.7%, 1.4%, and 6.4% respectively. The

¹ Jan W.van Deth, What is Political Participation?, Department of Political Sociology, University of Mannheim, 2021, Page 2.

² Dr. Pankaj Kumar, Participation of Women in Politics: Worldwide Experience, Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Volume 22, Issue 12, 2017

³Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Politics, 2025, https://data.ipu.org/women-averages/?date_month=1&date_year=2025 Accessed 10 February 2025.

percentage of women candidates for the City and State Councils from these parties was 41.6%, 14%, 3.8%, and 10.9% respectively.⁴

To address such gaps, there are many international and regional legal frameworks with many signatory states, including Ethiopia. These legal frameworks include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)⁵, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women⁶, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)⁷, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)⁸, and Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa (The Maputo Protocol).⁹

In addition to these international and regional legal frameworks, states also have domestic laws promoting women's political participation. In the case of Ethiopia, the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE Constitution) is a key example. The Constitution provides equal opportunities for both men and women, allowing for affirmative action to compensate women for the historical discrimination they have faced.¹⁰

Equal participation of women in politics benefits not only women themselves but also society and the nation as a whole. When all citizens have equal participation in the political process and leadership, it can foster a high quality of development in all areas. In contrast, the underrepresentation of certain segments of the population, such as women, hinders the quality of governance and leadership, as the country is not fully enjoying the capacity of its citizens.

Although Ethiopia is a signatory to the international and regional laws mentioned above and has a constitution that supports women's political participation, women's involvement is still limited. Following the reform brought by the new government, many positive changes occurred, including

⁴ Seblewongiel Kidanie and Eden Hailu, Women's Participation in Ethiopia's 2021 Elections: The Role of Political Parties, Volume 23, No 1, 2024

⁵ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 21

⁶ Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Article 1-3.

⁷ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Article 7

⁸ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 3 and 25.

⁹ Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa (The Maputo Protocol), Article 9.

¹⁰ The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Article 35(1).

women taking on prominent political and decision-making roles. The first woman president was elected during this period¹¹, and 10 women were appointed as ministers.¹² However, this progress was short-lived, as most of the women ministers and the first female president have since been replaced by men¹³. Some women resigned voluntarily, while others lost their positions when their terms ended.¹⁴ The resignation of some women officials and the replacement of others by men, without maintaining the previous number of women in leadership, suggested that there are factors preventing women from continuing their political careers.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

As stated above, international, regional, and national laws recognize political participation and involvement in public affairs as basic human rights. Taking part in politics and leadership helps women fully enjoy their other rights and freedoms. However, giving women the right to participate in politics is not enough if there are no support and protection mechanisms in place to ensure meaningful participation. Failure to design effective support and protection mechanisms might lead to minimal participation of women in political participation and leadership roles and it might threaten women's ability to fully enjoy their human rights. Additionally, it will hinder the country's growth by preventing the full utilization of its human resources in this area.

As the researcher tries to states in the above section, after Prime Minister Dr. Abiy came to power, women were briefly active in Ethiopia's politics, but their higher positions didn't last. Even before the reforms, women were rarely seen in long-term political roles. The increase in the number of women politicians holding higher positions, followed by the rapid shift in such numbers over a relatively short period of time, can serve as a significant indicator that something is not quite right.

¹¹Who is Sahlework Zewde, Ethiopia's first female president? https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/27/who-is-sahle-work-zewde-ethiopias-first-female-president?utm_source=chatgpt.com Accessed 14 February 2025.

¹²Ethiopia: Women occupy 50 percent of new cabinet, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/16/ethiopia-women-occupy-50-percent-of-new-cabinet?utm_source=chatgpt.com Accessed 20 February 2025.

¹³Ethiopia president replaced after falling out with PM, https://clubofmozambique.com/news/ethiopia-president-replaced-after-falling-out-with-pm-267699/?utm_source=chatgpt.com Accessed 20 February 2025.

¹⁴ Council of ministers of Abiy Ahmed, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Ministers_of_Abiy_Ahmed?utm_source=chatgpt.com Accessed 20 February 2025.

This quick change might suggest that the political system is not allowing women to maintain long-term positions, or that their advancement into these roles may not be based on a consistent supportive structure. The underlying issue could be the lack of necessary support and protection mechanisms from various stakeholders, such as government bodies, political parties, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Without proper systems in place, women may face barriers like inadequate training, insufficient mentorship, or even social and cultural pressures that hinder their ability to stay in the political system. These challenges can undermine the sustainability of their political involvement, where they may enter politics due to enabling laws but withdraw because of the absence of supportive and protective mechanisms. Therefore, the researcher believes that the available support and protection mechanisms for women in politics should be studied, as these factors are crucial for enabling women to exercise their political rights.

The proposed research will explore the legal protection, support systems, and the role of political parties and stakeholders in promoting women's political participation, along with the personal experience of women politicians in Addis Ababa.

1.3. Research Questions

The core questions addressed by this study are: “What are the existing support systems and protection mechanisms for women politicians in Ethiopia? And “How effective are they in promoting and safeguarding their political participation?”

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following specific research questions.

- ✓ Are there adequate laws, policies, or initiatives that protect and support women in the political sphere in Ethiopia?
- ✓ What institutional support systems are available to empower women in political roles in Ethiopia?
- ✓ How effective are political parties and other stakeholders in promoting women's right to participate in politics?
- ✓ What are the personal experiences of women politicians in Addis Ababa regarding the support and protection mechanisms available to them in their political lives?

1.4. Objective of the Study

General Objective

The primary aim of this study is to examine the current support structures and protection measures available to women politicians in Ethiopia.

Specific Objectives

- To explore international and regional human rights standards regarding the right to political participation, as well as support and protection for women politicians.
- To examine existing legal mechanisms providing support and protection for women politicians in Ethiopia;
- To explore the protection and support mechanisms in place for women involved in politics in Ethiopia;
- To assess the personal experiences of women politicians in Addis Ababa regarding the support and protection mechanisms available to them in their political careers;
- To explore the role of political parties, CSOs, and other stakeholders in empowering women politicians.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study will contribute to evaluating the effectiveness of existing support and protection mechanisms and provide insights into how to better facilitate women's engagement in the political process. The study will also shed light on the challenges that women are facing in their political participation and offer actionable strategies for overcoming these challenges. Furthermore, it will provide concrete recommendations for policy change, highlight the success and limitations of the current support and protection system, and ultimately contribute to the broader goal of advancing gender equality in the political sphere of the country.

1.6. Literature Review

Many Studies, articles, and research across various fields demonstrated that women's political participation and decision-making roles remain low, highlighting several challenges that hinder their involvement. Chala's research emphasizes the gap between legal opportunities for women

and the reality they face.¹⁵ While there are laws supporting equal political participation, Chala found that women in Ethiopia are still not equally represented in politics and leadership positions. He recommended better implementation of existing laws, the adoption of a gender equality policy, and the introduction of gender quotas for membership, candidacy, and leadership positions. Similarly, Bogie Kene's study¹⁶ identifies the underrepresentation of women in local politics, attributing it to factors such as unequal education opportunities, traditional gender roles, and economic dependence. He recommends legal and institutional reforms, creating civic programs for women and gender mainstreaming to address this barrier.

Minase Getahun's research¹⁷ also emphasizes that, despite available opportunities, women's participation remains limited due to a lack of recognition of their potential by key stakeholders, who continue to believe women are adequately represented. He advocates for the implementation of a quota system and awareness-raising activities to change societal attitudes and improve women's political engagement.

Nigist Shiferaw¹⁸ study explores the challenges faced by local governments in meeting indicators for promoting women's participation in decision-making bodies. She points to insufficient technical capacity, lack of a clear gender equality strategy, and negative community attitudes as key obstacles. Nigist recommends gender mainstreaming training for government staff, prioritizing gender equality in performance appraisals, and establishing committees to monitor women's participation in governance.

¹⁵ Chala Ture, *Political Participation of Women in Ethiopia: Law and Reality*, 2022.

¹⁶ Bogie Kene, *Political participation of women at the local level: the case of Sebeta Town Administration, Oromia National Regional State*, a thesis submitted to the Center of Federal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a Masters Degree in Federal Studies, 2016.

¹⁷ Minase Getahun, *Factors Affecting the Political Participation of Women, The Case of Arada Sub-City Woreda 07 Council Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*, Research Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Masters of Art in Political Science, 2018.

¹⁸ Nigist Shiferaw, *Women's participation at local government decision-making bodies: A case study in Amhara Regional State, South Wollo Zone, Ethiopia*, A thesis submitted to Larenstien University of Professional Education in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Masters of Development, specializing social inclusion gender and rural livelihood, 2008.

Tesfaye Alemu's study¹⁹ explores gender inequality in leadership positions, highlighting factors like educational gaps, household responsibilities, traditional attitudes, and men's sense of superiority. His recommendations include providing psychological support and training for women leaders to build their self-confidence.

Last but not least, Bizuneh Getachew's²⁰ research underscores the minimal representation of women in local government and their reluctance to engage in political activities, largely due to domestic responsibilities and fear of intimidation. Like Tesfaye, Bizuneh called for stronger government support and commitment to enhance women's political engagement. This recommendation is crucial, as such support systems are necessary to promote women in politics, and the availability of such practice should be researched rather than merely recommended.

These studies highlight the challenges women face in political participation, such as unequal education, traditional gender roles, economic dependence, and societal attitudes. While they emphasize key barriers, they lack a detailed analysis of the support and protection mechanisms available to help women overcome social, economic, and cultural challenges in politics. Without these protections, enabling laws become ineffective, and women may struggle to fully engage in the political process.

Therefore, the author of this study believes that the availability of support and protection mechanisms for women politicians is crucial to promoting and sustaining their involvement in politics. Political mentoring programs, legal protections, safe spaces, and emotional support are some of the key components of such mechanisms. Without these, many women may be forced to abandon their political careers due to the overwhelming challenges they face in the political arena. The availability of legal provisions for women's equal participation in politics should be reviewed from this perspective.

¹⁹ Tesfaye Alemu, *The role of women's participation in leadership and decision-making position: The case of Ginir Town Administration in Oromia Regional state*, 2020.

²⁰ Bizuneh Getachew, *Women political participation at a local government in Ethiopia: The case of Sebeta Town*, 2016.

1.7. Scope of the study

The study will mainly focus on the international, regional, and National laws of Ethiopia related to women's political participation. It will focus on the personal experiences of women politicians living in Addis Ababa, especially women who are or were members of political parties.

1.8. Research Methodology

The study will employ both doctrinal and qualitative types of legal research. The doctrinal type will be used to assess legal frameworks that protect and support women in the political sphere of Ethiopia. The study will also employ a qualitative type of legal research to meet its objectives, other than examining existing laws on the support and protection of women politicians.

1.8.1. Source of Data

The study will use both primary and secondary sources of data to acquire adequate information and to achieve its objectives. Primary data will be gathered from women politicians, political parties, individuals working in CSOs (mainly women rights-based organizations), the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), the Addis Ababa Political Parties Joint Council (AAPPJC), and the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA). International and regional human rights instruments, the EFDRE Constitution, and other national legal frameworks will also be used as primary document sources of data. Books, Journal Articles, policy documents, and online sources will be used as secondary sources of data.

1.8.2. Population and Sampling

The researcher will use a purposive sampling technique to identify and select women politicians living in Addis Ababa, as well as political parties registered at the federal level. Currently, 21 political parties are registered at the federal level. The researcher plans to engage with all these political parties, approaching 10 of them through their party representatives and the remaining 11 through their women members. This approach will enable the researcher to engage with all political parties registered at the federal level, explore their efforts in promoting, protecting, and supporting women politicians, and gain a deeper understanding of the experience of women politicians themselves.

The researcher will interview 9 key informants selected purposively for this study. Those interviewees will be 1 from NEBE, 1 from MoWSA, 1 from the AAPPJC, 3 former women politicians, and 3 from three different CSOs.

1.8.3. Methods of Data Collection

The researcher will develop an interview guide to gain greater insight and an in-depth understanding of the topic. The interviews will help the researcher obtain comprehensive information about the available support and protection systems for women politicians in Addis Ababa. Focus group discussions will be conducted on issues requiring more clarification and explanation.

1.8.4. Methods of Data Analysis

The data gathered from both primary and secondary sources will be systematically organized and presented in thematic sub-sections, according to their similarities and interrelations. A qualitative approach will be employed for the analysis, utilizing descriptive methods. Data will be analyzed qualitatively based on descriptive analysis. Furthermore, relevant facts and perspectives will be compared to enhance the reliability and comprehensiveness of findings.

1.9. Referencing and Citation Style

The study will use footnotes to acknowledge others' work within the text or to further explain concepts raised in the text. The OSCOLA referencing style will be used throughout the study for reference. The citation rules of Addis Ababa University, School of Law, and the Journal of Ethiopian Law will be used for citing domestic laws.

