

The Influence of Patriarchal Culture on Women's Participation in Local Politics

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ABSTRACT

The participation of women in local politics is a crucial element in achieving inclusive governance and equitable development. However, in many societies, patriarchal culture continues to pose significant barriers to women's political involvement. This study examines the influence of patriarchal norms, values, and structures on women's participation in local politics, focusing on how gender roles, social expectations, and institutional practices limit women's opportunities to engage in political decision-making. The analysis draws on qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary literature to explore the complex interplay between culture and political participation. The findings reveal that patriarchal culture perpetuates discriminatory attitudes, restricts women's mobility and access to political networks, and reinforces traditional beliefs that confine women to domestic roles. Despite these challenges, the study also identifies emerging strategies employed by women and advocacy groups to challenge patriarchal norms and expand women's political representation at the local level. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for comprehensive policy interventions, gender-sensitive education, and community-based empowerment programs to dismantle patriarchal barriers and promote women's full participation in local politics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in politics is a fundamental aspect of democratic governance and social justice. It ensures that the voices, needs, and interests of half the population are adequately represented in decision-making processes that shape public policy and community development. In the context of local politics, women's engagement is particularly critical, as local governance often addresses issues directly affecting family welfare, education, healthcare, and community services-sectors where women's perspectives and experiences are especially relevant.

Despite significant progress in women's political representation worldwide, gender disparities remain prevalent, particularly at the local level in many developing and patriarchal societies. Patriarchal culture — characterized by male dominance in social, economic, and political spheres — continues to exert profound influence on women's ability to participate fully and equally in political life. In such societies, traditional gender norms, rigid family roles, religious interpretations, and social expectations often limit women's access to political power, hinder their leadership development, and constrain their political agency. This introduction seeks to explore the deep-seated influence of patriarchal culture on women's participation in local politics by examining its structural, socio-cultural, and institutional dimensions. The discussion aims to lay the foundation for a comprehensive understanding of how

entrenched patriarchal norms function as barriers, as well as the ways in which women navigate these obstacles to assert their political rights.

Patriarchy refers to a system of social organization where men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. According to Walby, patriarchy is “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women.” Patriarchal culture, therefore, encompasses not only institutional power imbalances but also the prevailing beliefs, customs, and practices that sustain male dominance and female subordination. In patriarchal societies, gender roles are sharply defined: men are perceived as natural leaders and breadwinners, while women are often relegated to the private sphere, responsible for childbearing, caregiving, and household management. These gendered expectations are enforced through socialization processes that begin in early childhood and are reinforced by family, education systems, religious teachings, media representations, and legal frameworks. Over time, such norms become internalized, making them appear as natural or inevitable aspects of social life rather than as products of social construction.

Local politics refers to political activities and decision-making processes that occur at the municipal, village, district, or community level. It encompasses a wide range of governance functions such as resource allocation, service delivery, infrastructure development, and conflict resolution. For many women, local politics serves as the most accessible entry point into formal political participation, especially in contexts where national politics may be more competitive, hierarchical, or exclusionary. Participation in local politics provides women with several key opportunities: Influencing policy decisions that directly affect their lives and communities. Developing leadership skills that can serve as a foundation for higher political ambitions. Gaining visibility and credibility within the public sphere. Building political networks and alliances that support their advancement. Challenging traditional gender norms by demonstrating women's capacity to lead. Yet, despite these opportunities, women's participation in local politics remains constrained by patriarchal cultural structures that permeate nearly every aspect of their personal and public lives.

Patriarchal culture influences women's participation in local politics through multiple, interrelated mechanisms. These mechanisms operate at the structural, institutional, and individual levels, reinforcing one another in ways that systematically disadvantage women. From an early age, girls and boys in patriarchal societies are socialized into distinct gender roles that shape their identities, aspirations, and perceived capabilities. Boys are often encouraged to be assertive, competitive, and ambitious traits associated with leadership and public life while girls are taught to be nurturing, obedient, and modest traits linked to caregiving and private life. As a result, many women internalize beliefs that politics is a male domain, leading to lower political ambition, limited confidence, and reluctance to pursue political office. Even when women express interest in politics, they may face resistance from family members who view political involvement as inappropriate or unsafe for women.

