



## Empowering Women: Fostering Gender-Inclusive Local Governance through Enhanced Electoral Participation: A Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

Having more women in government leadership roles lead to better gender-responsive and inclusive governance (United Nations Development Program, 2023). Participation in the decision-making and political power of the state is of paramount importance for every citizen of the state. However, there remains a significant gap between the number of men and women elected in local politics. Despite much progress toward gender equality in recent years, critical gaps between men and women persist. One of the targets under Sustainable Development Goal 5 is to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life. This study examined the status of women in local politics and the existing policies on women's political participation in local governance in the Philippines. It delves into the critical nexus of women's leadership participation in electoral politics and the imperative for gender-responsive local governance in the Philippines. This study employed a qualitative method. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing policies, the research identifies both the progress made and the persistent challenges faced by women in accessing and influencing political processes at the local level. Drawing upon these insights, a set of recommendations is proposed to address barriers, promote inclusivity, and empower women in shaping more equitable and responsive governance structures. This study underscores the significance of fostering women's leadership in electoral politics as a catalyst for advancing gender equality and enhancing democratic governance at the grassroots level.

**Keywords:** *Women, Politics, Leadership Participation, Local Governance*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

WOMEN in politics in the Philippines have made progress but still face challenges for equal representation. Historical figures like Cory Aquino and Leni Robredo have had big roles. The Philippines ranks well for gender equality, but there's still a gap between men and women in leadership roles. Women hold about one-fifth of elected government positions, but they need at least 30% for real influence (Philippine Commission on Women, 2019). Challenges include old-fashioned beliefs, stereotypes, and the extra responsibilities women have at home and in society. Women get into politics through personal success, family connections, marriage, media, and special nominations. Efforts are being made to increase women's role in politics through technology, data management, and gender quotas. While there's been progress, there is still work to ensure women have equal chances in political leadership.

The gender gap report (United Nation Women, 2023) in power and leadership is an important element of the persistent lag in gender equality (Target 5.5). On a global scale, women occupy only

26.7% of parliamentary seats, 35.5% of local government seats, and just 28.2% percent of management positions in businesses. According to current trends, women will hold no more than 30% of all managerial jobs by 2050. Global assessments of women's empowerment constantly place the nation highly among major indices of gender equality. For instance, the nation remains the best among Asian nations in the Global Gender Gap Index (2021), even if it dropped one spot from the previous year. The middle-income nation appears to be making progress toward its gender equality goals based on its high rating and reputation for having adopted important legislation advancing women's rights (Philippine Commission on Women, 2021). Globally, research have demonstrated that having more women in government leadership roles leads to better gender-responsive and inclusive governance (United Nations Development Program, 2023).

But there are still enormous obstacles in the way of Filipino women's political representation. The Philippines still lags behind other countries in terms of women's ability to significantly influence

decision-making in institutions. Traditional norms about women's proper place in the public sphere remain an obstacle. The seventh round of the World Values Survey has found that more than half of Filipinos believe that men make better political leaders than women (Franco, 2021).

Women's political participation is essential for gender equality and development because it allows them to directly engage in public policies and decision-making. However, political families now hold most of the highest-level local seats, making it challenging for women to enter politics without dynastic links (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2017). Despite progress in several aspects of social and economic life, Filipino women have yet to show convincing indicators of growth in political participation.

The foregoing issue on the gender gap in politics spurs this study to determine the extent of leadership and political participation of women and their challenges in the local government which has a significant impact on the formulation and implementation of public policies.

## 1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study addressed gender inequality and issues that affected Philippine women specifically in key leadership positions and in the political participation in local governance. The specific objectives of this study are the following:

1. To examine the status of women's leadership participation in local governance and electoral politics in the Philippines.
2. To analyze the existing policies in the Philippines which promote women's leadership and political participation.

## 1.2 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it provides sufficient information on the status and challenges of women's leadership participation in local governance. It will be a reference to government departments, NGOs and other agencies in the process of reviewing or drafting gender responsive policies and setting up effective interventions for improving the participation of women in governance. Specifically, the study may benefit policymakers to take national and local affirmative actions to empower women and promote gender equality. Moreover, this paper aims to inform policymakers, advocacy groups, and community leaders to take national and local affirmative actions to empower women and promote gender diversity in creating more inclusive and equitable societies.