1.10. Limitation of the Study

The major limitation of this study is the reluctance of some political parties to participate in interviews. Their unwillingness stemmed from a lack of trust in the political system, which they perceived as being inherently dishonest and unsuitable for both women and men. Another significant limitation was time constraints, as the researcher conducted this study alongside a full-time job, which limited the time available for data collection and analysis. Additionally, the women politician who agreed to participate in the interview placed a strong emphasis on confidentiality

and was initially hesitant to engage. However, the researcher was able to gather their responses by assuring them that their identities and input would remain strictly confidential.

Another limitation was the unavailability of the final, approved version of Ethiopia's Election, Political Parties Registration, and Election Code of Conduct Law. Although this proclamation was endorsed by the House of Peoples Representatives (HoPR) on July 17, 2025, the researcher was unable to access the officially published version at the time of writing, up to the date of thesis submission. As a result, only the draft version of the proclamation has been referenced in this study.

1.11. Organization of the Study

The study will have five chapters. The first chapter of the study contains the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, objective of the study, significance of the study, literature review, scope of the study, research methodology, referencing and citation styles, and organization of the paper. In the second chapter, the researcher will unpack the concept, history, benefits of, and barriers to women's political participation. Chapter three will discuss the international and regional human rights standards on the right to political participation and support and protection for women politicians. Chapter four will analyze the law and the practice concerning the support and protection mechanisms for women politicians. It will specifically assess the institutional support system, the effectiveness of political parties and other stakeholders in promoting women's political participation, and, the personal experiences of women politicians. Finally, the fifth chapter will provide conclusive remarks on the matter and offer recommendations on what needs to be done to address the identified problem.

CHAPTER TWO

2. WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: DEFINITION, FACETS, EVOLUTION, BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

2.1. Introduction

This chapter explores women's political participation, emphasizing the definition of political participation, evolution and benefits of women political participation, and the challenges women face in the political sphere. While significant progress has been made, with women gaining the right to vote and hold office, numerous barriers still exist. These include psychological, economic, socio-cultural, and institutional challenges, as well as violence against women in politics (VAWP), which further discourages their involvement. The chapter highlights the advantage of increasing women's political participation and the ongoing efforts needed to achieve gender equality in politics.

2.2. An Overview of Political Participation

The word "participation" refers to allowing citizens to engage meaningfully in decision-making processes that impact them or that they care about.²¹ When the word 'participation' becomes more specific to politics, it lacks a universally agreed-upon definition. Some definitions are overly restrictive, focusing solely on actions like voting rights. In contrast, others are vague and expansive, making it difficult to determine what activities qualify as political participation. The narrow definition of political participation focuses only on citizens voting in elections.²² However, this view is too restrictive, as it excludes many other important forms of political involvement. Political Participation should encompass a wider range of activities beyond just voting. The

²¹ Bruce L. Smith, Public Policy and Public Participation Engaging Citizens and Community in the Development of Public Policy, Prepared for Population and Public Health Branch, Atlantic Regional Office, Health Canada, 2003, Page 34.

²² Jerome M Culp, Edited Comments on Political Participation, 1995, Page 399.

broader definition refers to citizen's right to influence public matters, which could involve voting, running for office, joining political parties, participating in protests, or other related activities.²³

2.3. The Rights and Forms of Political Participation

There is no right more important than the ability to choose those who make the laws that citizens must follow.²⁴ One of the primary methods of exercising political rights is through voting and running for office, which reflects the will of the people. Participation in elections determines the makeup of legislative and executive bodies, which subsequently impacts policy-making.²⁵

The right to vote grants the electorate legal power, as it provides individuals with the authority to elect public officials.²⁶ Some argue that voting is a source of power because it enables citizens to gain political influence.²⁷ Therefore, denying someone the right to vote is equivalent to denying his or her political power. As a result, when this right is restricted, the political power of citizens is diminished. This implies that a state which restricts the voting rights of its citizens is treating them as inferiors.

The right to run for office is another important aspect of political participation, distinct from voting rights. In a democratic system, the right to be a candidate and stand for office is as crucial as the right to vote and to hold free, fair, and regular elections.²⁸ The most common way to exercise political participation is by engaging in elections as both voters and candidates.

Beyond voting and running for office, citizens can exercise their political rights by holding legislative, executive, and administrative positions. Participating in policy-making and

²³ Godwin Ihemeje, Patriotism, Political Participation, and Women's Rights: A Critical Analysis of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, *Journal of Politics and Law*, Vol 9, No. 9, 2016, Page 16.

²⁴ *Wesberry V. Sanders*, 376 U.S. (1964). As Cited in, Bobby Scott Congressman, Voting Rights <https://bobbyscott.house.gov/issues/voting-rights?page=3>

²⁵ Ludvig Beckman, Legal Power and the Right to Vote: Does the Right to Vote Confer?, Article in *Canadian Journal of Law & Jurisprudence*, 2017, Page 5.

²⁶ *Id*, Page 21.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁸ Loammi Wolf, The right to stand as an independent candidate in national and provincial elections: *MAJOLA V The President*, Article in *South Africa Journal on Human Rights*, 2024, page 170.

implementation, as well as joining political parties, are other ways to engage in politics. Additionally, representing the country abroad, such as by serving as a diplomat, is another way for citizens to exercise their political rights.

2.4. Women's Political Participation: A Global Overview

The right to political participation for women is a relatively recent development. Historically, men have dominated public life, often using their power to restrict and marginalize women in their private lives.²⁹ However, over the past century, the increasing involvement and representation of women in formal political arenas has emerged as one of the most impactful developments in global politics.³⁰ Within just over a century, women gained the right to vote and to be elected to represent their interests in parliament.³¹ For instance, New Zealand became the first country to extend voting rights to women in 1893, paving the way for many other nations to follow.³²

In addition to gaining the right to vote, women began to be represented in national parliaments. Finland elected its first female parliamentarian in 1970,³³ the Soviet Union had 10% women in its parliament by 1946, Germany reached 30% female representation in 1967, and more recently, in 2013,³⁴ Rwanda achieved 64% female representation in its parliament.³⁵

Over the past 25 years, the percentage of women in parliament has progressed significantly. Globally, the overall percentage of women in parliaments increased from 11.3% in 1995 to nearly

²⁹ CEDAW General Recommendation No. 23, 1997, Paragraph 8.

³⁰ Pamela Paxton, Melanie M. Hughes, Matthew A. Painter, Growth in Women's Political Representation: A Longitudinal Exploration of Democracy, Electoral System and Gender Quotas, 2010, Page 25.

³¹ Ibid

³² A Brief History of Women and the Vote in New Zealand New Zealand women get the vote (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/sites/default/files/documents/womenandthevoteinNewZealand.pdf>) Accessed 23 February 2025.

³³ Women's Role in Finish Democracy Building, The Finish Experience, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Page 13.

³⁴ Supra note 30

³⁵ Revisiting Rwanda five years after record-breaking parliamentary elections, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/8/feature-rwanda-women-in-parliament> Accessed 28 February 2025.

double that at 24.9% in 2020.³⁶ In 1995, out of 174 countries, women held less than 10% of seats in the lower house of parliament in 109 countries.³⁷ In contrast, by 2020, out of 191 countries, only 24 had less than 10% women representation in their lower house.³⁸ By January 2012, only 17% of global government ministers were women, the majority of whom oversaw social sectors, such as education and health.³⁹ In 2013, the percentage of women parliamentarians rose to 21.8%, an increase of 1.5 percentage points, double the average rate of increase during the years near to 2013.⁴⁰ At that time, 8 women served as Head of State, and 13 as Head of Government.⁴¹ The global percentage of women in parliament reached 27.2% in 2025.⁴²

The 2023 edition of the Women in Politics Map, published by UN Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, shows that while women's participation in political decision-making has increased globally, gender equality has yet to be reached. As of January 2023, out of 151 countries, only 17 have women serving as Heads of State, and out of 193 countries, only 19 have women serving as Heads of Government.⁴³ Europe remains the region with the highest number of women leaders. According to the map, the global share of women parliamentarians during 2021 increased from 25.5% to 26.5%, and the percentage of women Speakers of Parliament grew from 20.9% to 22.7% in the same year. In 2021, women held 22.8% of ministerial positions globally. The Map revealed that men continued to dominate ministries like the economy, defense, and justice.

³⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Parliament: 1995-2020.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ UN Women, Women's Leadership and Political Participation, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/12/UN%20WomenLGThemBriefUSwebrev2%20pdf.pdf> Accessed 3 March 2025.

⁴⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Parliament in 2013.

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Parliament 1995-2025, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2025-03/women-in-parliament-1995-2025>

⁴³ Women in Politics 2023, <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2023/03/women-in-politics-2023-womens-participation-in-politics-is-still-far-from-equality> Accessed 4 March 2025.

2.5. Justification for Women's Political Participation

Women make up just over half of the global population.⁴⁴ Due to their involvement in both productive and reproductive activities, they contribute significantly to social and economic development, often matching or exceeding men's contribution. Despite this, their participation and representation in formal politics remain limited.

There are several compelling reasons to support the increased political participation of women, which can be seen as advantageous from various viewpoints. The argument for enhancing women's political involvement can be framed through a human rights lens or from a broader benefit perspective. The benefits of such enhancement can be observed in several areas, including for women themselves, political parties, and society at large. From the perspective of women, it encourages more women to run for office, shifts societal attitudes toward women's capacities, and boosts their confidence in shaping political agendas within parties and parliaments.⁴⁵ For political parties, it improves their image, strengthens their policies and programs, and enhances their electoral strategies.⁴⁶ Society benefits from more equitable representation in government and a deeper understanding of gender issues in the public sphere.⁴⁷

Women's involvement in politics is crucial for promoting gender equality and genuine democracy, as it enables them to actively shape public policies and ensures greater accountability to their needs.⁴⁸ Moreover, it is better to bring more women to leadership positions, as they value accountability, can improve interpersonal relationships, are better mentors, and can negotiate in high-stake situations.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Global Population 2000-2023, by Gender, Published by Enar H. Dyvik, Feb 12, 2025.

⁴⁵ Journal of Political Science and Public Affairs, Department of Political Science, Obafemi, Awolowo University, Osun, Nigeria, Vol 11, Iss. 2, No. 1000025.

⁴⁶ Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties, 2014, Page 32

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ UN Women, Political Participation of Women, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/governance/political-participation-of-women> Accessed 5 March 2025

⁴⁹ Patcha Bhujanga Rao, Vijay Bhaskar Reddy, The Role of Women in Leadership Positions and Their Effects on Corporate Culture, Article in International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR), 2023, Page 703 and 704.

The percentage of women in national parliaments can be seen as an indicator of a nation's democratic status.⁵⁰ A country cannot be considered democratic if women are not equally represented in politics and leadership roles. Allowing women to participate equally in politics can improve a country's image as women tend to bring different perspectives, and skills to the table.⁵¹ Research also indicates that women's leadership brings various societal benefits, including reduced inequalities, greater collaboration across political and ethnic divides, and a stronger focus on social issues such as health and education.⁵² Women's skills, knowledge, and expertise are valuable leadership assets that cannot be fully utilized if women are underrepresented in politics. Furthermore, women excel in negotiation, especially in conflict situations.

Having more women in politics helps strengthen the legitimacy of the decision-making bodies and the result of their decisions as equal representation is a key sign of democracy.⁵³ Global leaders agree that gender equality is not just the right thing to do but also the wise one.⁵⁴ This belief comes from the idea that women can contribute to economic growth by improving productivity.

Overall, women's political participation is vital for achieving gender equality and true democracy. It allows women to directly influence public decisions, ensure greater accountability to their needs, and contributes to a more inclusive and fair society. It helps reduce inequality and can inspire other women, particularly the young generation, to get involved in politics.

2.6. Women's Political Participation: Challenges and Barriers

The underrepresentation of women in politics implies that many challenges are hindering their involvement. The researcher aims to discuss some of these challenging factors as follows.

⁵⁰ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties, 2014, Page 30.

⁵¹ Charlie Jacob, The Significance of Women's Political Participation Towards Gender Equality, Journal of Political Science and Public Affairs, Vol. 11, Iss 2, Page 1.

⁵² UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Women's Political Participation and Leadership, Page 2.

⁵³ Kristen Kao, Ellen Lust, Marwa Shalaby, and Ghagai M. Weiss, Female representation and Legitimacy: Evidence from a Harmonized Experiment in Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, 2024, Page 502.

⁵⁴ Supra note 50, Page 41

2.6.1. Psychological Factor

Society, including women, tends to view politics as a domain reserved only for men, believing that women are not suited for it.⁵⁵ Psychological readiness is a key factor for political participation. Even if individuals have the necessary knowledge and resources, they will not engage in politics without psychological preparation. Family and community can influence women's psychological readiness. Gender norms and social prospects play a substantial role in how women perceive their ability to engage in various activities, including politics. The culture that promotes women's dependency on men and confines them to tasks related to housekeeping significantly harms women's self-confidence.