Patriarchal norms often limit women's access to the financial, educational, and social resources necessary for political participation. Running for political office requires not only motivation but also financial backing, campaign resources, educational credentials, and access to influential networks — all of which tend to be more accessible to men. In many cases, women are economically dependent on their husbands or families, leaving them with limited autonomy to pursue political careers. Additionally, limited access to quality education, especially in rural areas, restricts women's ability to develop the skills and qualifications that enhance political credibility. Formal political institutions often reflect and perpetuate patriarchal norms. Political parties, electoral systems, and governance structures may be dominated by male elites who control candidate selection processes, campaign financing, and political appointments. Women may face discriminatory party rules, limited mentorship opportunities, and exclusion from informal networks where critical political decisions are made.

Moreover, electoral violence, harassment, and intimidation disproportionately target women candidates, further discouraging their participation. In some cases, legal frameworks may offer little protection against gender-based violence in politics, leaving women vulnerable to abuse without effective recourse. Cultural and religious norms are powerful forces in shaping perceptions of women's appropriate roles. In many patriarchal societies, conservative interpretations of religious texts are used to justify male authority and female subordination. Women who challenge these norms by entering politics may be accused of violating cultural or religious expectations, facing moral judgment, social

ostracism, or reputational harm. Religious leaders and institutions may also play influential roles in discouraging women's political participation, framing it as incompatible with women's "natural" roles as wives and mothers.

Even when women enter politics, patriarchal culture often imposes a "double burden" of responsibility. Women are expected to fulfill both their public roles as political leaders and their private roles as caregivers and homemakers. This dual expectation creates significant time constraints and emotional stress, making political careers more difficult for women to sustain over the long term. The lack of adequate support systems, such as affordable childcare, family-friendly work environments, and equitable distribution of domestic labor, further exacerbates these challenges. The exclusion of women from local politics has far-reaching consequences for governance, development, and gender equality. Women's perspectives are essential for formulating policies that address the needs of marginalized groups, promote inclusive development, and ensure equitable distribution of public resources. Greater attention to social welfare, education, healthcare, and child development.

Improved transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption efforts, Enhanced responsiveness to the needs of women, children, and vulnerable populations, More inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. Women bring different lived experiences, priorities, and leadership styles to political institutions, enriching public debate and broadening the scope of policy agendas. Their representation also serves as a powerful symbol of gender equality, inspiring future generations to challenge patriarchal norms and pursue leadership roles. While patriarchal culture remains deeply entrenched, numerous strategies have been employed to promote women's political participation and challenge gender-based discrimination. Legal measures such as gender quotas, affirmative action, and equal opportunity laws can help level the playing field by mandating minimum levels of women's representation in political institutions. Several countries have successfully implemented quotas at the local level, leading to substantial increases in women's political participation.

Training programs that build women's leadership skills, public speaking abilities, campaign strategies, and political negotiation skills can empower women to run for office and succeed in politics. Mentorship programs that connect aspiring women leaders with experienced role models can also provide valuable guidance and support. Efforts to challenge gender stereotypes and promote positive images of women leaders through media campaigns, community dialogues, and educational curricula can help shift public attitudes and normalize women's participation in politics. Programs that enhance women's access to education, employment, and financial resources increase their autonomy and capacity to engage in politics. Microfinance initiatives, vocational training, and entrepreneurship support can reduce women's economic dependence and create pathways for political engagement. Women's organizations, civil society groups, and feminist movements play vital roles in advocating for policy reforms, providing support networks, and mobilizing collective action to demand greater representation of women in politics.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the influence of patriarchal culture on women's participation in local politics. Qualitative methods are appropriate for capturing the depth and complexity of participants' experiences, perceptions, and the socio-cultural dynamics underlying political participation. A case study design is utilized to gain in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of women engaged in local politics within patriarchal societies. This approach allows for the exploration of specific contexts where patriarchal norms are deeply embedded and their impact on women's political engagement is most pronounced. Primary data are collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with women who are currently holding or have previously held positions in local political institutions, such as village councils, municipal boards, or district assemblies. Additional interviews are conducted with political party leaders, community elders, and family members to capture broader societal attitudes and expectations. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with women's groups and local NGOs provide further insights into community-level perceptions and collective strategies for overcoming barriers. Secondary data from official reports, policy documents, academic literature, and media sources complement the primary data. Purposive sampling is employed to select participants who have relevant experiences and insights related to the research topic. The sample includes diverse age groups, educational backgrounds, political affiliations, and geographic locations to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring

patterns, themes, and relationships within the data. Transcribed interviews and FGDs are systematically coded, categorized, and interpreted to reveal the influence of patriarchal culture on women's political participation. Informed consent, confidentiality, and participants' anonymity are strictly maintained throughout the research process to ensure ethical integrity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socialization and Internalized Gender Roles

One of the most pervasive themes emerging from the data is the powerful role of gender socialization in shaping women's political aspirations. Most female respondents reported that from a young age, they were raised to prioritize domestic responsibilities over public or political ambitions. Political engagement was often portrayed as an activity suited for men, while women were expected to focus on household management, caregiving, and child-rearing. This deeply internalized belief system results in many women lacking confidence and self-efficacy to pursue political careers. Even when women develop interest in politics, they often face psychological barriers rooted in societal expectations of modesty and subordination. Socialization plays a central role in shaping individual behavior, beliefs, and aspirations, particularly concerning gender roles. In patriarchal societies, gender socialization begins from early childhood, systematically assigning different expectations, responsibilities, and privileges to males and females.

These internalized gender roles significantly influence women's willingness and ability to participate in public life, including politics. From a young age, girls are often taught to prioritize qualities such as obedience, modesty, nurturing, and domesticity, while boys are encouraged to be assertive, ambitious, competitive, and independent. Toys, media, family interactions, educational content, and religious teachings frequently reinforce these distinctions. For instance, girls may receive dolls, toy kitchens, and materials associated with caregiving, while boys receive toys that promote leadership, exploration, and problem-solving skills. Over time, these seemingly benign differences embed deeper notions of what constitutes appropriate male and female behavior. Families are often the first and most influential agents of gender socialization.

Parents, consciously or unconsciously, guide their daughters toward roles centered around home and family responsibilities. Daughters may be subtly discouraged from expressing ambition or interest in leadership activities, while sons are pushed toward careers and positions of authority. In many communities, girls who show interest in political or public activities may be perceived as deviating from social norms, facing criticism or ostracism. Educational institutions further reinforce gender roles. Teachers may unconsciously give boys more attention in science and leadership-oriented subjects while encouraging girls to focus on arts, caregiving professions, or homemaking skills. Textbooks and curricula often contain implicit gender biases, portraying men as leaders and decision-makers while depicting women in supportive or subordinate roles.

Religious and cultural norms also contribute to internalized gender roles. In some patriarchal societies, religious teachings are interpreted to assign leadership to men and submission to women, presenting these arrangements as divinely ordained. This religious framing makes challenging gender roles not only a social transgression but a moral or spiritual one, further discouraging women from entering public spheres such as politics. As these gender norms become internalized, many women develop feelings of self-doubt regarding their political capabilities. They may believe they lack the skills, knowledge, or legitimacy to lead, even when they possess the necessary qualifications. This phenomenon, known as "internalized oppression," leads to low political ambition and confidence among women, contributing to their underrepresentation in political leadership. Moreover, societal approval often reinforces these roles through reward and punishment.