## 1.3 Theoretical Background

The social role theory supports the idea that gender differences occur because of two related processes: social learning and societal power relation's behavior (Kacmar et al., 2010). Women and men have traditionally occupied different roles, people might perceive women and men as having different leadership skills to hold key political positions and positions of power. Individual beliefs and stereotypes regarding men and women's roles within society have casted both men and women into certain roles. The key premise is that what may be considered as gender-appropriate behaviors are usually learned through social modeling and reinforced through society's power and status structures (Kacmar et al. (2010) cited by Anigwe, A. (2014).

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies shed light on the status of women's empowerment, gender-inclusive local governance, and electoral participation in the Philippines. Soliman and Pulhin (2021) conducted case studies in Makati City and Butuan City, revealing persistent challenges such as gender stereotypes and limited access to resources hindering women's participation in local governance. Meanwhile, Tabunda and Lao's (2020) investigation into political dynasties highlighted their negative impact on women's political participation, contributing to a male-dominated political landscape. Dignadice and Magat's (2019) analysis highlighted a significant disparity between women's representation in the population and their presence in local government positions, emphasizing the need for measures to enhance women's political participation.

Additionally, Berja's (2017) study revealed that while women's participation in Philippine local politics has increased, political dynasties continue to shape the political landscape, impacting women's opportunities for leadership roles. These studies collectively underscore the complex interplay of socio-cultural norms, political structures, and institutional factors influencing women's participation and empowerment in the Philippines' governance and electoral processes.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

For this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted. This involved systematically examining existing academic works, policy documents, and reports concerning women's involvement in local governance and electoral processes in the Philippines.

### 3.2 Data Gathering Procedure

Data from the existing policies in the Philippines which promotes women's leadership and political participation were obtained from various references and resources which document such policies. To examine the status of women's leadership participation in electoral politics in the local level, the gubernatorial results of the election data last 2022 was used. The number of elected women governors in all 82 provinces was determined.

### 3.3 Limitations

This study limits itself on women's leadership participation in the local level specifically on the number of women elected for gubernatorial positions based on the result of the election conducted last 2022. This study only tackles those policies which specifically promote women's leadership and political participation in the Philippines.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Data proved to be very vital in this study. The data from existing statistics and library research was analyzed and used to draw conclusions and recommendations for enhancing women's participation in politics at the local level.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Status of Women Leadership Participation and Representation in Electoral Politics*

According to Commission on Elections (COMELEC, 2022) data from 2016 to 2022, the proportion of females among all registrants has always been at least 50%. From 2010 to 2022, voter turnout among women has been high, with at least 75% of registered female voters voting on election day. The most recent COMELEC figures also show women's active participation abroad. The majority of registered and actual voters overseas in the 2019 elections were women, both at roughly 60%. Furthermore, female registrants' turnout in the same elections was 33.0 percent, while males' turnout was 29.4 percent.

In a gist, women have traditionally been active participants in the electoral process from the inception of women's suffrage. This form of involvement does not extend beyond voting, as women's representation in elective posts in the country has remained low. Although the proportion of female candidates has risen during the previous five automated elections, from 16.7% in 2010 to 20.6% in 2022, these numbers still only represent one female candidate out of every five. Women's share of elected officials rose from 18.5 percent in 2010 to 23.3 percent in 2022, but it is still below parity.

Women occupy only 22 percent of gubernatorial posts from previous election, 18 percent of vice-gubernatorial posts, 18 percent of provincial board seats, 21 percent of mayoralty posts, 20 percent of city council seats, and 20 percent of municipal council seats (COMELEC, 2013). Out of the 44,326 candidates who ran for various national and local elective posts in the 2013 elections, excluding party-list groups, only 7,925 or 18 percent were women. Women make up half of the population and yet occupy just one-fifth of government elective positions. This gender imbalance reflects why many of the laws are biased against women, or why women's issues and concerns relating to family are often neglected. From 1998 to 2016, the percentage of women elected into public office ranged from 16.1 percent to 21.44 percent, reaching its peak in the 2016 elections. In the 2019 National and Local Elections, only 20.16 percent (8,782) of the candidates were female. As of 2022 election, only 20% or 16 out of 82 provinces of gubernatorial posts are occupied by women (COMELEC, 2022).

Since 2019, women have made up 28% of the House of Representatives and 29% of the Senate, which is somewhat more than the global average of 25.5 percent for 2020. To establish a critical mass in representative politics, women must attain the international benchmark of 30%, according to global standards (Franco, 2021). Women hold just 23% of all elective positions in the country when local government jobs are taken into account. Yet, a 2017 study reveals that because many female politicians originate from political families, they have a stronger affinity for their relatives than for women's problems.