2.6.2. Economic Factor

The cultural mindset of the world community places women at an economic disadvantage, which affects their involvement in politics.⁵⁶ Lack of economic resources is a major barrier preventing women from participating more in politics.⁵⁷ Women rarely have control over their finances, as the husband typically manages all household finances. As a result, women often need permission from the head of the family to make any financial decisions. Even when women have their own income, it is often controlled by men. This makes it difficult for women to organize campaigns or attend political meetings, which require transportation costs. This economic dependence on men is a significant reason why women participate less in politics.

2.6.3. Factors related to Political Parties

The Lack of support from political parties is also a major barrier that women politicians face, as most parties are male-dominated.⁵⁸ Political parties are often seen as the primary cause of women's underrepresentation, as they act as the main gatekeepers to elected positions of power and decision-making at all levels.⁵⁹ Traditional, patriarchal structures within parties often limit women's

⁵⁵ Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008, Page 19.

⁵⁶ IPR Report, Barriers to Women Entering Parliament and Local Government, 2018, Page 30.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Aradhana Sharma, Challenges Faced by Women Leadership in Politics, International Journal of Political Science and Governance, 2019, Page 61.

⁵⁹ Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, Role of Political Parties on Women's Participation and Representation, Page 4.

opportunities, prioritizing men for leadership roles and nominations. Political Parties play an important role in shaping women's opportunities to access positions of power, both within the parties themselves and in elected political officials at the national and local levels.

2.6.4. Socio-cultural Factors

To this day, the culture around the world confines women in household roles. The patriarchal system strongly supports this limited role for women, making it harder for them to focus on personal development or get involved in politics. From childhood, women are expected to be obedient and submissive wives and mothers, with many parents seeing marriage as their daughter's primary goal.

Scholars argued that the main issue lies in the patriarchal system, where men hold the power to make decisions.⁶⁰ Many women, even if educated and working, still face the expectation of being homemakers, while men are seen as the leaders of the household, with rights to engage in public life. Therefore, even when women decide to engage in politics, they often struggle to balance their household responsibilities.

The time constraint that women have is also an impact of cultural gender roles. The unequal distribution of family care responsibilities among husband and wife forces women to spend more time on childcare, and allocating little time for activities outside their home. This makes it difficult for women to be involved in politics, as it requires time for meetings, campaigns, and other activities. It also prevents them from pursuing higher education, which is essential for political engagement.

2.6.5. Lack of Access to Education

Illiteracy is a major obstacle to women's political participation.⁶¹ Education is crucial for one's personal development and leadership roles. Without better education for women and girls, progress in their political participation is unlikely. Although more children attend school, girls still face

⁶⁰ Josephine M. Kiamba, *Women and Leadership Positions: Social and Cultural Barriers to Success*, Vol. 6, 2008, Page 12.

⁶¹ Najib Khan, Muhammad Jawad, Saima Sarir, Malik Muhammad Shafi, *Assessing the Impact of Education on Women's Political Participation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan*, Vol. 7, 2021, Page 1027.

significant challenges in education.⁶² In many countries, girls and boys start school at the same rate, but girls often struggle to finish their education as they get older.⁶³ In sub-Saharan Africa, girls are still unlikely to attend school at any educational stage.⁶⁴

2.6.6. Religious Factors

The position of women in society is shaped by the interpretation of religious texts, as well as the culture and institutional framework of religious communities.⁶⁵ The link between religion and gender equality can be understood through the idea that more religious societies tend to accept the authority of religious leaders, who promote a patriarchal social structure.⁶⁶ As a result, religion is a key factor that discourages women from being bold and participating in politics or leadership positions by assigning the decision-making role to men.

2.6.7. Violence Against Women in Politics (VAW-P)

VAW-P is not just physical or sexual; it also includes efforts to silence or prevent women from being active and heard in public life.⁶⁷ Equal participation in politics is essential for a democratic system and national growth that benefits all citizens, including women. VAW-P threatens women's ability to enjoy these benefits. Fighting against VAW-P is the first step toward removing barriers for women in politics and making politics accessible to everyone.

VAW-P aims to stop women from participating in politics and gaining access to power. It is a worldwide issue that occurs everywhere across the world and can affect any woman in politics,

⁶² Global Literacy Trends: Statistics on Progress and Challenges in Underrepresented Regions, December 26, 2024, <https://www.matsh.co/en/statistics-on-global-literacy-progress-challenges/> Accessed 10 March 2025.

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Progress on Girl's Access to Education: What the New UNESCO Data Reveals, Last updated on March 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/progress-girls-access-education-what-new-unesco-data-reveals#:~:text=In%20sub-Saharan%20Africa%2C%20girls,to%2050%25%20of%20boys>) Accessed 11 March 2025.

⁶⁵ Kamila KLINGOROVA, Tomas HAVLICEK, Religion and Gender Inequalities: The Status of Women in the Societies of World Religions, Vol. 23, 2015, Page 2.

⁶⁶ Id, Page 9.

⁶⁷ Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics in the OSCE Region Toolkit Tool 1: Introduction to Violence Against Women in Politics, Page 1.

regardless of their religion and ethnicity. Some women accept this violence as part of being in politics while others remain silent without reporting it to protect their reputation, out of fear of more abuse, or because they fear being blamed for the violence. Even if they decide to report the violence, there are no effective systems in place to report it and seek support.⁶⁸

VAW-P affects not only women currently involved in politics but also discourages the new generation from entering politics, as no one wants to become a victim. VAW-P can take physical, sexual, economic, or psychological forms.⁶⁹ Physical violence involves threats or harm to a woman's body, including beatings and assassination.⁷⁰ Sexual violence includes rape, sexual assault, and sexist insults.⁷¹ Economic violence can be defined as any action or behaviour that results in financial damage to an individual.⁷² Therefore, we can link it to women political participation, such as damage to campaign materials or denial of funding and financial support. Psychological violence can include degrading talk with sexual connotations.⁷³ There must be a collaborative effort to eliminate VAW and VAW-P.

2.7. Conclusion

Women's political participation plays a pivotal role in the development and democratization of any society. The benefits of increasing women's political participation are undeniable. A more inclusive and diverse political system can lead to more effective governance, stronger political legitimacy, and higher levels of public trust. The presence of women in political roles not only enhances democracy but also contributes to the prioritization of important social issues. Moreover, the experiences and perspectives that women bring to the table are invaluable.

⁶⁸ Id, Page 14.

⁶⁹ Addressing Violence against Women in Politics In the OSCE Region Toolkit, Tool 5: Support and Encouragement for Women in Politics, Page 5.

⁷⁰ The National democratic Institute, Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics, 2022, Page 3.

⁷¹ World Health Organization: Violence Against Women, Fact Sheet, 2014.

⁷² European Institute for Gender Equality, Understanding Economic Violence Against Women.

⁷³ UN Women, Data and Violence Against Women in Politics, Expert Group Meeting Report and Recommendations, 2029, Page 10.

The evolution of women's political participation reflects a significant shift towards greater inclusion and representation in political processes globally. From being marginalized and excluded from formal politics, women have steadily gained the right to vote, run for office, and hold political offices, resulting in positive changes in many countries. While there has been significant progress, the journey towards full gender equality in political participation remains an ongoing challenge. Despite the strides made in increasing the number of women in politics, women still face numerous barriers. These challenges range from psychological and socio-cultural factors to economic constraints, political party dynamics, and limited access to education. VAW-P further complies with this issue, deterring many women from entering or remaining in the political sphere. It varies in different forms, including physical, sexual, economic, and psychological abuse, and continues to be a significant obstacle for women seeking to engage in politics.

To overcome these barriers and foster a more inclusive political system, it is crucial to establish robust support and protection mechanisms for women politicians. Supporting and protecting women in politics is essential to their full participation in the political sphere, which will not only advance gender equality but also contribute to the overall development and stability of society.

CHAPTER THREE

3. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

3.1. Introduction

Women's political participation is a cornerstone of democratic governance and essential to achieving gender equality. This chapter explores the international, regional, and soft law frameworks that underpin women's rights to be active members of political parties, to run for office, and to hold party office. It highlights the legal foundations established through binding instruments such as the UDHR, ICCPR, CEDAW, and regional treaties like the African Charter and the Maputo Protocol, as well as the interpretive and normative influence of soft law instruments like the Beijing Declaration and CEDAW General Recommendations. The chapter also examines how these instruments impose obligations on states to eliminate barriers and adopt affirmative measures that guarantee women's full and equal involvement in politics.

3.2. An Overview of Applicable Human Rights Instruments on Women's Political Participation

The applicable human rights instruments on women's political participation are rooted in international and regional agreements as well as national constitutions. The first international instrument is the UDHR, adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1948. This foundational document in international human rights law plays a significant role in advancing human rights globally. It specifically addresses political rights, asserting that everyone is entitled to take part in the governance of their country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives.⁷⁴ This provision guarantees that women, just like men, have the right to engage in the political process, including voting and standing for election. The UDHR provides a broad framework for affirming the intrinsic dignity and equal rights of every person, including women.

The second international instrument is the ICCPR, adopted by the UN in 1996, which ensures the right to engage in public affairs, as well as the right to vote and be elected in free elections.⁷⁵ It

⁷⁴ UDHR, Article 21

⁷⁵ ICCPR, Article 25

also prohibits discrimination based on sex, which directly impacts women's capability to exercise these rights equally with men. This instrument is crucial in safeguarding women's right to participate fully in political life. Another significant instrument is the CEDAW, adopted by the UN in 1979. This essential international instrument addresses discrimination against women in all spheres, including political and public life.⁷⁶ It highlights the need to guarantee that women can vote, participate in political organizations, hold public office, and take in the decision-making process.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, identifies 12 critical areas for women's empowerment, with participation in decision-making being a key focus.⁷⁷ It outlines strategies to increase women's involvement in political and decision-making processes at both national and international levels. While it does not carry the legal force of a treaty, the Platform provides guideline principles and recommendations for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to address gender equality and women's rights. Though non-binding, it has significantly influenced global and national women empowerment policies.

The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (often referred to as the Banjul Charter), adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1981, is a key regional human rights instrument that guarantees a comprehensive set of civil, political, economic, and social rights for all individuals in Africa. It specifically addresses political rights, emphasizing the rights of every citizen to participate freely in the government of their country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives.⁷⁸ It also recognizes the need to promote gender equality and safeguard women's political participation. The Charter is a significant regional instrument that complements international human rights frameworks by establishing binding obligations for African states to ensure the protection and promotion of women's political rights. Although it is less comprehensive in addressing women's political rights compared to other regional instruments like the Maputo Protocol or international instruments such as CEDAW, it provides a crucial legal foundation as it

⁷⁶ CEDAW, Articles 7 and 8.

⁷⁷ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, The Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995, Paragraph 181-195.

⁷⁸ The African Charter on Human and People's Rights, Article 13.

guarantees non-discrimination that serves as a key basis for upholding women's equal right to participate in political life.

The other important applicable regional human rights instrument is the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), adopted by the African Union (AU) in 2003. It aimed at promoting women's rights on the African continent. It specifically guarantees women's right to participate in the political decision-making process.⁷⁹

Political participation encompasses various elements that enable individuals, including women, to engage meaningfully in the political process. These elements include voting, running for public office, joining political parties, attending public meetings, contacting representatives, signing petitions, volunteering for political campaigns, participating in elections, donating to political campaigns or parties, and engaging in advocacy or lobbying.⁸⁰ While the elements of political participation are broad, this research will focus specifically on those related to political parties. These include the right to be an active political party member, to run for office, and to hold party office. The research will explore the substance of these rights and the related responsibilities of states under the following sections.

3.3. The Right to be an Active Political Party Member

A political party is an organization of individuals who share common political ideas and goals, working together to shape public policies by electing their candidates.⁸¹ Membership in a political party is a key form of political engagement. It allows individuals to support the party's aims, participate in political activities, and impact decision-making processes. It provides a formal way for individuals to be involved in the political system, enabling individuals to influence policies and

⁷⁹ The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, Article 9.

⁸⁰ Inside Political Science (<https://insidepoliticalscience.com/conventional-political-participation-examples/>) Accessed 19 March 2025.

⁸¹ Olubunmi Fatai AESANMI, Political Party, Participation and Democratic Governance in Nigeria, (<https://doi.org/10.47743/jopafi-2022-24-02>) Accessed 19 March 2025.

run for office. For marginalized groups like women, party membership is crucial for gaining leadership roles, advocating for gender-sensitive policies, and becoming agents of change.

The right of women to participate in political parties is a fundamental aspect of political engagement, as outlined in international and regional human rights instruments. The UDHR affirms that all individuals, including women, have the right to participate in their country's government, either directly or through freely chosen representatives.⁸² This broad statement implicitly includes the right to participate in political parties.

Building on this, the ICCPR further codifies the right to political participation, granting citizens the right to vote and be elected at genuine periodic elections.⁸³ Significantly, it recognizes that political participation goes beyond voting and extends to the right to be a member of political parties, as party membership is a pathway to election. State parties to the ICCPR are obliged to prohibit gender-based discrimination in these rights, including the right to be an active member of political parties.⁸⁴ Therefore, states must not only protect an individual's right to join a political party but also actively eliminate any barriers preventing women from doing so, including cultural or legal restrictions. States are responsible for guaranteeing that women have the same opportunities as men to engage in political parties, which involves removing legal, procedural, and practical obstacles. They must also establish systems that allow women to actively participate in party decision-making and activities.