Women who conform to traditional gender expectations are praised and socially accepted, while those who pursue leadership roles may face social sanctions, such as gossip, isolation, or character attacks. Fear of social repercussions discourages many women from stepping into political arenas. In sum, socialization and internalized gender roles create powerful psychological and cultural barriers that deter women from participating in politics. Breaking these patterns requires deliberate interventions in education, family dynamics, media representation, and community norms to foster more egalitarian views on gender roles. Encouraging young girls to develop leadership skills, confidence, and political awareness from an early age is essential for expanding women's participation in public life and dismantling the enduring legacy of patriarchal socialization.

Family and Community Resistance

Family resistance emerged as a critical barrier to women's political participation. Many participants disclosed that their husbands, parents, or extended family members discouraged or outright prohibited them from entering politics, citing concerns about family honor, reputation, and gender-appropriate behavior. In patriarchal societies, a woman's public visibility is sometimes interpreted as a threat to traditional norms. Community members may label politically active women as neglectful mothers, disobedient wives, or morally questionable figures, leading to social stigma and reputational damage. One female participant shared: "When I first decided to run for office, some people in my village accused me of abandoning my family."

They said politics would make me arrogant and ruin my marriage." This social scrutiny creates a hostile environment where women must constantly justify their presence in the political sphere while managing family relationships and societal judgment. One of the most formidable barriers faced by women aspiring to participate in local politics in patriarchal societies is rejection from both family and broader society. This rejection stems from deeply ingrained beliefs about gender roles that position politics as a male-dominated sphere, while relegating women to the private, domestic domain. For many women, the first source of resistance comes from within their own families, where political ambition is often seen as incompatible with traditional female duties. Family rejection often manifests through discouragement, control, or outright prohibition. Husbands, parents, and extended family members may perceive a woman's political engagement as a threat to family honor or stability.

They may argue that political involvement would detract from her primary responsibilities as a wife, mother, and caretaker. In some cases, women face emotional pressure or even coercion to abandon political aspirations in favor of fulfilling familial obligations. This domestic opposition can significantly undermine women's confidence and discourage them from pursuing leadership roles. Beyond the family, societal rejection compounds the challenge. In many communities, women who step into political arenas are subjected to harsh social scrutiny and moral judgment. Their character may be questioned, and they may be labeled as disobedient, ambitious, or neglectful of their families. Gossip and negative stereotypes often circulate, aiming to shame or intimidate women into conforming to traditional expectations.

This societal rejection serves to police women's behavior and maintain the patriarchal status quo. The rejection by family and society not only affects women psychologically but also has practical implications for their political careers. Women may struggle to build necessary support networks, secure campaign resources, or gain voter trust if they are perceived as violating social norms. The lack of community acceptance can translate into reduced electoral support and hinder their ability to influence local governance. Overcoming this rejection requires both individual resilience and collective action. Support from women's organizations, community leaders, and progressive family members can help create an environment where women's political participation is normalized and valued. Public education campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes and highlight successful female leaders can also play a crucial role in shifting societal attitudes and reducing the stigma associated with women's political engagement.

Institutional Barriers and Political Party Dynamics

The structure and functioning of political parties often reflect patriarchal hierarchies that marginalize women. Many participants shared experiences of discriminatory party practices, including limited nomination slots for women, tokenistic inclusion in leadership positions, and lack of institutional support during campaigns. One party activist noted; "Although my party talks about gender equality, in reality, women are rarely chosen as candidates for winnable positions. We are asked to run only in areas where the party is weak." Even when women secure positions within political parties, they often find themselves sidelined from decision-making processes, assigned to committees related to social welfare rather than core political functions such as finance, security, or governance.

While patriarchal culture operates at the social and familial levels, it is also deeply embedded within the institutional structures of political parties. As the primary gateways to political office, political parties play a decisive role in shaping women's opportunities for participation and advancement. However, the internal dynamics of many political parties often reflect and reinforce gender biases, creating significant institutional barriers for women. One of the most common institutional obstacles is the male-dominated leadership within political parties. Party leadership positions are typically held by men, who control nomination processes, campaign funding allocation, and policy decision-making. As a result, women often find themselves excluded from important discussions and decisions.