In the last election in the Philippines which was conducted on May 09, 2022, there were 20% of women elected as Governors compared to 80% of men as shown in Figure 1.

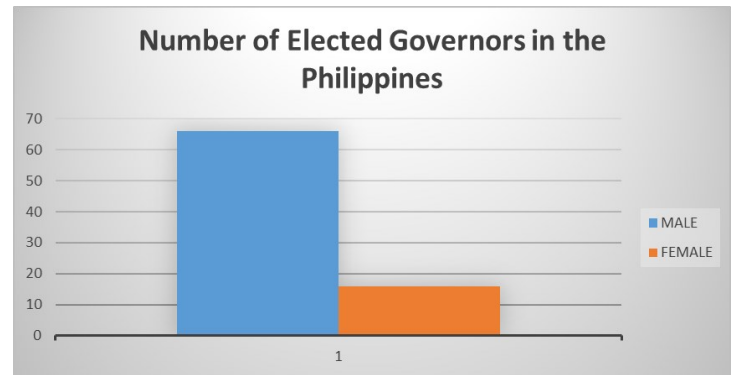


Figure 1. Number of male and female elected as Governors among the 82 Provinces in the Philippines

In the recent Gubernatorial election held last May 2022 (COMELEC, 2022) for the 82 provinces in the Philippines, there are 66 provinces that elected male governor (80%) while only 16 provinces elected female governor (20%). This means that majority of the gubernatorial seats are being occupied by men.

The gradual rise in women's representation in politics can be ascribed to gender stereotypes and the patriarchal norms and beliefs that are still in place. Politics is seen as a dirty profession, and the idea that men should dominate the political sphere was influenced by the violent electoral campaigns and elections that have occurred across the nation's informal sector. Voters are deterred from supporting female politicians by gender stereotypes that portray women as meek, sensitive, and unable to make decisions—qualities that are undesirable in negotiations and politics (Philippine Commission on Women, 2016).

This in turn influences political parties' or organizations' inclination to support male candidates who are thought to have a better chance of winning the election. Women's inability to raise the necessary funds for expensive political elections sometimes prevents them from seeking elected national government positions. Simultaneously, women are deterred from running for public office by the "multiple burden" they endure, which involves them carrying out the majority of household chores while also participating in political, economic, and social activities.

### *Philippine Policies Promoting Women's Political Participation by the Philippine Commission of Women*

In response to international commitments, the Philippines has enshrined and promoted women's rights to participation in politics and other decision-making processes under international human rights treaties. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW), and The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Furthermore, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal No. 5 aimed at attaining gender equality targets among other things, and women's full and effective participation and equal opportunity for leadership at all levels of decision-making in politics, economics, and public life.

Various Philippine legislations have sought to promote gender equality in the bureaucracy including improvement of women's participation and representation in decision-making bodies. Most notable is the Magna Carta of Woman (R.A. 9710) which mandates the government to institute the following affirmative action measures so that women can participate meaningfully in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policies, plans, and programs for national, regional, and local development; to wit:

- Empowerment within the Civil Service. Within the next five (5) years, the number of women in third (3rd) level positions in government shall be incrementally increased to achieve a fifty-fifty (50-50) gender balance;
- Development Councils and Planning Bodies. To ensure the participation of women in all levels of development planning and program implementation, at least forty percent (40%) of membership of all development councils from the regional, provincial, city, municipal, and barangay levels shall be composed of women;
- Other Policy and Decision-Making Bodies. Women's groups shall also be represented in international, national, and local special bodies. It shall also ensure the participation of grassroots women leaders in decision and policy-making bodies in their respective sectors including, but not limited to, the Presidential Agrarian Reform Council (PARC) and its local counterparts; community-based resource management bodies or mechanisms on forest management and stewardship; the National Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council (NFARMC) and its local counterparts; the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples; the Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor; the National Anti-Poverty Commission; and, where applicable, the local housing boards.;
- International Bodies. The State shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the opportunity of women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination to represent their government at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations;
- Integration of Women in Political Parties. The State shall provide incentives to political parties with women's agenda. It shall likewise encourage the integration of women in their leadership hierarchy internal policy-making structures, appointive, and electoral nominating processes; and
- Private Sector. The State shall take measures to encourage women leadership in the private sector in the form of incentives.