In line with these instruments, CEDAW is another key international human rights instrument aimed at ensuring women have the same rights as men to participate in the political life of their country, including the right to vote and run for office.⁸⁵ The right to run for office is facilitated through joining political parties, and thus, Article 7 impliedly affirms women's right to join and actively participate in political parties without discrimination. CEDAW also emphasizes the need for governments to take affirmative action to remove barriers to women's political participation

⁸² Supra note 74.

⁸³ Supra note 75.

⁸⁴ Id, Article 2, 3 and 26.

⁸⁵ Supra note 76, Article 7.

and ensure equal representation.⁸⁶ CEDAW requires states to foster a supportive environment that promotes women's involvement in politics. This can include implementing gender quotas, offering capacity-building training, and establishing supportive party structures that encourage women's membership in political parties.

The African Charter is another significant regional human rights instrument that upholds women's right to participate in politics. It guarantees fundamental political rights, including the freedom to take part in the governance of one's country, either directly or through freely elected representatives.⁸⁷ This extends to women's right to join political parties and engage actively in their activities. As signatories to the Charter, African states are obliged to protect all the rights enshrined within it, including political rights, without any discrimination.⁸⁸ This entails ensuring that membership in political parties is free from gender-based discrimination and violence and fostering a legal and cultural environment where women can join political parties and continue as members without facing social or institutional barriers.

Additionally, the Maputo Protocol is a crucial regional instrument that mandates that member states take positive actions to promote women's participation in the political life of their countries, including elections.⁸⁹ It is clear that joining and actively participating in political parties is a key aspect of engaging in elections. Therefore, this regional instrument obligates African states to remove barriers that prevent women from becoming active political members. This may include legislative reforms to encourage political parties to actively recruit women, creating space for women's voices within party structures, and designing gender-sensitive policies. States should also promote education and training programs to prepare women for political roles, and, where necessary, introduce gender quotas to guarantee women's representation within political parties.

3.4. The Right to Run for Office

The right to run for office is a critical component of political participation, as it directly empowers individuals to stand for election and hold public office. It is a vital means by which citizens,

⁸⁶ Id, Article 4.

⁸⁷ Supra note 78.

⁸⁸ Id, Article 2 and 3.

⁸⁹ Supra note 79.

including women, can contribute to the democratic process. Running for office allows individuals to represent their constituents and shape national and local agendas. For women, this right is fundamental for ensuring their inclusion in decision-making processes and for achieving gender balance in political leadership. International and regional human rights instruments that guarantee the right to participate in political parties also protect the right to run for office, ensuring that women are equally entitled to exercise this right without discrimination.

As mentioned earlier, Article 21 of the UDHR asserts that everyone has the right to participate in the government of their country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives. While the UDHR does not explicitly mention the right to run for office, its broad language implies this right, as running for office is a necessary condition for direct participation in governance. It also affirms that this right is inherent to all individuals, including women, and serves as a foundational principle for further human rights protection in this area.

Similarly, Article 25 of the ICCPR explicitly states that every citizen has the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs, including the right to vote and be elected in genuine elections. This provision guarantees women the right to run for office on equal terms with men. Importantly, the ICCPR also mandated states to take steps to guarantee that political participation is free from discrimination based on sex, directly impacting women's ability to run for office and pursue political positions. States must remove legal and societal obstacles that restrict women's full engagement in the political sphere, including their right to stand for election.

The right to run for office, like the right to be an active member of a political party, is also protected under Article 7 of CEDAW. This Article specifically affirms women's right to participate in the formulation of government policy, to hold public office, and to engage in political and public life on equal terms with men. The right to run for office is a vital component of women's political participation under CEDAW. Additionally, Article 4 of CEDAW applies to this right, urging governments to implement affirmative action programs, such as gender quotas or targeted support for women candidates, to increase women's representation in political positions.

At the regional level, Article 13 of the Banjul Charter guarantees every citizen's right to participate in government, either directly or through freely chosen representatives. This includes the right of women and men to stand for election and run for office. The charter also obliges African states to

promote gender equality and eliminate any discriminatory practices that may hinder women from fully participating in the political process.

As mentioned in the previous section, the Maputo Protocol specifically requires African countries to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to adopt measures that ensure their participation in political decision-making. Article 9 explicitly states that women have the equal right to participate in the electoral process as candidates and to be meaningfully represented and involved in decision-making at all levels, which can be achieved through running for office. Moreover, the Protocol mandates member states to take specific positive actions to create an enabling environment for women to run for office. These actions may include legislative and policy changes, as well as financial and technical support for women candidates, with the term “other measures” in the provision being interpreted broadly.⁹⁰

3.5. The Right to Hold Party Office

While the right to run for office ensures women can participate in elections, the right to hold party office further empowers women by enabling them to take leadership roles within political parties, thereby influencing political agendas and advancing their representation in decision-making processes. It provides individuals, including women, with the opportunity to assume leadership roles within political parties and influence political discourse. Holding party office enables individuals to make decisions that impact the party’s stance on political and social issues. For women, the right to hold party office is fundamental to ensuring their representation in leadership positions and advancing their participation in political decision-making processes.

Article 21 of the UDHR also applies to this right. Although this article does not explicitly mention the right to hold party office, it guarantees the right to participate in the government of one’s country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives. This broad provision supports the broad participation of individuals in governance, and this inherently includes political party membership and leadership, as holding party office can be one way of holding public office as a

⁹⁰ Ibid, Article 9 (1).

politician. This right is not reserved for men alone. The UDHR granted this right to all individuals, prohibiting discrimination based on sex and ensuring equal rights for everyone.⁹¹

Article 25 of the ICCPR further supports this right. It guarantees the right to participate in public affairs, including the right to vote, be elected, and engage in political processes. While the ICCPR explicitly mentions the right to vote and stand for election, it also addresses the broader issue of political participation, which includes holding party office. Signatories to the ICCPR are obliged to ensure that political participation is free from discrimination, including gender-based discrimination, thus ensuring that women have equal opportunities to hold office within political parties.⁹² Furthermore, states are required to take necessary steps, in accordance with the Covenant, to enable the meaningful participation of women in political parties, including holding leadership positions.⁹³ Article 2 (2) of the ICCPR emphasizes the necessity for states to take all required actions to ensure women's involvement in holding party office, as it is a right stipulated by the covenant.

CEDAW, is another pivotal international instrument supporting the right of women to hold party office. Article 7 of the Convention allows women to participate freely in elections as voters or candidates and to hold public office. Since holding party office is a precursor to holding public office, Article 7 must be interpreted broadly. The Convention underscores the need for governments to adopt affirmative measures to remove obstacles to women's political participation and to foster an enabling environment that supports their advancement into political roles, including leadership positions within political parties.⁹⁴ Article 4 of the Convention, which refers to "special measures," can be interpreted as gender quotas or mentorship programs to facilitate women's access to party office.

At the regional level, the African Charter also guarantees women's right to hold party office. Article 13(1) of the Charter, similar to the ICCPR and UDHR, grants both men and women the right to participate freely in the government of their country, either directly or through

⁹¹ Supra note 74, Article 2

⁹² Supra note 75, Article 2 (1)

⁹³ Ibid, Article 2 (2)

⁹⁴ Supra note 76, Article 4

representatives. This provision guarantees the political rights of citizens, including the right to engage in political activities, which extends to holding office within political parties. The right to hold political office begins with being a member of a political party and leads to holding public office. If a woman holds party office, it serves as a stepping stone to holding public office. Therefore, if the Charter allows women to hold public office, either directly or through representatives, it impliedly allows women to hold party office, as holding party office is a precursor to holding public office. The Charter also obliged signatory states to promote gender equality in this regard and ensure that women have equal chances to hold leadership positions within political parties, free from discrimination and cultural barriers.⁹⁵

Another regional instrument, the Maputo Protocol, specifically addresses women's right to hold party office. Article 9 of the Protocol explicitly states that women have an equal right to participate in the electoral process as candidates and to be meaningfully represented at all levels of decision-making. This includes holding leading positions within political parties. Unlike other international instruments, the Maputo Protocol directly incorporates women's right to hold party office. The Protocol also requires African states to adopt specific measures to create an enabling environment for women to occupy decision-making positions, including holding party office.⁹⁶ These measures may include legislative and policy reforms to address gender imbalances within political parties, as well as financial and technical support and protection mechanisms for women seeking leadership roles within political organizations.

3.6. Applicable Soft Law on Women's Political Participation and Representation

Even though soft laws are not legally binding, they play a critical role in shaping and guiding national, regional, and international efforts to enhance women's political participation and representation. While not legally enforceable, these frameworks influence policy development and help establish social and political norms that support gender equality in political representation. Such instruments include declarations, recommendations, general comments, and resolutions

⁹⁵ Supra note 78, Article 1 & 2

⁹⁶ Supra note 79, Article 9.

issued by UN treaty bodies and African Union mechanisms. They provide interpretive guidance on binding treaties and provide normative frameworks for state action.

One of the most influential soft law instruments is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which explicitly acknowledges and reaffirms women's right to participate in the decision-making process and access to power.⁹⁷ "Women in Power and Decision-Making" is identified as one of twelve critical areas of concern.⁹⁸ It highlights the need to eliminate systemic barriers that prevent women from accessing leadership roles at all levels.⁹⁹ While the Declaration does not specifically mention the right to be a political party member, run for office, or hold party office, it underscores the broader principle of gender equality in political participation. The Declaration advocates for women's right to hold leadership positions in political parties and public offices, acknowledging that these rights are fundamental for achieving gender balance and inclusive decision-making.

The Declaration emphasizes the need to ensure equal access to political power, leadership positions, and decision-making roles, both within political parties and public offices.¹⁰⁰ It outlines concrete actions to be taken by governments, political parties, the UN, and CSOs, including women's groups.¹⁰¹ According to the Declaration, the government should achieve gender balance in the public sector by setting targets and implementing positive measures such as gender quotas, leadership training programs, and public awareness campaigns that foster women's political participation and representation.¹⁰² Additionally, political parties should be urged to integrate women into both elective and non-elective positions.¹⁰³ Therefore, the Declaration advocates the promotion of women's rights to be active political party members, run for office, and hold party office, as these rights are fundamental to achieving decision-making positions.

In addition to the Beijing Declaration, General Recommendation No. 23 by the CEDAW Committee emphasizes the importance of cooperation between governments and political parties

⁹⁷ Supra note 77, Para 13.

⁹⁸ Ibid, Para 181.

⁹⁹ Ibid, Para 190-194.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, Para 181-195.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, Para 190-195.

¹⁰² Ibid Para 190 (a)

¹⁰³ Ibid, Para 190(b)

to safeguard that women are appointed to political positions.¹⁰⁴ This can be achieved through measures such as setting gender quotas and giving preference to women when candidates are equally qualified.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, it emphasizes the government's responsibility to lead efforts to change societal attitudes and to encourage women's greater participation in public life.¹⁰⁶ These efforts directly support and reinforce women's rights to run for office, hold public office, and hold party office as fundamental aspects of equal political participation.

General Recommendation No. 25 on temporary special measures further complements this by defining the term "measure" under Article 4 (1) of CEDAW as a wide range of actions, including legislative, executive, administrative, and regulatory tools, as well as targeted policies such as outreach programs and support programs, resource allocation, and quota systems.¹⁰⁷ This Recommendation affirms the duty imposed by CEDAW on states to adopt multi-sectoral strategies that enable women to become active members of political parties, run for office, and hold party office.

3.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, while many international and regional human rights instruments are broad and do not explicitly mention terms such as "the right to be an active member of political parties", "the right to hold party office" or "the right to run for office", they unequivocally protect these rights through their broader provisions on political participation. These rights are fundamental to achieving gender equality in political decision-making. States are urged to use these instruments as guiding principles to enact specific and actionable policies, such as gender quotas, affirmative action measures, and supportive infrastructure, that promote women's full participation in political life. Even without legally binding commitments, soft laws play an indispensable role in shaping global and national efforts to improve women's representation in politics.

The practical impact of these international and regional standards is progressive. However, their real impact depends on effective monitoring and enforcement. To ensure these commitments result

¹⁰⁴ CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 23: Women in Political and Public Life, Para 28-29.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, Para 28.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, Para 29.

¹⁰⁷ General Recommendation No. 25, on article 4, paragraph 1, of CEDAW, on temporary measures, Para 22.

in meaningful change, international and regional monitoring mechanisms, such as the CEDAW Committee, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), play a vital role. These bodies are responsible for reviewing state compliance, issuing recommendations, and promoting accountability. Additionally, women's rights-based CSOs are essential in holding governments accountable and ensuring that international standards are translated into concrete national action.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. SUPPORT AND PROTECTION MECHANISMS FOR WOMEN POLITICIANS IN ADDIS ABABA: AVAILABILITY AND GAPS

4.1. Introduction

This section examines the existing national legal frameworks governing women's political participation along with the support and protection mechanisms available to women politicians in Addis Ababa, drawing first-hand insights from women politicians, political party representatives, CSOs, and relevant institutions. Through qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, the section offers an in-depth analysis of the availability and effectiveness of support and protection mechanisms for women politicians in Addis Ababa.