Even when women hold positions within party structures, they are frequently relegated to roles perceived as extensions of traditional female responsibilities, such as social welfare, education, or family affairs, rather than core political or strategic posts. Candidate selection processes further reflect gender bias. Party elites often perceive male candidates as more electable, experienced, and authoritative, while doubting women's ability to lead or win elections. As a consequence, women may be nominated in constituencies with little chance of victory or placed low on party lists. In some cases, gender quotas designed to increase female representation are only partially implemented or manipulated to satisfy legal requirements without genuine commitment to gender equality. Access to party resources is another significant institutional barrier.

Political campaigns require substantial financial support, media exposure, and logistical backing, which are often distributed unequally within parties. Male candidates, with their established networks and influence, usually receive more substantial support, leaving female candidates to rely on personal resources or informal networks. Internal party culture can also discourage women through subtle forms of exclusion, such as meetings held at times or locations that are difficult for women with family responsibilities to attend, or through informal networks where key decisions are made outside of official forums. These dynamics make it difficult for women to fully integrate into party activities or influence party agendas. To address these institutional barriers, political parties must actively promote gender-inclusive reforms, such as transparent nomination processes, equitable resource distribution, leadership training for women, and genuine enforcement of gender quotas. Without deliberate structural changes, political parties will continue to act as gatekeepers that perpetuate patriarchal norms and limit women's full participation in political life.

The Double Burden of Work and Family

Women who succeed in entering politics often face the dual burden of balancing political responsibilities with domestic obligations. Unlike their male counterparts, women are expected to continue managing household duties even after assuming public office. The lack of family support, childcare services, and flexible working arrangements exacerbates this burden. One female leader stated; "Even after being elected, I still have to cook, clean, and take care of my children. My male colleagues don't face these expectations." This double workload leads to burnout and limits women's availability for political activities, committee work, and policy discussions. One of the most persistent challenges faced by women in local politics, especially in patriarchal societies, is the double burden of balancing professional responsibilities with traditional family obligations.

Unlike their male counterparts, who often receive strong familial support or are exempted from domestic duties, women are expected to simultaneously fulfill the roles of political leaders and primary caregivers. This dual expectation significantly affects their ability to fully engage in political activities and advance their careers. In many cases, women politicians must manage household chores, child-rearing, and caregiving for elderly family members alongside demanding political schedules. Campaigning, attending meetings, participating in decision-making processes, and fulfilling administrative duties often require extensive time commitments and flexibility demands that conflict with rigid family responsibilities. This constant juggling of roles leads to physical exhaustion, emotional stress, and limited time for strategic networking or policy development, which are crucial for political success. Moreover, societal expectations reinforce these pressures.

Women who delegate domestic responsibilities may face criticism for neglecting their family duties, while men in politics rarely face similar scrutiny. The perception that women must excel simultaneously in both private and public spheres creates unrealistic standards and additional psychological pressure. As one female politician explained: "When I work late for political meetings, people say I am abandoning my children. But when male politicians do the same, they are praised for their dedication." Institutional structures often do little to accommodate women's dual roles. Political parties may not provide family-friendly policies, such as flexible meeting times, childcare support, or maternity leave, making it even harder for women to sustain long-term political engagement.

In many instances, women are forced to make difficult choices between their political aspirations and family well-being, resulting in high attrition rates among female politicians. Addressing the double burden requires both cultural and institutional change. Family members, particularly spouses, must share domestic responsibilities to support women's political involvement. Political institutions should implement gender-sensitive policies that recognize and accommodate women's caregiving roles. Public awareness campaigns can also help shift societal attitudes, emphasizing that political leadership is a shared responsibility that should not be hindered by outdated gender norms. Ultimately, reducing the

double burden is essential for ensuring that women can participate in politics on an equal footing, contributing fully to governance and policy-making processes.