Other statutes enacted to support women in governance are:

- R.A. 7160: An Act Providing for a Local Government Code of 1991. The Local Government Code has been amended to provide representatives for women in all of the 1,600 local legislative assemblies (Sangguniang Panlalawigan, Sangguniang Panlungsod, Sangguniang Bayan and Sangguniang Barangay) nationwide. This is consistent with the 1987 Constitution recognizing women's vital role in nation-building.
- R.A. 7941: Party List Law (1995). The 1987 Constitution provides that there shall be party-list representatives and

the women sector is to be allocated a seat therein (Art. VI, Sec. 5 [2]). Before the enactment of Republic Act No. 7941, the sectoral representative for women was appointed by the President. This law now provides for the election of party-list representatives through the party-list system including the women sector.

- R.A. 7192: Women in Development and Nation Building Act (1992). The Act provides guidance and measures that will mobilize and enhance the participation of women in the development process in ways equal to that of men. These include: a substantial portion of foreign assistance funds shall be allocated to support programs for women; women shall benefit equally and participate in development programs funded by foreign assistance; gender bias shall be removed from government regulations, circulars, issuances, and procedures; equal opportunities shall be provided for women in all military schools of the Armed Forces and the Philippine National Police; equal rights shall be accorded to women in entering into contracts and loan agreements and in joining social and cultural clubs; and household managers can avail of social security services through their working spouses.
- R.A. 7688: An Act Giving Representation to Women in the Social Security Commission (1994). The Act guarantees women representation in the Social Security Commission.
- Labor Code (1989). It covers issues such as night work prohibition, specifies that employers must provide special facilities for women, prohibition of discrimination against women in respect to terms and conditions of employment, prohibition of discrimination by reason of marriage of a woman worker.
- R.A. 7822 (1995). An act providing assistance to women engaging in micro and cottage business enterprises.
- Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (1995-2025). The National Plan for Women that consolidates the action commitments of the Philippines during the Beijing World Conference on Women. This is the overall frame that is also the point of reference for the discussions and monitoring of gender mainstreaming.
- Gender and Development (GAD). This process aimed at "institutionalizing gender concerns in the mainstream development process and agenda and not just peripheral programs and projects of the government". Concretely, it prescribes for the allocation of 5% of the government agency's/local government unit's budget to gender-responsive activities and projects. As a result, implementation of the development programs and policies of government also means women partaking a role in governance. As primary stakeholders in the development process, women have the right to maximize their involvement in governance, be it at the local or national level.
- Framework Plan for Women (FPW). This is part of the Philippine Development Plan for Women which focus on three thrust namely: promoting women's economic empowerment; advance and protect women human rights; and promote gender responsive governance. This plan identifies the concrete gender issues that will be addressed, pinpoint targets and indicators, name programs, formulates the im-

plementation plan, and set-up tools for monitoring and evaluation.

Furthermore, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) implemented a series of measures to support the goal of gender balance in executive positions. In 1999, the CSC published a Memorandum Circular establishing a target of 50-50 representation of men and women in executive posts, as well as demanding gender-specific reporting on nominations, appointments, and positions held.

The CSC also collaborated with the PCW and the Career Executive Board in implementing three programs that aim to increase women's capacity and skills, namely:

1. Career Advancement of Women in Government Services (CAPWINGS) seeks to enhance support mechanisms, capacity building, training and other enabling mechanisms for women employees. The program has worked on improving working conditions, preventing sexual harassment in the workplace, facilitating career advancement and advocacy. Policies enacted include: paternity leave, leaves for various family-related occasions, establishment of day care centers, flexible working arrangements (including modified maternity leave, part-time work and flexible hours).
2. Merit Promotion Plan, which guides promotions based on merit, and has been revised to ensure that gender biases do not obstruct recruitment and promotion and to emphasize equal opportunities for women and men;
3. Directory of Women on the Move, which provides information about qualified women candidates for vacancies in the Cabinet and other executive positions to ensure that appointing authorities have information and choices about qualified women for top posts.

The CSC recognizes the importance of top-level support for gender and development and the need to establish sex-disaggregated data and statistical information on women and their specific situations and concerns in the bureaucracy to help decision-makers and intensify women-specific training and human resources development opportunities.

Furthermore, the CSC policy on equal representation directs the recommending and appointing authority to ensure women are equally represented in managerial/executive positions. This starts with promoting gender balance in the terms of nominations and instituting specific provisions of women's presence in oversight agencies as well as a provision on fifty percent women representation in policy-making bodies of social security sector such as Social Security System, PhilHealth, GSIS, PAG-IBIG Fund, among others.