4.2. Historical Development and Context of Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia

Historically, Ethiopian women had an impressive role in decision-making processes and politics.¹⁰⁸ According to Agenagn's writing, Ethiopian women influenced the politics of the country during the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods.¹⁰⁹ We can name Queen Sheba whose reputation goes for the entire world, Prince Yodit Gudit, who was the founder of the Zagwe dynasty, and Quen Eleni who performed key political roles during early modern period (16th century) under the Ethiopian government.¹¹⁰ The writer also mentioned the period of Zemene Mesafint in which Ethiopian women made decisions on political issues in their provinces.¹¹¹ Empress Mentewab and Empress Tayetu Betul are also icons to show women's participation in politics in Ethiopian history.¹¹² However, the mentioned women leaders were entitled to such

¹⁰⁸ Agenagn Kebede, 'Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia from ancient times to the Present (2020), International Journal of Research in Social Sciences, Vol 10, page 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ Id, page 2.

¹¹² Ibid

power due to their affiliation with the kings either hereditary or through their marriage. The society did not accept the capacity of those women leaders, rather they accepted them by their affinal or consanguineal relation with the kings.

Human rights are rights given to all human beings with the only ground of being human. Therefore, the right to political participation should not be given to women on the grounds of their blood or affinal relation with kings. Rather it should be given with a mere fact of being human. Even though Ethiopian history did not show the right way of acquiring political rights, it can show the ability of women to lead and play a vital role in politics for those who argue against this fact. As women constitute over half of the world's population, improving women's political participation and incorporating their perspectives at all decision-making levels may help advance the development of the political sphere and achieve the goal of equality, development, and peace.

Ethiopian women have played an undeniable role in the country's public life, both during the monarchical era and the subsequent period, by taking key roles and making decisions on political issues.¹¹³ From 1960 to 1980, Ethiopian women actively engaged in politics through the student union, participating in demonstrations and campaigns.¹¹⁴ During this time a woman called Marta Mebrahtu played a significant role in the political arena of the country.¹¹⁵

The year 2005 was a significant year for women's political participation, as Birtukan Midekssa became the first female political party leader, leaving a lasting impact on Ethiopian Politics. In the same year, the Women's Affairs Office was upgraded to a Ministry and began operating with a five-year national plan that included women's political participation. Additionally, regional women's affairs were established across the country. Based on these developments, it is clear that the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) made significant efforts to empower women and challenge traditional customs and practices that were not gender-sensitive.

After 2018, with the appointment of Dr. Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister of Ethiopia, women's political participation reached a high point. The Prime Minister appointed more than eight women to key ministerial positions, including defense, trade, transport, federal supreme court, and the

¹¹³ Supra note 4, Page 115.

¹¹⁴ Supra note 17, page 191.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

newly created Ministry of Peace. The appointment of the first female president was also a historic moment. However, sadly, this significant shift in power for women did not last long.

4.3. Overview of National Legal Framework on Women's Political Participation

4.3.1. The FDRE Constitution

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution (the FDRE Constitution) declares that 'all international agreements ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the law of the land'.¹¹⁶ This implies that once international agreements are ratified, they automatically become part of Ethiopian law. Therefore, since the international and regional human rights instruments discussed in the previous chapter are ratified by Ethiopia, all the instruments are considered part of the domestic legal framework. Furthermore, the Constitution requires the interpretation of the rights stated within it to be in accordance with those international human rights instruments.¹¹⁷ Hence, whenever interpretation is required, such as in cases of vagueness or ambiguity in the provisions or rights outlined in chapter three of the constitution, the interpretation must align with these international human rights instruments.

The Constitution affirms that every Ethiopian has the right to participate in politics, either directly or through their representatives, without any discrimination.¹¹⁸ Additionally, the Constitution ensures equal enjoyment of this right for both men and women.¹¹⁹ The political rights granted by the Constitution include the right to vote, to run for office as a candidate, to join any political party that aligns with their belief, and to be involved in the political affairs of the country.¹²⁰

Although the Constitution provides a solid foundation for enhancing women's political participation, it still contains loopholes and can benefit from the experiences of other African countries, such as Rwanda. Rwanda became the first country in the world to achieve a majority of

¹¹⁶ FDRE Constitution, Article 9(4)

¹¹⁷ Id, Article 13(2)

¹¹⁸ Id, Article 38 (1) (a)

¹¹⁹ Id, Article 35 (1)

¹²⁰ Id, Article 38 (1) (a-c), (2)

women in parliament, with women holding 61.3% of the seats in 2013.¹²¹ This proportion remained steady at 61.25% in 2023.¹²² This remarkable achievement is the result of the Rwandan government's strong commitment to gender equality, demonstrated through constitutional reforms. Notably, Rwanda's 2003 Constitution introduced a 30% quota for women in decision-making positions laying the ground for this progress.¹²³

4.3.2. The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration, and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation No. 1162/2019

The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration, and Election Code of Conduct Proclamation addresses the political participation of citizens in general and women's participation in politics in particular. The Proclamation includes several gender-specific provisions. For instance, it mandates ensuring gender representation when recruiting or assigning election officials, establishing a grievance hearing committee, and appointing election observers.¹²⁴ Similarly, the Proclamation requires gender balance in the recruitment of founding members for the formation of both nationwide and regional political parties, as well as in the election of leadership positions within the party.¹²⁵ Another important aspect of the proclamation is that it uses the number of female candidates, female members, and women in leadership roles as eligibility criteria for granting government funding to political parties.¹²⁶

The proclamation maintains the previously established system of voluntary party quotas rather than introducing a mandatory framework. Due to these and other limitations, the proclamation is currently under review. In light of this, the researcher has provided the following analysis of the proposed draft proclamation.

¹²¹ Supra note 40.

¹²² Percentage of women in Rwanda's Parliament 2004-2013, published by Saifadin Galal, Nov 4, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1248551/proportion-of-seats-held-by-women-in-rwanda-national-parliament/> Accessed 12 April 2025.

¹²³ Rwanda's Constitution of 2003 with Amendments through 2015, Article 75- 80

¹²⁴ The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration, and Election Code of Conduct Proclamation No.1162/2019, Article 13(5) and (6), and 15(11).

¹²⁵ Id, Article 64(6), 65(5), and 74(4)

¹²⁶ Id, Article 100 (2) (c) and (d)

4.3.3. The Draft Ethiopia's Election, Political Parties Registration, and Election Code of Conduct Law

The draft electoral framework marks a significant step forward in advancing women's political participation and promoting a more inclusive and equitable political landscape. The draft provisions address long-standing gaps in the existing proclamation and introduce targeted measures to empower women and other marginalized groups throughout the electoral process. The following highlights the key changes made to the current proclamation that directly affect women's political rights.

One of the foundational improvements appears in Article 5 (2) of the draft proclamation, which expands the grounds on which no individuals may be denied the right to vote or stand for election. The draft proclamation explicitly prohibits discrimination based on race, color, ethnicity, sex, disability, language, religion, political or other opinion, or other status, safeguarding that were not present in the existing proclamation.¹²⁷

To ensure a safer and more inclusive voting environment, Article 15 of the draft (amending Article 14 of the current proclamation) grants Constituency Offices the authority to maintain polling stations that are free from sexual harassment. It also mandates them to take appropriate legal action when such incidents occur, responsibilities that Constituencies did not have as per the current proclamation.¹²⁸ However, the provision could be strengthened by explicitly addressing all forms of gender-based violence, including Violence Against Women in Elections (VAW-E) and Violence Against Women in Politics (VAW-P). Its effectiveness would also be significantly enhanced by incorporating mandatory gender-sensitivity training for polling station staff.

Similarly, Article 17 (replacing Article 16 of the current proclamation) assigns new duties to Polling Stations, empowering them to prevent and respond to instances of sexual harassment during the election period, this proactive measure addresses a critical gap in the current legal framework and enhances protection for female voters and candidates alike.¹²⁹ Here again, to ensure a truly inclusive and secure electoral environment, this Article of the draft proclamation shall

¹²⁷ The Draft Ethiopia's Election, Political Parties Registration, and Election Code of Conduct Law, Article 5 (2).

¹²⁸ Id, Article 15(10).

¹²⁹ Id, Article 17(7).

consider all forms of gender-based violence and gender-sensitive training for polling station staff. Furthermore, the establishment of dedicated help desks at polling sites for real-time reporting and support would provide immediate assistance to victims and promote a culture of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness throughout the electoral process.

The draft also introduces provisions aimed at leveling the playing field for women candidates, particularly those with disabilities. Article 33 (amending Article 31 of the current proclamation) lowers the required number of supporting signatures from 3000 to 2000 for women with disabilities, easing their access to candidacy compared to able-bodied candidates.¹³⁰

Further refinements are found in Article 34 (amending Article 32 of the current proclamation), which sets differentiated signature requirements for candidates seeking seats in the HPR and regional councils. Under this revision, women contesting HPR seats need 1500 signatures, while women with disabilities require only 1000. By contrast, male candidates need 3000 signatures and 1500 if they are disabled.¹³¹ For regional councils, the requirement is 750 signatures for women and 500 for women with disabilities, compared to 1000 and 750 respectively for male counterparts.¹³²

A landmark provision in the draft introduces a mandatory gender quota, requiring that at least 20% of the total candidates nominated by any political party, coalition, or front must be women.¹³³ This requirement, which is absent from the current proclamation, marks a significant step forward in institutionalizing gender representation in political nominations. However, while this provision represents progress, it falls short of achieving genuine gender parity. A quota of only 20% for female candidates and 30% for leadership positions does not adequately reflect the demographic reality of women in society. To ensure more meaningful representation, a gender-sensitive 50/50 nomination criterion should be adopted. Such a balanced approach would better guarantee that women's voices and interests are fully reflected in political decision-making processes, thereby strengthening democratic inclusiveness and equality.

¹³⁰ Id, Article 33(5).

¹³¹ Id, Article 34(3).

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Id, Article 34(6).

Even if a 50% quota may currently seem ambitious, valuable lessons can be drawn from countries such as Rwanda, which has implemented one of the most gender-progressive electoral systems in the world. Rwanda's Organic Law No. 001/2019.OL of 29/07/2019, governing elections, set a strong precedent. It allocates 30% (24 out of 80 seats) in the Chamber of Deputies exclusively for women.¹³⁴ Additionally, the law mandates gender-balanced representation in local governance, requiring each sector to elect one male and one female member to the sector council and it ensures that female members constitute at least 30% of all District Council members elected through indirect and select ballot.¹³⁵ Moreover, the law requires that at least 30% of members of the District, City of Kigali, and National Council executive committees be female.¹³⁶ These examples in comparison demonstrated that a 20% quota, as proposed in the draft proclamation, is insufficient and fails to meet the standard of fairness and inclusivity. Stronger measures are needed to ensure that women are not merely present in politics but fully empowered within it.

Article 47 (amending Article 44 of the current proclamation) also represents significant progress in media access. It grants women candidates and candidates with disabilities the right to utilize state-owned media distinctly from the coverage afforded to male candidates.¹³⁷ However, it is also necessary to create specific training programs for women candidates on effective media engagement and communication strategies to enhance their visibility during campaigns. Such training would empower women to navigate media landscapes confidently, enabling them to articulate their platforms effectively and connect with voters.

Article 82 (amending Article 74 of the current proclamation), mandates that political party bylaws ensure at least 30% of party officials are women, thereby promoting female leadership within party structures.¹³⁸ However, to further advance gender equality and create safer political spaces, it is also essential to require political parties to incorporate policies addressing GBV, VAW-P, and VAW-E as core components of their bylaws. These policies would reinforce party accountability

¹³⁴ Election Law of Rwanda (N° 001/2019.OL of 29/07/2019 Organic Law governing elections), Article 87 (2).

¹³⁵ Id, Article 137 and 138

¹³⁶ Id, Article 141 and 154

¹³⁷ Supra note 127, Article 47(3).

¹³⁸ Id, Article 82(4).

and contribute to a political culture that actively protects and empowers women throughout the electoral and political process.

To complement these structural changes, Article 144 (amending Article 130) imposes an obligation on political parties to conduct ongoing education for members and supporters, focusing on preventing sexual harassment during the electoral process.¹³⁹ It also requires parties to fully cooperate with legal proceedings when violations occur. However, violence manifests across all phases of the electoral cycle in various forms, and violence can be perpetrated by diverse sections of society, including candidates, political party agents, poll administrators, community members, and observers. Furthermore, violence could occur both in domestic settings (e.g., by spouses) and public spaces, leading to severe short- and long-term psychological and health consequences. Given these realities, merely requiring political parties to engage in soft duties such as cooperation and awareness-raising is insufficient to address VAWiE effectively. Political parties' legal obligations to prevent and respond to harassment and other forms of violence against women must be explicitly outlined in the law. These obligations should include mechanisms for accountability, reporting, and enforcement to ensure meaningful protection for women throughout the electoral process.