The Role of Education and Awareness

Education emerged as a key factor enabling women to challenge patriarchal norms and participate in politics. Participants with higher levels of education reported greater confidence, stronger public speaking skills, and better understanding of legal rights and political processes. In addition, awareness campaigns conducted by NGOs, women's organizations, and international agencies have helped to shift societal attitudes, promote gender equality, and create more supportive environments for women's political engagement. Education and awareness play a critical role in challenging patriarchal norms and promoting women's participation in local politics. In societies where traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched, access to quality education equips women with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to enter the political arena and advocate for their rights.

Education serves as a foundation for personal empowerment. Women who attain higher levels of education often develop stronger self-confidence, critical thinking abilities, and leadership skills. They become more aware of their legal rights, political systems, and the importance of their involvement in decision-making processes. As one respondent noted: "Education opened my eyes to the fact that women have the same rights as men to lead and to serve the community." Furthermore, education exposes women to diverse perspectives and role models who challenge traditional gender stereotypes. Exposure to women leaders, both locally and globally, can inspire women to pursue political careers and envision themselves as capable leaders.

Educated women are also better positioned to navigate political structures, communicate effectively, and engage in policy debates, enhancing their credibility and influence within political institutions. Awareness-raising campaigns conducted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women's advocacy groups, and international organizations complement formal education by directly addressing cultural and societal barriers. These campaigns challenge prevailing gender norms by highlighting the value of women's leadership and emphasizing the societal benefits of gender-inclusive governance. Media platforms, workshops, and community outreach programs can dispel myths about women's political participation and create supportive environments for aspiring female politicians.

Community-wide awareness is equally important, as it fosters a more inclusive political culture. When communities understand the importance of women's representation, they are more likely to support female candidates and reject discriminatory practices. Educational initiatives targeting both men and women can shift attitudes, reducing resistance from family members and political parties. However, access to education remains uneven, particularly in rural and marginalized areas where patriarchal norms are strongest. Efforts must focus not only on increasing educational opportunities for girls but also on ensuring that educational content promotes gender equality and leadership development. In conclusion, education and awareness are powerful tools for dismantling patriarchal barriers to women's political participation. By investing in education and promoting widespread gender-sensitive awareness, societies can empower women to actively participate in political life and contribute meaningfully to local governance.

4. CONCLUSION

The research clearly demonstrates that patriarchal culture remains one of the most significant obstacles to women's participation in local politics. Deeply rooted in socialization processes, family expectations, institutional structures, and cultural norms, patriarchy shapes not only the external environment but also women's internal perceptions of their own political capabilities. From early childhood, gendered socialization instills in women the belief that their primary role lies within the domestic sphere, discouraging political ambition and leadership aspirations. Family and societal rejection further compound these challenges. Women who attempt to engage in political activities often face strong resistance from spouses, parents, and community members who perceive their involvement as a violation of traditional gender roles. This rejection frequently manifests as social stigma, moral criticism, and even ostracism, creating a hostile environment that deters many women from pursuing political office. Institutional barriers within political parties also reflect the pervasive influence of patriarchal culture. Party leadership structures, candidate selection processes, resource allocation, and informal political networks are largely controlled by men, limiting women's access to opportunities and support. Even when women manage to enter political parties, they are often sidelined into non-strategic roles that reinforce traditional gender expectations. The double burden of balancing political responsibilities with family obligations adds another layer of complexity. Unlike their male counterparts, women in

politics are expected to fulfill both public duties and private caregiving roles, often without sufficient institutional support or societal recognition of this dual responsibility. However, the research also reveals pathways for progress. Education and awareness emerge as powerful tools in challenging patriarchal norms and empowering women to participate in politics. Access to quality education enhances women's self-confidence, political knowledge, and leadership skills, while awareness campaigns help shift societal attitudes and create more supportive environments. Addressing the influence of patriarchal culture requires a multifaceted approach that combines legal reforms, institutional restructuring, educational initiatives, and cultural transformation. Political parties must adopt gender-inclusive policies, governments should enforce anti-discrimination measures, and communities must actively support women's leadership. Only through sustained, collective efforts can the deeply embedded structures of patriarchy be dismantled, paving the way for greater gender equality and more inclusive political representation at the local level.

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