On the other hand, there are a lot of obstacles for the Philippines when it comes to women's presence in leadership positions and politics. Even though the nation has had female presidents in the past, only 28% of elected politicians are female. This indicates that there are not many women in politics. This discrepancy is a glaring example of the structural obstacles' women must overcome in order to assume leadership roles. Affirmative action is needed to address this problem by promoting gender diversity in leadership roles and political representation. The cultural and societal conventions that prohibit women from obtaining these roles must also be addressed (Amido,

2023). Also, women have been constrained from entering local-level politics by the lack of finances for campaigning and time constraints needed to manage domestic responsibilities, income-generation activities, and political work (Ofeci-Aboagye, 2000).

Despite the existence of international and national legislations giving women equal access to men in different spheres of life, disparity still exists and that women in the Philippines are still facing challenging issues in leadership and decision making in local governance. The growing number of policies that give women their rights are not implemented in reality, women are still underrepresented in politics. Gender inequality depends on the factors limiting women's political participation: Ideological Factors, Political factors, Socio-cultural, Economic factors, and Lack of social capital and political capabilities. Therefore, the pursuit towards gender equality is a continuous stride and ultimate concern.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### 5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the journey towards achieving gender parity and ensuring meaningful participation of women in local governance and electoral politics in the Philippines demands a concerted effort from policymakers, civil society actors, and the broader community. This endeavor requires a multifaceted approach that includes legislative reforms, capacity-building programs, awareness-raising campaigns, and the promotion of women's leadership at all levels of decision-making. Despite notable progress, pervasive structural factors continue to hinder women's full participation and leadership in political processes, necessitating comprehensive measures that transcend token representation. While existing policies highlight the significance of legal frameworks and initiatives aimed at enhancing gender equality and empowering women, gaps in implementation, enforcement, and monitoring persist as significant obstacles. By addressing these challenges and leveraging existing opportunities, the Philippines can move closer to realizing its commitment to gender equality and inclusive democracy.

### 5.2 Recommendation

In light of the findings and analysis presented in this study regarding women's leadership participation in local governance and electoral politics in the Philippines, the following recommendations are proposed to address existing challenges and enhance opportunities for gender equality and women's empowerment in these spheres; to wit:

1. Strengthen Data Collection and Research Efforts: to the Government departments, research institutions, and non-government organizations to enhance data collection methods and research initiatives to gather comprehensive and disaggregated data on women's participation in local governance and electoral politics. This will provide a clearer understanding of the current status, trends, and challenges faced by women in these spheres.
2. Implement Gender-Responsive Policies: the implementation of gender-responsive policies at the local level is crucial to empowering women and promoting gender equality within LGUs and government

agencies. Advocate for the effective implementation and enforcement of existing gender-responsive policies, such as quota systems, gender mainstreaming, and gender-responsive budgeting, at the local level. This includes providing adequate resources, training, and support to local government units to ensure the integration of gender considerations in decision-making processes.

3. **Raise Awareness and Promote Gender Equality:** Launch awareness-raising campaigns and educational programs targeting government officials, civil society organizations, and the private sector are essential to challenging gender stereotypes, promote women's leadership, and encourage community support for gender equality initiatives.

4. **Provide Capacity-Building Opportunities:** Capacity-building programs should be provided to women interested in leadership roles, as well as to NGOs and training institutions, to equip them with the necessary skills and confidence for effective political participation.

5. **Strengthen Institutional Mechanisms:** Enhanced support for institutional mechanisms, such as the Philippine Commission on Women and the Gender and Development Focal Point System, is vital to promoting women's leadership and political participation. The government needs to ensure these institutions have adequate resources, authority, and support to carry out their mandates effectively.

6. **Foster Multi-Sectoral Collaboration:** Government agencies, civil society organizations, academia, and private sector collaborative efforts will facilitate the development of holistic solutions to gender inequality challenges, pooling resources and expertise to drive sustainable change.

7. **Monitor and Evaluate Progress:** Government agencies, NGOs, monitoring and evaluation bodies to establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation and impact of gender equality initiatives in local governance and electoral politics. Regularly assess progress, identify gaps, and adjust strategies as needed to ensure continuous improvement and accountability in advancing women's rights and empowerment.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can work together to create an enabling environment that supports women's leadership and political participation in the Philippines, ultimately contributing to more inclusive, equitable, and democratic governance processes.

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