The draft proclamation introduces a new provision under Article 114 that regulates the use of government funding by political parties. It restricts the use of such funds, among other things, to initiatives that promote equal opportunities for women and persons with disabilities, as well as broader efforts to increase the participation of youth, women, disabled individuals, and other historically excluded groups.¹⁴⁰ However, this provision alone does not adequately address the substantial political inclusion of women. Hence, provisions for specific female candidates' financial support are crucial. While running for election, many women encounter numerous obstacles, such as restricted access to resources and funding. Women can be empowered to pursue political careers more successfully by putting in place systems that offer financial aid, training courses, and mentorship possibilities. Moreover, political parties must be obligated to create an

¹³⁹ Id, Article 144(3).

¹⁴⁰ Id, Article 114(2) (g) and (J).

enabling environment using government funds. This includes establishing facilities such as daycare centers and breastfeeding areas for female politicians.

Last but not least, violations of the electoral code of ethics, as outlined in Articles 156–159 of the draft proclamation, detail the actions to be taken against such breaches. However, specific attention is lacking when it comes to violations related to women, particularly those involving VAW-E. The Electoral Law should address this gap by providing clear definitions and standards for what constitutes VAW-E and VAW-P, enhancing criminal and civil remedies for survivors, and establishing mechanisms to respond to such cases during both pre-electoral and electoral cycles.

4.4. Support and Protection Mechanism for Women Politicians in Addis Ababa

4.4.1. Participants Profile

A total of 21 political parties are registered at the federal level. However, 3 of these parties declined to participate in this research, stating that they do not believe there is a functioning political system in Ethiopia. As a result, they were unwilling to discuss political participation, whether for women or men. Consequently, 18 political parties voluntarily took part in the study (11 of them through their women members and 7 of them through their party representatives).

Given that this research aims to assess the available support and protection mechanisms for women politicians in Addis Ababa, particularly from the perspective of their right to political participation within political parties, the researcher conducted interviews with 11 women politicians from various political parties. In addition, 7 representatives from other political parties, excluding those represented by the 11 women politicians, were also interviewed.

To further enrich the study the researcher also interviewed 3 former women politicians. Additionally, 3 representatives from CSOs working on women's rights were consulted along with 1 representative each from the AAPPJC, NEBE, and MoWSA, as they are key stakeholders in this area.

The researcher reached 3 CSOs named Network of Ethiopian Women Associations (NEWA), Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), and TIMRAN since NEWA is a network of CSOs working on women's rights, EWLA has a legal aid center (since legal aid is also one

supporting mechanism) and TIMRAN is established to work solely on women's political participation and leadership.

Finally, to triangulate the data collected from the different sources, a focus group discussion was held with 5 women politicians, 3 from the political parties represented by party representatives and 2 from those represented by the interviewed women politicians. The researcher made efforts to include participants from all the institutions involved in the study, however, scheduling conflicts and limited availability made it challenging to secure their participation. As a result, the focus group discussion proceeded with the available women politicians.

In total, the research engaged 32 participants from a range of institutions and perspectives.

4.4.2 Ethical Consideration

The researcher has secured the consent of each respondent. Particular care was taken to protect the privacy of the women politicians who participated. They explicitly requested that their identities not be disclosed due to the sensitive nature of their experience and the political environments they navigate. This request was fully respected.

4.4.3 Experience of Women Politicians

The researcher engaged a total of 11 women politicians, each representing a different political party out of the 18 parties registered at the federal level. The research findings will focus on the experiences of these women politicians, who reside in Addis Ababa, particularly in relation to the available support and protection mechanisms.

A. Barrier women politicians face in their political participation in Addis Ababa

All the respondents reported encountering similar types of barriers in their political careers. These barriers can be categorized into three main categories: social norms, perceptions within political parties, and the broader political environment. Traditional gender roles persist in restricting women's participation by reinforcing the notion that leadership is primarily a male responsibility. Being a politician often requires attending meetings after regular work hours, which poses additional challenges for women as they strive to balance political responsibilities with domestic duties. Within political parties, women often face doubt about their capabilities and are given minimal or symbolic roles. The wider political landscape is also male-dominated and lacks

effective protective mechanisms for women politicians. These shared challenges highlight the urgent need for targeted support and systemic reforms to advance gender equality in politics.

B. Availability and sufficiency of support systems

All respondents reported that they had the opportunity to participate in capacity-building training organized by different entities, including CSOs, NEBE, and their respective political parties. However, only 2 women politicians indicated that they had experienced a mentorship opportunity initiated by fellow women politicians' efforts that were not facilitated by their political parties or any other stakeholders. The remaining 9 women politicians stated that they had never been part of a mentorship program. All respondents agreed that the existing support system is inadequate and emphasized the need for greater involvement and effort from all relevant stakeholders.

C. Experience of GBV and Harassment in the Political Sphere

According to the findings, 3 women politicians initially reported that they had not experienced any form of GBV or harassment. However, upon further questioning, it became clear that these women had experienced verbal harassment, but did not recognize it as a form of GBV, indicating a gap in awareness about the nature and definition of GBV. The remaining 8 women politicians confirmed that they had experienced verbal and psychological harassment within the political sphere. When asked how these incidents were handled, only 2 out of the 8 women politicians who experienced GBV reported their cases to the responsible body under their political party. However, as of the time of this research, no action or resolution had been provided. The remaining 6 women chose not to report their experiences, citing a lack of trust in the system and a belief that reporting would not lead to any meaningful outcome.

These findings reveal a critical gap in both awareness and institutional responses to GBV in the political environment. The reluctance to report incidents, combined with the absence of effective responses when cases are reported, highlights the urgent need for a dedicated support and protection mechanism. A supportive and protective system must be established to encourage women politicians to come forward and report such incidents, and to foster a political environment where they feel safe, heard, and confident that their concerns will be addressed.

D. Legal and institutional protection mechanisms for women politicians: availability and effectiveness

All the respondents acknowledged the existence of various institutions where cases of harassment and GBV can be reported, including political parties, political party joint councils, and NEBE. However, they unanimously agreed that these mechanisms are largely ineffective. One major concern raised was those individuals responsible for handling such cases within political parties are often male and personally friends with harassers, and in many instances, they tend to side with them rather than support the victims. A similar lack of impartiality and action was observed in the AAPPJC, which also lack the authority to hold political parties accountable or compel them to uphold women's rights.

Moreover, respondents highlighted that NEBE lacks a strong institutional structure supported by a binding legal framework necessary to enforce accountability in harassment cases within political parties. As a result, NEBE's responses to such issues have been both inadequate and ineffective.

One of the former women politicians who participated in this research shared that she was subjected to both verbal and physical harassment after questioning the actions of her party's leadership. She immediately reported the incident to the AAPPJC. However, the case was dismissed as an internal party matter. Despite her report, she continued to face intimidation and threats, which ultimately led her to leave politics out of fear for her safety. Another two former women politicians reported that they were illegally banned from their political party. She took the case to the NEBE but stated that the board took nearly a year just to establish a committee to investigate the issue. As a result, she viewed the prolonged process as a denial of justice and decided to withdraw from politics.

These findings underscore the urgent need for independent and gender-sensitive protection mechanisms to ensure accountability and effectively address harassment and GBV within political institutions.

E. Recommended changes and stakeholder roles in creating a safer and more supportive political environment for women politicians

The respondents provided several recommendations to help create a safer and more supportive environment for women in politics. These can be summarized as follows.

- While many CSOs are working on women's economic empowerment, GBV, and other women's rights, the number of CSOs focusing specifically on women's political

participation is limited. Therefore, the presence of CSOs in this area should be expanded. Additionally, it is recommended that CSOs provide not only training but also financial support to women politicians.

- CSOs working on women's political participation should make efforts to reach a broader group of women politicians across Ethiopia, rather than repeatedly engaging the same individuals. They should also monitor and follow up with their trainees to assess whether the knowledge gained is being applied and to identify future training needs.
- NEBE should be mandated to implement binding legal requirements that compel political parties to adopt gender-sensitive internal policies.
- While some political parties have gender-related provisions in their internal laws, they must be held accountable to implement and respect these provisions in practice.
- MoWSA has various programs focused on addressing GBV. However, it would be beneficial to include components that specifically address VAW-P and VAW-E.
- Finally, there is a need to establish institutions that can offer free psychological support to women politicians when needed.

These recommendations reflect the need for coordinated, systemic efforts from CSOs, political parties, and governing bodies to ensure a more equitable and safe political landscape for women.

F. Support received from political parties and other stakeholders during personal and professional challenges

All respondents reported that, apart from receiving occasional training, they did not receive any form of meaningful support from their respective political parties or other stakeholders during times of personal or professional challenges. This lack of comprehensive support highlights a significant gap in the assistance systems available to women politicians, particularly in navigating the unique pressures they face in political life.

G. The role of gender balance in political parties in strengthening support systems for women politicians

4 women politicians stated that they believe having women in leadership positions within political parties can help reduce the challenges faced by women, as women are more likely to understand and support one another. However, the remaining 7 women politicians felt that appointing women

to leadership roles alone is not a sufficient solution. They stressed that a supportive environment must also be in place for women in leadership, as their presence can only be truly impactful if they themselves are empowered and protected. These respondents emphasized the need for a multi-sectoral approach involving political parties, CSOs, and government institutions to establish comprehensive support and protection mechanisms for women politicians.

These perspectives highlight the complexity of advancing gender equality in politics. While increased representation of women in leadership is important, systemic and structural changes are equally necessary to ensure that women politicians not only gain access to political spaces but also thrive within them. A holistic and coordinated strategy is essential to bring an inclusive culture and ensure sustainable support for women's political participation.

H. Male party members' support for women in politics and areas of improvement

All respondents stated that there are only a few male party members who actively support women politicians and refrain from engaging in harassment. However, all the respondents emphasized that most male party members do not believe women are capable of making contributions to politics. This deep-rooted bias is often reflected in day-to-day interactions and decision-making processes within political parties. One respondent shared a specific example, stating that during party meetings, male members often disregard women's input and intentionally exclude their ideas from the meeting minutes, thereby silencing their voices and reinforcing marginalization.

These insights reflect a significant lack of respect for women's political agency among many male counterparts. This persistent attitude not only undermines women's confidence and participation but also weakens the overall inclusivity and effectiveness of political institutions. To foster meaningful change, respondents recommended that political parties implement clear accountability measures that promote equal participation and ensure respect for women in all political processes. Additionally, they emphasized that internal bylaws of political parties should be reviewed and revised to include gender-sensitive policies, accompanied by strong monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure their effective implementation.

I. Suggestions to promote women's participation and leadership within political parties

The respondents provided the following suggestions to enhance women's political participation and leadership.

- Political parties should be required to revise their internal policies to ensure they are gender-sensitive and inclusive.
- NEBE should take an active role in monitoring both the revision and the effective implementation of these internal policies.
- Women politicians should be encouraged and supported to pursue continuous education and skill development to strengthen their roles and influence within political parties.

4.4.4 Political Parties' Support and Protection Mechanisms for Women Politicians

A. Political party's strategy and support mechanism for increasing women's participation in leadership positions

Six out of the seven political parties reported implementing capacity-building training programs for their female members, aimed at enhancing leadership skills, building confidence, and increasing preparedness for political roles. In addition to these efforts, the parties have also conducted awareness-raising initiatives targeting male party members to promote a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere for women in leadership positions.

In contrast, one party, being newly established within the past two years, acknowledged that it currently lacks a dedicated gender department and has not yet developed a comprehensive strategy to promote women's participation in politics. However, the respondent expressed recognition of the importance of gender inclusivity and a commitment to strengthening internal structures in the future.

During a focus group discussion, participants noted that most of the time, the training organized by political parties is poorly designed, inadequately planned, and conducted with limited financial resources. Furthermore, they highlighted that the parties failed to carry out any post-training assessment to evaluate the impact of the training on both women and male politicians.

B. Political parties' initiatives for preparing women to compete in elections and leadership positions

All respondents reported using training as a primary tool to empower women to compete effectively in elections and take on leadership roles. These training programs focus on building the necessary skills and confidence for political engagement and leadership responsibilities.

One party, in particular, goes a step further by consulting women politicians to identify their preferred regions and zones for candidacy. While candidate placement is the mandate of political parties, this party adopts a consultative approach, aiming to encourage women to run candidacy.

However, the party also noted a recurring challenge, despite efforts to create leadership opportunities, many women are hesitant to accept such roles. According to the party, this hesitation often stems from pressure within the family, especially from husbands. Political involvement is frequently perceived as dangerous and incompatible with traditional domestic responsibilities, particularly for women in our country.

These insights suggest that politics is still not viewed as a safe or favorable space for women. Therefore, as a society, we must work collectively to transform the societal perception and the political environment itself, making it safer, more inclusive, and as healthy and welcoming as any other profession, so that women can participate fully and without fear.

Nevertheless, the party's initiative to allow women to choose their preferred candidacy locations reflects a commendable commitment to inclusive and participatory practices, an approach that could serve as a valuable example for other political parties to follow.

C. Political parties' efforts to change social and cultural norms that hinder women's political participation

2 political parties stated that they challenge the social norm by promoting their female members to visible leadership roles. One party highlighted that the chair of the Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council, who is also Deputy Minister for the Ministry of Labour and Skills, is a woman from their party. The second party noted that 6 out of its seven executive committee members are women. Both parties use the public visibility of women in leadership roles as a deliberate strategy to combat stereotypes and demonstrate that women are fully capable of political leadership.

A third mentioned that their party appointed 50% of women to cabinet positions during the 2018 reform. However, this claim was challenged during the focus group discussion, where participants

noted that such efforts were not sustained over time, raising questions about the long-term commitment to gender equality.

The remaining 4 respondents stated that, apart from capacity-building training for their members, their parties do not have any specific initiatives to address the deep-rooted social and cultural norms that discourage women's political participation.

These findings suggest that while a few parties are taking visible steps to challenge gender-based norms through leadership representation, most still lack comprehensive strategies to combat the broader societal barriers facing women in politics.

D. Political party's response to backlash faced by women candidates due to gender or political views

All respondents indicated that their parties address backlash against women politicians, whether based on gender or political views, through existing frameworks such as the party's bylaw, the national electoral law, and criminal law. These legal mechanisms are used to handle cases of harassment, threats, or discrimination.

However, this approach was critically examined during a focus group discussion. Participants argued that most Ethiopian political parties lack comprehensive gender-sensitive policies capable of addressing the specific and often nuanced challenges faced by women in politics. Additionally, they noted that the national electoral proclamation does not include specific provisions addressing VAW-P and VAW-E. This gap significantly limits the ability of the current legal framework to ensure the safety and full participation of women in the political sphere.

The findings suggest that while political parties may rely on general legal mechanisms, there is a pressing need for more tailored, proactive, and gender-responsive internal policies to effectively protect and support women in politics.

E. Availability and effectiveness of formal reporting mechanisms for addressing harassment and discrimination against women politicians

All respondents indicated that their party has a women's wing responsible for receiving and addressing complaints from women members. The parties view these wings as formal reporting mechanisms for cases of harassment or discrimination faced by women politicians. However,

respondents also acknowledged a significant limitation, most women do not report incidents, which reduces the number of cases that are formally addressed.

During focus group discussions, participants further criticized these mechanisms, arguing that they are not truly impartial and often fail to provide a safe and supportive environment for women to come forward. The absence of gender-sensitive procedures and independent oversight was highlighted as a key barrier to the effectiveness of current reporting systems.

As stated under section 4.3.3 “D”, the experience of the two former women politicians highlights the lack of effective reporting mechanisms and timely responses to their complaints. These insights suggest that while formal structures may exist, there is an urgent need to strengthen their credibility, safety, and responsiveness to truly protect women politicians and foster a more inclusive political environment.

F. Steps taken by political parties to address women’s issues through policy, including VAW-E and VAW-P

5 of the respondents stated that their party manifestos include a commitment to ensuring that at least 30% of their candidates or leadership positions are filled by women, as per the suggestion of the national electoral law. However, all respondents acknowledged that their parties lack specific internal policies that address VAW-P and VAW-P. Instead, their bylaws contain only a few general provisions on harassment, with no detailed definition or recognition of the different forms such violence may take.

During the focus group discussion, participants expressed concerns that while many parties formally commit to the 30% requirement, this commitment is often superficial. It was noted that some parties appear to fulfill; the quota primarily to access incentives offered by NEBE, as outlined in the electoral proclamation. In some cases, parties were even reported to have included women, such as housemaids, on their candidate's list without any genuine intention to involve or empower them politically.

These findings highlight a critical gap between policy statements and meaningful action, suggesting a need for more robust, gender-sensitive and enforcement mechanisms within political parties.

G. Monitoring and tracking the progress of women politicians within political parties

All the respondents stated that the parties have set key performance indicators, one of which is gender. Therefore, the parties attempt to monitor gender composition within their ranks. However, during a focus group discussion, participants pointed out that this monitoring culture focuses solely on numerical gender representation, rather than on tracking how women politicians progress in their careers or understanding the challenges that hinder advancement.

This finding reveals a gap between formal commitments to gender equality and the practical implementation of measures that support women's political development. It suggests that while representation is counted, meaningful inclusion and support remain overlooked.

H. Psychological support and counseling service for women politicians in political parties

All the respondents stated that the political parties have not incorporated psychological support in their programs. However, it is important to consider providing such support for women politicians, given the unique pressures and challenges they often face in political life. Women in politics frequently encounter gender-based discrimination, harassment, and the pressure to constantly prove their competence in male-dominated environment. These factors can significantly impact their confidence and long-term engagement in political leadership.

4.4.5 Institutional Support Systems to Empower Women in Political Roles

A. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Women rights-based CSOs have developed a culture of working to empower women politicians.¹⁴¹ Respondents (representatives of NEWA, EWLA, and TIMRAN) mention that they frequently organize capacity-building and awareness-raising training for women politicians from diverse backgrounds, as well as for political party leaders. In some cases, CSOs also organize experience-sharing programs for women politicians with aspiring women politicians and experienced senior women leaders who offer guidance drawn from their political journey.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Mr. Aregawi Gidey (Program Officer at NEWA), Mr. Wendimeneh Lemma (Program Coordinator at EWLA), and Ms. Hawi Geleta (Program Manager at TIMRAN), in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, (April 10, 11, and 12, 2025, respectively).

In addition, CSOs often act as election observers and work to combat VAW-E. They also, help women candidates sharpen their public speaking and persuasion skills by organizing debate forums. Additionally, they engage in advocacy efforts to reform laws and policies that are not gender-sensitive.

A respondent from NEWA mentioned their practice of conducting research to identify challenges and gaps before, during, and after elections. These findings help guide future interventions and serve as a protection mechanism. EWLA provides legal aid services, although their respondent noted that women politicians are often reluctant to seek legal help. TIMRAN indicated that it is preparing to launch a new support and protection program, though currently, it lacks an established protection mechanism.

While CSOs work closely with international organizations, NEBE, Political Parties Joint Council, and political parties rarely engage at the community level to address deep-rooted cultural and societal barriers to women's political participation. Additionally, although CSOs conduct impact assessments as part of their broader programming, these assessments rarely focus specifically on the political engagement of women.

Despite the positive efforts, respondents highlighted several persistent challenges. One major issue is that, when CSOs reach out to political party leaders requesting the participation of women politicians, some parties send individuals who are not genuinely politically active, such as domestic workers, rather than real party members. This undermines the effectiveness of the training programs. Respondents also mentioned that the same individuals are often repeatedly sent to training sessions, preventing the broader inclusion of women from diverse backgrounds.

Financial constraints were identified as another barrier, limiting CSO's capacity to reach more women politicians. Moreover, while male political leaders may attend training, they often fail to apply the knowledge in practice. Although there are some bureaucratic hurdles, respondents noted that they do not usually face active resistance from stakeholders.

During a focus group discussion, participants expressed concerns that CSOs tend to become more active in supporting women politicians only when elections are approaching. They emphasized that year-round engagement is crucial for sustained impact. Participants also suggested that CSOs

design one-to-one mentorship programs. Finally, while capacity-building training is essential, participants stressed the need for CSOs to expand their support by introducing protection mechanisms and psychological support services, as well as encouraging women politicians to claim the existing legal aid services.

B. Addis Ababa Political Parties Joint Council (AAPPJC)

The AAPPJC has its own support system for women politicians.¹⁴² The joint council regularly organizes capacity-building training programs for women politicians, either independently or in collaboration with CSOs and international partners working to advance women's political participation. However, the joint council does engage in advocacy, as well as in facilitating access to political funding or campaigning resources for women candidates.

One of the major limitations of the Joint Council is its lack of a mandate to require member political parties to adopt gender-sensitive internal policies, comply with gender equality standards, or actively promote women's participation. As a result, the Joint Council cannot intervene in internal party matters, such as responding to cases of gender-based violence, which are typically handled by the individual parties themselves. Moreover, the Joint Council does not monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of gender parity initiatives within its member parties. However, when cases are reported to the Joint Council, it refers to its women's wing. But, the women's wing is relatively weak, lacking a formal protection mechanism beyond issuing statements that the council does not support gender-based discrimination.

Another major challenge identified is the resistance of political parties to appoint women to leadership positions. According to the respondent, some parties believe that increasing the number of women in leadership may reduce their competitiveness. Financial constraints were also cited as a barrier to expanding the Joint Council's gender-focused activities.

In conclusion, the respondent emphasized the need to revise the mandate of the Joint Council to include the authority to monitor how political parties are promoting women's participation and to

¹⁴² Interview with Mr. Mulugeta Abebe, secretary at AAPPJC, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (May 20, 2025).

hold them accountable. Additionally, strengthening the capacity and influence of the women's wing is critical to advancing and defending women's rights in politics.

C. National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)

According to an interview with NEBE's representative, NEBE organizes various training sessions aimed at enhancing the skills and competence of women politicians.¹⁴³ However, it does not currently provide psychological or financial support. One of the key recommendations for the ongoing amendment of the electoral proclamation is to include provisions for financial assistance to individual women candidates.

As part of its mandate, NEBE reviews the internal policies of political parties to assess whether they are gender-sensitive. While it is an important step towards accountability, NEBE does not have the legal authority to enforce compliance or take mandatory action against parties that fail to meet gender-related standards. Furthermore, the respondent noted that NEBE currently lacks specific policies to address VAW-P and VAW-E. However, through the ongoing amendment process of the electoral proclamation, there is growing stakeholder pressure to include legal measures targeting these forms of violence, and NEBE is considering such proposals.

Additionally, the respondent mentioned that during the 6th general election, NEBE introduced a hotline to receive complaints. However, this mechanism was not tailored specifically for women politicians or for reporting cases of VAW-E. Though the responder mentioned that NEBE has a committee to address incoming complaints, focus group discussion participants expressed frustration with the slow response time, which discourages them and pulls them back from their political engagement.

According to the respondent, NEBE has introduced financial incentives. NEBE uses metrics such as the number of female candidates, women party members, and female leaders in decision-making positions as part of the eligibility criteria for accessing government funding. Nevertheless, focus group discussion participants criticized the lack of a robust monitoring system. They pointed out

¹⁴³ Interview with Ms. Yordanos Tewolde, Gender Inclusion Expert at NEBE, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (May 29, 2025).

that some political parties exploit the incentive system by bringing women who are not actively engaged in politics, simply to qualify for funding.

The NEBE representative also mentioned that NEBE provides platforms for women candidates to connect, network, and support each other during the electoral process. However, political parties retain the authority to replace these trained candidates with others, including men, thereby weakening the impact of these efforts.

The respondent mentioned that even if it is not mandatory, the existing electoral proclamation contains some progressive elements, such as incentives for promoting women's inclusion and reference to the 30% quota. The lack of enforceable provisions limits the effectiveness of NEBE's gender initiatives. To address this, NEBE is working on drafting an amendment proclamation that would include binding provisions, enabling it to hold political parties accountable for failing to meet gender-sensitive standards.

In conclusion, while NEBE has taken steps to support women in politics through training and incentives, the respondent emphasized the importance of a strong legal foundation with mandatory provisions.

D. Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA)

Based on an interview with a representative from MoWSA,¹⁴⁴ the researcher has identified the MoWSA's indirect role in supporting and protecting women in politics. The respondent explained that MoWSA is primarily responsible for policy formulation, including the development of the 1986 women's policy and the draft Gender Policy, both of which include provisions related to women's political rights.

However, during a focus group discussion, participants criticized the 1986 women's policy as being outdated, having been enacted over 30 years ago, and noted that it no longer addresses the current needs of women politicians. Additionally, the draft Gender Policy has been under development for a prolonged period without formal approval, further limiting its practical impact.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Ms. Tangute Ashagrie, Women Social and Political Participation and Benefit Empowerment Senior Expert at the Ministry of Women's and Social Affairs (MoWSA), in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (May 15, 2025).

In this regard, the researcher suggests that Ethiopia could draw lessons from Rwanda, which amended its Gender Policy in 2021¹⁴⁵ which contributes significantly to women's representation in the country.

According to the respondent, MoWSA does not provide direct support to women politicians, such as capacity-building training, psychological support, legal assistance, mentorship programs, or protection mechanisms. It plays a supervisory role by monitoring how other government ministries incorporate women's rights and needs into their responsibilities. MoWSA evaluates the effectiveness of its policies through reports, success stories, and impact assessments submitted by other ministry offices.

Additionally, the respondent mentioned that MoWSA aims to ensure women's issues are reflected in national policy-making processes by reviewing institutional plans and budgets. However, focus group discussion participants expressed concerns that MoWSA's efforts are heavily focused on GBV. They pointed out that MoWSA does not sufficiently address VAW-E and VAW-P, which are distinct from broader GBV and require targeted strategies and attention.

In summary, the above discussion highlights that MoWSA lacks a structured partnership with CSOs and NEBE to effectively support women in political spaces.

¹⁴⁵ Republic of Rwanda, Revised National Gender Policy, 2021,

CHAPTER FIVE

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.4 Conclusion

Various studies have shown that women's political participation in Ethiopia remains far below the desired level. As supported by the findings of this research, the lack of adequate support and protection mechanisms is a major factor limiting women's engagement in the political sphere. Within the geographic scope of this study, Addis Ababa, there is a clear absence of institutional structures designed to support and safeguard women politicians.

International and regional human rights instruments unequivocally protect the right to actively participate in political parties, to hold party office, and to run for public office. These instruments urge states to use these instruments as guiding principles and translate them into concrete, actionable policies, such as gender quotas, affirmative action measures, and supportive infrastructure, that promote the full participation of women in political life.

Although the FDRE Constitution does not incorporate a quota system like Rwanda's constitution, it provides a strong normative foundation for inclusive political participation and guarantees equal political rights for all citizens, including women. One of Ethiopia's key laws in this regard is the Electoral, Political Parties Registration, and Election Code of Conduct Proclamation No. 1162/2019. While this proclamation includes gender-sensitive provisions, its reliance on voluntary quotas and the absence of enforceable measures has significantly hindered progress in advancing women's political empowerment.

This proclamation is in its amendment process and the draft proclamation introduces some important legal reforms, such as mandatory candidate quotas. However, it still falls short in several critical areas. For example, the proposed 20% quota for female candidates and 30% for party leadership does not adequately reflect the demographic composition of women in Ethiopia. Moreover, the draft fails to fully address the VAW-E and VAW-P. It lacks explicit legal obligation for political parties to prevent, respond to, and be held accountable for such violence. Furthermore, it does not include strong enforcement mechanisms or survivor-centered remedies.

The lived experience of the women politicians interviewed in this research clearly illustrate the persistent structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that hinder their full and meaningful participation in politics. These realities underscore the critical absence of support and protection mechanisms for women in political life.

Political parties and relevant institutions such as NEBE and the AAPPJC have consistently failed to provide a timely, impartial, and effective response to incidents of harassment and violence against women politicians. While some foundational efforts are in place, the overall approach remains superficial, reactive, and insufficient to bring about real change.

Women politicians continue to face widespread structural, cultural, and institutional barriers, including harassment, lack of mentorship and psychological support, and minimal legal support. Institutions such as political parties, NEBE, AAPPJC, and MoWSA provide fragmented support with minimal accountability or follow-up. While CSOs are often the most active supporters, their efforts are under-resourced and mostly engaged only during election periods, which limits their long-term impact.

5.5 Recommendations

To address the aforementioned gaps, the following recommendations are put forward:

- The FDRE Constitution should include a quota system in addition to the existing affirmative action provision, so that all Proclamations, including the proclamation governing political parties and elections, must reflect and enforce the constitutional quota allocation. Implementing such a measure would make these provisions more authoritative and binding, contributing to lasting change.
- Before the adoption of the draft electoral framework, NEBE should consider incorporating clear definitions and standards for what constitutes VAW-E and VAW-P, enhancing both criminal and civil remedies for survivors, and establishing effective mechanisms to address such cases during both pre-electoral and electoral cycles. The framework should also include a strong and safe reporting mechanism, increase the proposed quota for female candidates (20%) and women in political party leadership (30%), and include a binding

provision requiring political parties to adopt policies that address VAW-P and VAW-E and a follow up mechanism for proper implementation of the policies.

- While various CSOs recognize the urgent issue of GBV and are committed to addressing it, many lack an understanding of its specific manifestations in the political sphere, namely VAW-E and VAW-P. Therefore, CSOs should broaden their focus to include these critical areas. In addition, CSOs working to advance women's political rights, along with the NEBE, should provide long-term mentorship and experience-sharing opportunities during both electoral and non-electoral periods. They should also follow up with trainees to assess the impact of the training, track any changes implemented, and identify future needs for support and development.
- Stakeholders such as CSOs, NEBE, and the joint councils of political parties should work to raise awareness among women politicians, helping them recognize when they are experiencing harassment and empowering them to seek justice.
- The findings of this research indicated the existence of various institutions where cases of harassment and GBV can be reported, including political parties, political party joint councils, and NEBE. However, the study also revealed that political parties and their joint councils are not independent and that the joint council lacks the mandate to compel member parties to adopt gender-sensitive policies. Therefore, NEBE, as an independent institution, should establish a strong, independent, and safe reporting mechanism that ensures the timely and effective resolution of cases.
- Since women politicians face multidimensional challenges from political parties, society, and even their own families, stakeholders such as CSOs, political parties, and NEBE should consider providing psychological support to help sustain their resilience and strengthen their participation in the political sphere.
- CSOs, NEBE, and political parties should work on raising awareness among male members of political parties to reduce harassment and encourage them to become supporters of women politicians. Additionally, they should engage in public awareness campaigns to challenge and change the societal perception that politics is not meant for women.

- The research findings reveal that the AAPPJC currently lacks the authority to hold its member political parties accountable for acts of harassment. It is essential to review and strengthen the joint council's authority to effectively address these issues.
- A draft gender policy aimed at revising the 1986 policy is under review, but its adoption has faced significant delays. Therefore, MoWSA should take responsibility for expediting the adoption of this draft and ensuring it includes adequate support and protection mechanisms for women politicians.

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APPENDICES

Interview Questions Guideline

This study involves key informants from institutions such as NEBE, MoWSA, AAPPJC, as well as women politicians, representatives from CSO organizations, and political parties.

Your insights are vital to the depth and quality of this research. By helping to identify gaps in the support and protection mechanisms available to women politicians in Addis Ababa, your participation plays a crucial role in shaping solutions to these challenges. Your cooperation is therefore an essential part of this problem-solving effort.

Note: All your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous, unless you explicitly consent to have your identity disclosed.

A. For respondents from women politicians

1. In your experience, what barriers do women politicians face in their political participation in Addis Ababa?
2. What kind of support system from different institutions (e.g., mentoring, training) has been available to you in your political career? If yes, do you think these support systems are sufficient?
3. Have you personally experienced or witnessed gender-based violence or harassment within the political field? If yes, how was the situation handled?
4. What legal and institutional protection mechanisms are in place to ensure the safety, security, and fair treatment of women politicians facing intimidation or harassment, and how effective are these protections?
5. What changes are necessary to create a safer and more supportive environment for women in politics in Addis Ababa, and what roles should political parties and stakeholders such as MoWSA, NEBE, and CSOs play in empowering women politicians?
6. How have you personally been supported by your political party or other organizations during times of personal or professional challenges?
7. Do you believe that gender balance within political parties affects the effectiveness of support systems for women politicians?

8. In your opinion, how well do male party members support women in politics, and what could be improved in this regard?
9. Do you have any suggestions to increase women's participation and leadership with in political parties?

B. For respondents from Political Parties

1. Does your party have a clear strategy or target for increasing women's participation in leadership positions, and what types of support are offered to women politicians to help achieve this goal?
2. How does your party prepare women to compete effectively in elections and leadership positions? Are there specific programs for skill or capacity development?
3. What role does your party play in addressing the broader social or cultural norms that discourage women's political engagement?
4. How does your party handle situations where women candidates experience backlash or disapproval because of their gender or their political views?
5. Does your party have any formal mechanisms for reporting and addressing harassment or discrimination that female politicians may face within the party or during their political campaigns?
6. What steps has your party taken to ensure that issues affecting women (e.g., VAW-E) are included in the party's policies?
7. Does your party track or monitor the progress of women politicians within its ranks? If so, how?
8. Does your party provide any specific psychological support or counseling for women politicians dealing with the pressures of their role?

C. Respondents from former women politicians

1. Why did you decide to leave politics?
2. Reflecting on your experience as a woman politician, what were the biggest challenges you faced?
3. Was the lack of support and protection system a reason for your withdrawal from politics?
4. How do you think the political landscape for women politicians in Ethiopia has changed over time? What progress do you think has been made?

5. How have support systems for women in politics evolved over the years?
6. Have you observed a change in the level of public support or criticism of women politicians over the years? How did this affect your personal experience?
7. What specific challenges did you face as a woman politician that were not addressed by your political party and other stakeholders?
8. Were there moments when you were made to feel that your gender was a barrier to your political roles? How did this impact your decision to leave politics?
9. Were you subjected to gender-based violence (verbal, physical, or online abuse) during your political career? If so, how was this handled by your political party and other stakeholders?
10. What lessons do you think political parties, the government, and CSOs can learn from your experience to prevent other women from leaving politics?
11. What challenges would you recommend to make the political system to be more protective and supportive for women's long-term political engagement?
12. If you could have done anything differently, what actions would you have taken to improve the support systems for women politicians during your time in politics?

D. For respondents from CSOs

1. Can you describe your organization's role in supporting women's political participation?
2. Did your organization offer any financial, psychological, mentorship, or capacity-building programs for women politicians? How effective were these programs?
3. What were the main barriers your organization encountered in promoting women's political participation in Addis Ababa?
4. Did you observe any resistance from political parties, the government, or other stakeholders when it came to increasing women's participation in politics?
5. What protection mechanisms did your organization have in place to ensure the safety and security of women politicians, especially those facing threats or harassment?
6. Were there any legal or institutional mechanisms that your organization engaged with to address gender-based violence in politics? If yes, how successful were these mechanisms in offering protection to women politicians?

7. What partnerships has your organization formed with political parties, government agencies, or international organizations to support women in politics?
8. How does your organization address cultural and societal barriers to women's political participation within your programs?
9. How do you assess the long-term impact of your programs on the political engagement of women? Are there any mechanisms in place to track this?

E. For respondents from AAPPJC

1. What role does the Addis Ababa Political Parties Joint Council play in promoting the political participation of women in Addis Ababa?
2. How does the Joint Council ensure that all political parties within the council adhere to gender equality standards, especially with respect to promoting women's participation?
3. What kinds of support systems are available to women politicians within political parties under the Joint Council?
4. What challenges has the Joint Council faced in achieving gender parity in political participation?
5. How do political parties in the Joint Council handle gender-based discrimination or bias within their ranks?
6. What protection mechanisms are in place for women politicians within the Joint Council, particularly those facing harassment or threats due to their gender?
7. Are there specific procedures or protocols for addressing cases of gender-based violence or harassment within member political parties or during electoral processes?
8. Has the Joint Council worked with the MoWSA, NEBE, and CSOs to address issues of women's political participation and protection?
9. Can you provide examples of how the Joint Council has successfully advocated for women's issues within the broader political landscape?
10. What role does the Joint Council play in facilitating women's access to political funding or campaign resources?
11. How does the Joint Council monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of gender parity initiatives among its member parties?

12. What improvements do you believe are needed in the current system to better support and protect women in politics?

F. For respondents from NEBE

1. What support systems does the NEBE offer to women politicians, such as training, campaigning resources, psychological support, or awareness programs?
2. What protection mechanisms are in place to ensure the safety and security of women politicians?
3. Has the NEBE developed any policies or protocols for addressing gender-based violence, harassment, or threats against women politicians?
4. How does the NEBE monitor and respond to incidents of gender-based violence or discrimination during elections?
5. What measures does the NEBE take to protect women politicians from intimidation or violence, and how do you ensure these measures are effectively implemented?
6. What legal or institutional reforms does the NEBE believe are necessary to further support and protect women politicians?
7. What specific measures does the NEBE take to encourage political parties to adopt gender-sensitive practices during elections?
8. Does the NEBE provide any platforms for women candidates to network and support one another throughout the election process?
9. How does the NEBE address the issue of electoral violence against women and ensure that women are not excluded from the political process due to fear of violence?
10. In your opinion, how well do current election laws support or hinder women's political participation, and what changes would you suggest?

G. For respondents from MoWSA

1. What role does the MoWSA play in promoting women's political participation?
2. How does the MoWSA provide training, capacity-building, psychological support, or mentorship opportunities for women in politics?
3. What protection mechanisms are in place to ensure the safety and well-being of women who are involved in politics?

4. How does the MoWSA ensure that women politicians are protected from harassment, gender-based violence, or discrimination in their political engagement?
5. What specific action does the MoWSA take to protect women politicians from threats or attacks, both physically and psychologically?
6. How does the MoWSA collaborate with political parties, CSOs, NEBE, and other stakeholders to create a more supportive and protective environment for women in politics?
7. How does the MoWSA evaluate the effectiveness of its policies and programs aimed at increasing women's participation in politics?
8. Does the MoWSA offer any legal support or advocacy services for women politicians who face legal challenges related to their political involvement?
9. How does the MoWSA ensure that women's issues are included in the broader national policy-making process, particularly those related to women's rights and gender equality?